

Charles darwin: life to death



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Charles Darwin: Life to Death When most people think of Charles Darwin they associate his name with the theory of evolution. The Darwinian Theory not only aroused controversy, while at the same time created a new form of scientific thought. Darwin did more than just come up with the theory of evolution, he married his cousin. All joking aside, he was a remarkable man that would have a tremendous impact on the scientific community as a whole. His ideas and discoveries lead to new ways for people to think that were not accepted in previous years. Darwin took a naturalist approach on the creation of people, and all other living organisms beginning from a young age until his death. He offended many people and was looked down upon but nothing stopped him. Charles Darwin and his undertakings are noteworthy because they shape our view of evolution, natural history, the classification of plants and animal species and the basis of the study of genetics. Darwin's theory of Survival of the fittest was created after extraneous research, discoveries, and criticism by religion. Charles Darwin was born on February 12, 1809 in Shrewsbury, England in the county town Shropshire. Growing up Darwin was the second youngest of six siblings. He came from a long line of scientists of which is father was a medical doctor and his grandfather a botanist. He came from a privileged household and did not have to worry about the financial stresses that plague the common folk. The wealth that his family provided him with allowed him to be highly educated and experience different lands and organisms to further his studies. At the age of sixteen he enrolled at Edinburgh University. Two years later he became a student at Christ's College in Cambridge. His father always hoped that he would follow in his footsteps and become a doctor. However, Darwin did not like blood and got sick at the sight of it. Darwin's scientific views were not limited to

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medical science. They were far more broad and included ideas of the genetics of people and how they had evolved and were created. The ideas that Darwin focused on were not the main focus of many other scientists so he was allowed room for error. Although he did not need much room because his discoveries were the first of many and were not comparable. Darwin knew that he wanted to continue on his naturalist path which leads him to his first voyage to the Galapagos Islands on a ship named the Beagle. He was persuaded and influenced by his professor, at Christ's College, who Darwin claims in his autobiography to be his mentor. The voyage allowed Darwin access to land and environments different than the one he had studied over and over. " He was able to study first hand geology including fossils and a multitude of organisms". (Huth) While he was on the island he encountered native people. The native people had an influence on Darwin's studies of adaption and survival of the fittest. " He methodically collected an enormous number of specimens many of which were new to science, thus giving him his reputation as a naturalist". (Huth) Before he left the island he contracted a disease known as Chagas Disease from an insect bite, but that did not take away his motivation to continue discovering and exploring new ideas. Darwin's theory first developed as he started to notice similarities in the fossils of extinct species when compared to living species of similar origin. This concept only grew larger as he studied fossils in different places. He began noticing patterns in particular species. Over the years it eventually leads to his concept: Survival of the Fittest. Darwin had four main notions that made up his theory: Variation, Heritability, Competition, and Differential Survival. " Natural selection, or " survival of the fittest", is an evolutionary shift in a species". (Hawkins) This takes place when members of a species

own specific genetic traits that are valuable to their survival in a specific environment. Those that survive because of that trait are obviously the only left to reproduce and the trait carries over to their offspring, and becomes common to that species. (Hawkins) This theory was observed by Darwin, and presented in his book “ Origin of Species” published in 1859. Darwin came upon this theory twenty years previous to the publication of his book during his travels on the Beagle. One stop on his journey was the Galapagos Islands. Darwin identified 13 species of finches in the Galapagos Islands. This perplexed him because he recognized only one species of this bird on the mainland of South Africa where they had all allegedly originated. He observed that the Galapagos species differed from each other in beak shape. (Ruth) He also noted that the beak varieties were related with diets based on different foods. He determined that when the original South American finches reached the islands, they dispersed to different environments where they had to adapt to different conditions. Over many generations, they altered structurally in ways that allowed them to get sufficient food and survive to duplicate. The first of the four is variation. Darwin expresses that in every species there is variation. Darwin’s concept of variation in relation to species is much like that of a tree and its roots. Each species he found to have roots in another species. Sometimes these would even lead to extinct species. It was these connections that sparked his thought that everything is connected. The next notion is heritability in which each species has traits that are strongly swayed by inheritance. It was through this Darwin believed that the strongest of a species would pass their genes along to the next generation. This idea gave dominance to certain species and the people in the 1840’s did not willingly accept this idea because they believed they were

