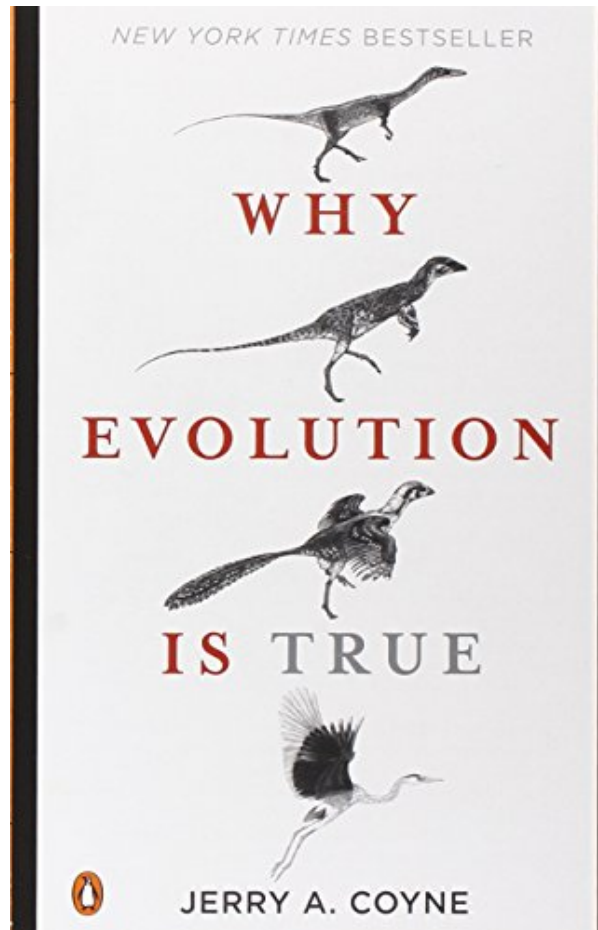


WHY EVOLUTION IS TRUE BY JERRY A. COYNE



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From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. With great care, attention to the scientific evidence and a wonderfully accessible style, Coyne, an evolutionary geneticist at the University of Chicago, presents an overwhelming case for evolution. Ranging from biogeography to geology, from anatomy to genetics, and from molecular biology to physiology, he demonstrates that evolutionary theory makes predictions that are consistently borne out by the data—basic requirements for a scientific theory to be valid. Additionally, although fully respectful of those who promote intelligent design and creationism, he uses the data at his disposal to demolish any thought that creationism is supported by the evidence while also explaining why those ideas fall outside the bounds of science. Coyne directly addresses the concept often advanced by religious fundamentalists that an acceptance of evolution must lead to immorality, concluding that evolution tells us where we came from, not where we can go. Readers looking to understand the case for evolution and searching for a response to many of the most common creationist claims should find everything they need in this powerful book, which is clearer and more comprehensive than the many others on the subject. Illus. (Jan. 26)

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Ray Olson

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"[Coyne] makes an unassailable case."

-New York Times

"In nine crisp chapters...the respected evolutionary biologist lays out an airtight case that Earth is unspeakably old and that new species evolve from previous ones."

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"Coyne's knowledge of evolutionary biology is prodigious, his deployment of it as masterful as his touch is light." -Richard Dawkins

In the current debate about creationism and intelligent design, there is an element of the controversy that is rarely mentioned—the evidence. Yet the proof of evolution by natural selection is vast, varied, and magnificent. In this succinct and accessible summary of the facts supporting the theory of natural selection, Jerry A. Coyne dispels common misunderstandings and fears about evolution and clearly confirms the scientific truth that supports this amazing process of change. Weaving together the many threads of modern work in genetics, paleontology, geology, molecular biology, and anatomy that demonstrate the "indelible stamp" of the processes first proposed by Darwin, *Why Evolution Is True* does not aim to prove creationism wrong. Rather, by using irrefutable evidence, it sets out to prove evolution right.

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THE intro book for the evolution-curious, but uninformed!

