

What Evolution Is (Science Masters Series)

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At once a spirited defense of Darwinian explanations of biology and an elegant primer on evolution for the general reader, *What Evolution Is* has several audiences in mind: those scientists and nonscientists who accept evolutionary thinking but do not know exactly how it works, and those who accept evolution but are not sure the Darwinian explanation is correct. With rare clarity, Mayr poses the questions at the heart of evolution—What is the evidence for evolution on earth? What is the origin and role of organic diversity?—and describes in refreshingly nontechnical language how the search for answers has over the years revealed solutions to the most challenging problems posed by evolutionary theory. In a provocative final section, Mayr considers how our improved understanding of evolution has affected the viewpoints and values of modern man.

Gathering insights from his seven-decade career, the renowned biologist Ernst Mayr argues that evolution is now to be considered not a theory but a fact—and that "there is not a single Why? question in biology that can be answered adequately without a consideration of evolution."

Mayr, emeritus professor of zoology at Harvard University, has long been one of the world's foremost researchers in genetic and evolutionary theory. In this overview of past and current scientific thought, he discusses key concepts and terms, among them the origin of species, the (somewhat metaphorical) "struggle for existence," and agents of micro- and macroevolution. Somewhat against the grain, he argues against reduction and for the study of evolution at the phenotypic, not genetic, level. In his concluding pages, Mayr offers a careful overview of human evolution, adding his view that humankind is indeed unique—though "it has not yet completed the transition from quadrupedal to bipedal life in all of its structures."

Advanced students of the life sciences, as well as readers looking for a survey of current evolutionary theory, will find Mayr's book a useful companion. --Gregory McNamee
Ernst Mayr is largely responsible for shaping the modern synthesis of genetic and evolutionary theory. He was Curator of the Whitney-Rothschild Collection at the American Museum of Natural History for more than twenty years before joining the zoology department at Harvard University, where he is now Professor Emeritus. He lives in the Boston area.

Other Books

Evolution: the Grand Experiment, "Darwin's book on evolution admitted that "intermediate links" were "perhaps the most obvious and serious objection to the theory" of evolution. Darwin recognized that the fossils collected by scientists prior to 1859 did not correspond with his theory of evolution, but he predicted that his theory would be confirmed as more and more fossils were found. One hundred and fifty years later, *Evolution: The Grand Experiment* critically examines the viability of Darwin's theory"--

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