

Charles Darwin: A Good Scientist Who Many Christians Do Not Understand

by Dr. Jay L. Wile

Qualifications

- University Professor From 1990 - 1995
- Helped Develop Indiana's Only Residential High School for Gifted and Talented Students
- NSF-Sponsored Scientist with More Than \$200,000 In Research Grants
- Became Interested in Homeschooling Because of Excellent University Students Who Were Homeschooled
- Currently writes homeschooling and Christian apologetics materials.
- New publisher: Berean Builders

Some Christians Have Very Negative Views about Charles Darwin

“...all history shows is that Darwin was a racist and a very bad scientist.”

-Tyson Thorne of Thinking Biblically

[<https://www.think-biblically.com/home2/8-blog/845-bible-in-media-34>]

Darwin was “...a sadist, he was insane, he suffered from multiple, multiple forms of insanity, and he confessed himself to be a sadist who enjoyed torturing small animals to death and really dreamed of killing and murdering people.”

-Kevin Swanson, director of Generations: Passing on the Faith

[<https://soundcloud.com/rightwingwatch/swanson-darwin-was-evil-insane>]

Something You Might Not Know

Evolution wasn't something new in the middle of the 19th Century.

Anaximander (c.610–c.546 BC) postulated that all life came from the sea. Several ancient Greek philosophers after him had similar ideas. Aristotle's views (384 – 322 BC) quickly replaced such ideas, however.

Evolution Came Back In The 18th Century

Erasmus Darwin (1731 –1802) described metamorphosis in great detail. He was struck by how much animals can change. He even discussed how much people change in the course of their lives.

“...would it be too bold to imagine, that in the great length of time, since the earth began to exist, perhaps millions of ages before the commencement of the history of mankind, would it be too bold to imagine, that all warm-blooded animals have arisen from one living filament, which THE GREAT FIRST CAUSE endued with animality, with the

power of acquiring new parts, attended with new propensities, directed by irritations, sensations, volitions, and associations; and thus possessing the faculty of continuing to improve by its own inherent activity, and of delivering down those improvements by generation to its posterity, world without end!”

In 1809, Jean-Baptiste Lamarck Proposed a Full-Fledged Theory of Evolution

He suggested that when an animal uses an organ a lot, its offspring would have a more useful version of the organ. Giraffes, for example, were originally horse-like animals, but because they kept reaching up to eat from the trees, their offspring were born with longer necks.

In 1859, Darwin Did Two Things That Separated His Theory From The Others

- 1) Gave direct evidence that species can change over the course of time.
- 2) Proposed a testable mechanism by which this change could produce the diversity of life we see today.

The First Point Is Incredibly Important

At the time, most natural philosophers believed in the **fixity of species**: Species could not change in any significant way, because they were perfectly designed.

Darwin Destroyed That Incorrect Idea

“I have associated with several eminent fanciers, and have been permitted to join two of the London Pigeon Clubs. The diversity of the breeds is something astonishing...Altogether at least a score of pigeons might be chosen, which if shown to an ornithologist, and he were told that they were wild birds, would certainly, I think, be ranked by him as well-defined species. Moreover, I do not believe that any ornithologist would place [them] in the same genus; more especially as in each of these breeds several truly-inherited sub-breeds, or species as he might have called them, could be shown him.” [Charles Darwin, *On The Origin of Species*, (Pickering and Chatto, 1992), p. 16]

This “Artificial Selection” is still going on today.

In only 50 years, a breeding program in Russia has changed aggressive silver foxes into foxes that look and act completely differently.

The Second Point

Nature mimics this process by selecting organisms that have features which make them more likely to survive and reproduce.

He Then Gave Examples from Nature

“[In] the Galapagos Archipelago ... almost every product of the land and water bears the unmistakable stamp of the American continent. There are twenty-six land birds, and twenty-five of these are ranked by Mr. Gould as distinct species, supposed to have been created here; yet the close affinity of most of these birds to American species in every character, in their habits, gestures, and tones of voice, was manifest. ... The naturalist, looking at the inhabitants of these volcanic islands in the Pacific, distant several hundred miles from the continent, yet feels that he is standing on American land.”

[Charles Darwin, *On The Origin of Species*, (Pickering and Chatto, 1992), p. 353]

Darwin Was Not What Most People Think

While on the famous HMS Beagle voyage that led to his theory, he wrote in his diary that he often bore the brunt of a good deal of laughter “...from several of the officers for quoting the Bible as final authority on some moral point.”

[Bern Dibner, *Darwin of the Beagle*, (Blaisdell Publishing Company 1964), p. 82]

Late in his Life, He Wrote of His Early Years

“...from what little I had heard and thought on the subject I had scruples about declaring my belief in all the dogmas of the Church of England; though otherwise I liked the thought of being a country clergyman. Accordingly I read with care 'Pearson on the Creed' and a few other books on divinity; and as **I did not then in the least doubt the strict and literal truth of every word in the Bible**, I soon persuaded myself that our Creed must be fully accepted.”