By Esk

I was raised in a very conservative Christian environment and taught Young-Earth Creationism (anti-evolution, anti-Big Bang, etc.). I bought into it for a long time. In college, I finally began to investigate some of the claims for myself--reading what was really being said by "the other side", rather than what I was being told was being said.

The disparity I discovered can hardly be exaggerated: what I had been taught bore essentially zero resemblance to the real thing. Genuine evolutionary theory was virtually unrecognizable in the creationists' caricatures of it. I learned that I had been lied to---intentionally, or not, I do not know---and that the quantity, diversity, and quality of evidence in support of evolution was simply crushing. It wasn't just that it could not be ignored or dismissed as trivial; it was that it was so cohesive and mutually supportive and overwhelmingly convincing that it simply HAD to be accepted as true. (As Gould said, it would be "perverse to withhold provisional assent.")

This discovery sparked a long (and ongoing) journey of reading books on the topic of evolution---books by authors such as Stephen Jay Gould, Sean Carroll, Richard Dawkins, Charles Darwin, Neil Shubin, and others. I was enthralled with the elegant simplicity and beauty and sheer explanatory power of the ideas I was learning. They not only made sense, but had tremendous evidentiary support in nature and the lab (as well as mathematical modeling, game theory, use in other disciplines, etc.).

But, as my journey progressed, and I continued to absorb ever more information and improve my understanding, I began to realize something. As I interfaced with many of those from my upbringing (i.e., those uninformed on evolution), it dawned on me that I hadn't yet found a truly excellent "introductory book" that clearly and accessibly discussed what evolution is (and is not) while relying heavily upon concrete evidentiary examples across many different disciplines. I had read many great books specializing in this or that discipline, or focusing more on the understanding of evolutionary concepts (but with looser reliance upon examples in nature), or whatever. But, I wanted a single, superb book to provide a solid overview of evolution that was inseparably intertwined with many diverse supporting evidentiary examples.

When a curious friend actually asked, voluntarily, for such a book suggestion, and I could not provide a single title (as opposed to a long list, which is too much to ask of the casually curious), I decided my desire for such a book had transformed into a bona fide need.

"Why Evolution Is True" is that book.

It covers so much in so few pages in such an accessible way that it is difficult to capture in only a few words. Dr. Coyne eloquently writes on:

- * what evolution is, and is not (specific defining features, testability, etc.; chapter 1 is all about this)
- * the fossil record (including specific examples and discussion of transitional forms and lineages (dinosaur feathers, whales, etc.), stratigraphy, and more; specific predictions and their fulfillments, such as Tiktaalik's discovery and marsupial fossils in Antarctica; etc.)
- * vestigial and atavistic features (e.g. human tails and appendices, and whale pelvises and dolphin legs)
- * "bad design" (e.g. flat fish skulls and eyes, and the route of the vagus nerve in humans, as well as problems with both genders' reproductive systems)
- * developmental oddities (e.g. dolphin embryos beginning growth of hind legs that are later changed, human embryonic growth and subsequent absorption of tails, as well as the growth and loss of a full coat of hair)
- * pseudogenes (e.g. bird pseudogenes for growing teeth, pseudo-GLO for (failed) vitamin C production in humans/fruit bats/guinea pigs, substantial presence of endogenous retroviruses in our genome (and chimpanzees, in the same places), extensive olfactory receptor pseudogenes in humans (and even more so in dolphins), mammalian pseudogenes for vitellogenin production (nutritious protein filling the yolk sac in birds/reptiles/monotremes) and our embryonic growth of a yolk sac)
- * biogeography (including discussion of species distributions (duh!), continental drift, and continental and oceanic islands)
- * specific examples of evolution in action, both in nature and in the lab (through natural selection (e.g. different bee species, mouse and lizard coloration, etc.), genetic drift (e.g. several genetically-bottle-necked

human sub-populations), and artificial selection (e.g. domestic dogs, agriculture, etc.); he writes of lab experiments, bacterial drug resistance (and even more dramatic changes), beak-length changes, and much more)

* micro- vs macro-evolution (including differences, expectations, and evidence)

* selection building complexity (including discussion of ID's claims about the bacterial flagellum and the blood clot cascade, and the eye)

* sexual selection (what it is, how it works, advantages it offers, and many examples; parthenogenesis; etc.)