created by God, and that being they were all created to be equal and this idea lead to his next notion, competition. Competition, states that most all species produce more offspring each year than the environment can support. It was because of this competition that Darwin believed the strongest of a species would compete with the weakest in a battle for resources. In the end the strongest would survive and the weaker part of the gene pool would die out very similar with his last theory Differential Survival which says that some individuals will survive the struggles for resources. This could be given that they have certain traits that others in their species did not possess, which gave them the advantage over the rest in their struggle. All four of Darwin's ideas that make up his theory have an underlying theme and that is that the strongest will survive. Many people before Darwin's time believed in creationism as the explanation for a life the way it is. Darwin stated in an autobiography " When I finally published my findings and theory I received much grief from the Christian community". Many Christians took it to be offensive because he was denouncing creationism. Even though his theory was unpopular it still continued to strengthen as time went on and new discoveries were made. Many people also found it hard to accept his theories because Darwin compared people with animals in his studies and men were perceived to be higher than animals. " Darwin's ideas of natural selection spawned a fundamental shift in how biology was understood".([www. darwin-literature. com](http://www.darwin-literature.com)) It was through this concept that there have been numerous breakthroughs of our understandings of evolution, and to those who believe it. Many people of this time as stated before did not accept his ideas. " Social Darwinism is a belief, popular in the late Victorian era in England, America, and elsewhere, which states that the strongest or fittest should survive and

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flourish in society, while the weak and unfit should be allowed to die. The theory was chiefly expounded by Herbert Spencer, whose ethical philosophies always held an elitist view and received a boost from the application of Darwinian ideas such as adaptation and natural selection". (Hawkins) The problem with Social Darwinism was Darwin's belief that things did not happen for a reason but instead they happened because you allowed them to. This struck many people of this era the wrong way because they believed anything that happened was operated by a higher form and out of their control. Darwin tried to make arguments to show how that was not true. His arguments however were not just enough to break the wall between religion and science with mostly all people which gave him obstacles in convincing people that his theory is true. Many people did not even let Darwin's ideas enter their minds because they sought to see it as sin and wrong to their Holy Father. The idea that burned bridges between the people and Darwin was his belief that the weaker gene pools needed to be eliminated. " In its most extreme forms, Social Darwinism has been used to justify eugenics programs aimed at weeding " undesirable" genes from the population; such programs were sometimes accompanied by sterilization laws directed against " unfit" individuals. The American eugenics movement was relatively popular between about 1910-1930, during which 24 states passed sterilization laws and Congress passed a law restricting immigration from certain areas deemed to be unfit. Social Darwinist ideas, though in different forms, were also applied by the Nazi party in Germany to justify their eugenics programs". (Dickens) He was not blamed for the Holocaust but people believed his ideas to have swayed the actions of strong military leaders. Darwin died in 1882 at the age of seventy-one. Charles Darwin

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created a new outlook on genetics and the origin of species that have influenced science and beliefs in people for over decades. His findings are crucial to the world today and have allowed scientists following him to expand on his ideas. Though Darwin was criticized and ridiculed he never stopped discovering and expanding his ideas of natural selection and survival of the fittest. Works Cited Huth, Beyond Charles Darwin. Paul & Co Pub Consortium, 2004. Print. Charles, Darwin. The Autobiography of Charles Darwin. Amhurst, N. Y.: Prometheus Books, 2000. Print. Charles, Darwin. Recollection of Darwin, 1867. In Conway. 1905. Autobiography. Text Hawkins, Mike. Social Darwinism in European and American Thought, 1860-1945: Nature as Model and Nature as Threat. 1997. Print Dickens , Peter. Social Darwinism (Concepts in the Social Sciences). London : 2009. eBook.