[Charles Darwin, *Autobiography of Charles Darwin*, Nora Barlow, ed., (WW Norton 1993) pp. 56–57]

He Was Hesitant To Publish His Theory

This was partly because of his careful nature as a scientist, and partly because of his wife.

Early in their marriage, she wrote him a letter begging him not to give up his faith, because she did not want to be separated from him for eternity. At the bottom, he wrote:

“When I am dead, know that many times, I have kissed & cryed over this.”

[<https://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/darwin/the-idea-takes-shape/a-wife-that-most-interesting-specimen>]

In an 1860 Letter to Asa Gray

“With respect to the theological view of the question; this is always painful to me.— I am bewildered.— I had no intention to write atheistically. But I own that I cannot see, as plainly as others do, & as I [should] wish to do, evidence of design & beneficence on all sides of us. There seems to me too much misery in the world. I cannot persuade myself

that a beneficent & omnipotent God would have designedly created the Ichneumonidæ with the express intention of their feeding within the living bodies of caterpillars, or that a cat should play with mice....”

[<https://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/letter/DCP-LETT-2814.xml>]

In The End He Did Lose His Faith

In 1879 John Fordyce wrote to ask if he believed in God. He also asked if theism and evolution were compatible. Darwin replied that a man “can be an ardent Theist and an evolutionist.” He gave Asa Gray and Charles Kingsley as examples. He then wrote: “In my most extreme fluctuations I have never been an atheist in the sense of denying the existence of a God.— I think that generally (& more and more so as I grow older) but not always, that an agnostic would be the most correct description of my state of mind.”

[<https://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/letter/DCP-LETT-12041.xml>]

He DID NOT Renounce His Views

Elizabeth Cotton Hope (widow of Sir James Hope, Admiral in the British Royal Navy) claims she visited him on his deathbed. She says he renounced his views on evolution and asked how to become a Christian.

Darwin’s daughter, Henrietta, wrote, “He never recanted any of his scientific views, either then or earlier...The whole story has no foundation whatever”

[James Moore, *The Darwin Legend*, (Baker Books 1994), p. 146]

What I Think Darwin Got Right

Species do change, both in nature and as a result of selective breeding.

Because of the cane toad invasion of Australia, the red-bellied black snake population now has smaller heads.

What I Think Darwin Got Wrong

Darwin thought that given enough time, this change could be unlimited. Because no one understood genetics at the time, this made sense.

We now understand that inheritance is governed by DNA, and the variations we see in nature and in selective breeding come from variations within the information content of the DNA. Evolution is therefore limited by the information content of the DNA.

Dr. John C. Sanford on Using Evolution to Produce Fundamentally New Organisms

“For several decades, this was the main thrust of crop improvement research. Vast numbers of mutants were produced and screened, collectively representing many billions of mutation events...The effort for the most part was an enormous failure...low phytate

corn is the most notable example of successful mutation breeding...The low phytate corn was created by mutagenizing corn, and then selecting for strains wherein the genetic machinery which directs phytic acid production had been damaged.”

[J.C. Sanford, *Genetic Entropy & The Mystery of the Genome*, (Elm Publishing 2005), p. 25, 2005]

The Most Important Thing To Consider

Charles Darwin gave young-earth creationists the ability to believe what we believe, given the science we know today!

Without Darwin’s theory, we would have to believe that two of all land animal species (at least 60,000 – not including insects) would have been on the ark, and that’s clearly impossible.

Young-earth creationists must use Darwin’s Theory to explain how the animals on the ark produced all the animals we see today.

Was Darwin a Racist?

Yes, as were most English “gentlemen” of his day!

“...a belief in Anglo-Saxon racial superiority was a vital ingredient in English and American thought of the nineteenth century...”

[Reginald Horsman in *Origins of Racial Anglo-Saxonism in Great Britain before 1850*]

Samuel George Morton, a creationist physician in Darwin’s time, wrote *Crania Americana*. In this, he used skull measurements to prove there are four separate races, only one of which (the Caucasian race) really had “human” intellect.

George McCready Price is considered by some to be the father of the creationist movement. He wrote such books as *Illogical Geology: The Weakest Point in the Evolution Theory* and *The New Geology*, which attempted to refute Darwin’s ideas and stand firm to young-earth creationism. He also wrote this poem:

The poor little fellow who went to the south
Got lost in the forests dank
His skin grew black, as the fierce sun beat
And scorched his hair with its tropic heat
And his mind became a blank.

[Ronald Numbers *et. al.*, *The Creationists*, (Harvard University Press 2006, p. 102)]