* speciation (discussion and examples; allopatric and sympatric speciation; autopolyploid and allopolyploid speciation; etc.)

* human evolution (fossil and genetic evidence, along with detailed discussion; "races"; "pastoralism" coinciding with "lactose tolerance"; malarial and HIV resistance, through genetic mutations; historical advantages that now are detriments; etc.)

* the 'moral/emotional' resistance to acceptance of evolution (noting and discussing that all the evidence in the universe is still not enough if a person is staunchly ideologically opposed)

* and much, much more

Clearly, the book covers a stunning array of material in its few pages. And, due to my particular reasons for wanting such a book, I was even more pleased to discover that Dr. Coyne does not shy away from periodically pointing-out (respectfully, but matter-of-factly) that creationism simply offers no good explanation for almost everything discussed---whereas evolution beautifully explains it all. Dr. Coyne remains focused on evolution, rather than dwelling upon creationism's failures; but, I felt that the little space he did devote to explicitly noting creationism's total inability to reasonably explain the evidence was worthwhile.

The book is not the be-all, end-all of evolutionary books, of course. It can't cover absolutely everything. To learn about evolution in its full depth and breadth requires the reading of many books (several of which Dr. Coyne suggests, and many more of which can be found in his book's bibliography). But, it nearly perfectly fulfilled my personal requirements for a "suggested single title for the curious" as an introductory book on evolution---one with heavy reliance upon numerous examples of interdisciplinary, mutually-supporting evidence that still communicates many of the important evolutionary concepts in a way easily accessible to the layman.

Indeed, the book covers so much so well that even though it is targeted to be a broad overview of the evidence, and even after my having read several other more topic-specific books on evolution, I still learned quite a bit from "Why Evolution Is True". Very highly recommended, whether you're new to evolution or not.

325 of 348 people found the following review helpful.

I wish this was the first book on evolution I read as a YEC

By Marcus Lewis

This is the best book on the evidence for evolution I have read. I wish I would have read it years ago.

I went to a Young Earth Creationist (YEC) teaching high school and have attended very conservative, Genesis-is-literal churches my whole life. I attended required YEC conferences by Kent Hovind and another by Ken Ham in my High School science classes, and heard John Morris and Duane Gish speak several times in my church.

Several years ago I decided to read a book on evolution because I couldn't understand why anyone would believe it. So I read "Why Darwin Matters" by Michael Shermer (also a very good book) and then started

reading all the books I could find on evolution. The subject is fascinating and I have a new love for science and nature as a result of understanding how evolution works. "Why Evolution is True" is the best book I have read and I will recommend it to any young or old earth creationist, or intelligent design proponent, I meet.

The explanation of the dating techniques of superposition, radiometric, and coral dating was very straightforward. Wells' experiment with radiometric dating and comparing the dates to the daily and yearly growth rings of coral was one of the best and most straightforward evidences I have read for an old earth.

The book looks at all the important fossils, especially tracing the development of whales, discussing *Haikouella lanceolata* being the earliest chordate, and explains *Tiktaalik roseae* well. The fossils in the human lineage are also explained in excellent detail.

The genetic portion of evolution books is always the most interesting evidence for evolution, in my opinion, and "Why Evolution is True" was no exception. Besides the normal explanations of pseudogenes, Coyne shows how dolphins have 80% of their olfactory receptor genes deactivated through mutation because they are no longer needed underwater. This obviously shows that dolphins evolved from an ancestor that walked on the ground. There isn't as much genetics as I might have liked, but interested readers might also want to check out Sean B. Carroll's "The Making of the Fittest" or Daniel Fairbanks' "Relics of Eden" for a lot more genetic evidence for evolution.

The section on biogeography is especially strong. The evidence presented makes no sense in light of creationist ideas, but all the sense in the world by evolutionary standards.

"Why Evolution is True" is especially strong at showing how evolution predicts the evidence. Coyne sets up several sections by explaining what evolution predicts in a certain area and then showing how the evidence fits. This rhetorical technique is especially strong if the reader has a good understanding of the scientific method. Because I am a biology major and the emphasis every class puts on the scientific method, it was great to see how strongly evolutionary theory fits into the prediction/test portion of the scientific method.

The religious and non-religious alike should find "Why Evolution is True" accessible. Coyne does not spend much time trying to bash the idea of god or the religious, just prove evolution true. Because of this I think this book is stronger than many of Dawkins', at least for introducing evolution to religious people. Unfortunately, many Christians don't want to read Dawkins' biology books because of the hints of atheism, but I don't think Christians will find that objection to Coyne's book.

"Why Evolution is True" is a fantastic book that I strongly encourage anyone who loves science or has questions about evolution to read. This is THE book I would start with when I was a young earth creationist, if I could go back in time.

Highly recommended.

224 of 243 people found the following review helpful.

Excellent account of evolution

By Dr. Peter Davies

Jerry Coyne is a bit annoyed that it was necessary to write this book. I am glad he got annoyed enough to write it. In part he is writing against the intelligent design movement, and against creationism and he shows the flaws in these viewpoints not with rhetoric, but with well chosen evidence.

The book is a powerful and straightforward account of evolution showing the strength of the theory, its ability to make predictions, and giving many examples of the evidence on which evolution is based. After reading the book you have a good idea of what evolution is about, and what fields of study it applies in. Coyne is clear that evolution is a theory in biology of great explanatory power. The key idea is that of descent with modification.

He is also clear (in his final chapter evolution redux) of the limits to evolutionary thinking. Good scientists know what they know, and also have some idea where their knowledge stops. Coyne demonstrates this ability well. By doing this he becomes a far better advocate for evolution than Dawkins.

Evolution is not an ontological or moral theory. You can derive no moral lesson from evolution- it just is (p253). David Hume pointed out that deriving an ought from an is is usually to make a specious argument. The fact that the idea of evolution as progress has been misused by many is not an argument against evolution. It is an argument against the misuse of ideas.

Coyne (p248)describes that, "There is an increasing (and disturbing) tendency of psychologists, biologists and philosophers to Darwinize every aspect of human behaviour, turning its study into a scientific parlour game." He liberates us (p250)from some of the genetic determinism that sometimes accompanies evolution, "There is no reason, then, to see ourselves as marionettes dancing on the strings of evolution. Yes certain parts of our behaviour may be genetically encoded, instilled by natural selection in our savanna-dwelling ancestors. But genes aren't destiny...."genetic" does not mean "unchangeable.""

Coyne liberates evolution from its role as chief evidence for atheism.(pxix) "Nor must it promote atheism, for enlightened religion has always found a way to accommodate the advances of science. In fact, understanding evolution should surely deepen and enrich our appreciation of the living world and our place in it." Denis Alexander makes a similar point in his recent book,"Creation or Evolution:Do we have to choose."

This book does have one notable omission which arises because it sticks closely to the facts. There is no account of how the first cell ever got started, maybe because there is not yet any great evidence for how this happened. So far as I can understand evolution it describes the mechanisms of relationship between ancestors and descendants, but the tracing back of ancestors can only go back so far- to some original reproducing cell.

This book is timely this year. It's a great account of how evolution works from its 6 basic principles namely evolution (genetic change over time), gradualism, speciation, common ancestry, natural selection, and non selective mechanisms of evolutionary change. The basic principles have clear starting points and consequences which are observable or at least, inferable.

It puts evolution in a sensible context, and shows where, and to what, it sensibly applies. It is a welcome book this year and it puts the theory of evolution centre stage on its own merits, and not as a means to advocating for other ideas. Sensible, tolerant, encouraging and provoking further thought. Very scientific. Highly recommended.

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