

Prologue

Until Darwin, evolution was bundled with demands for liberty, equality, and fraternity; but after Darwin, it was bundled with competition, eugenics, and the selfish gene.

Darwin's theory of evolution was born of a particular moment in history when the capitalist class was wresting control of mainstream intellectual culture from the clergy and the aristocracy, and his theory bears the imprint of that formative struggle. In Darwinist thought, religion is an obstacle to science (as Victorian progressives contended); competition makes the world go 'round (as the capitalists proclaimed); and superior social qualities are determined by superior bloodlines (as the aristocracy believed). Darwin merged these beliefs with the concept of natural selection—and brought organic evolution into the intellectual mainstream.

Darwin is best known for organic evolution, but his theorizing extended well beyond plants and animals to include the social and political issues of the day. Indeed, Darwin's place in history owes less to natural science than to the social forces that he set in motion. Darwin and his colleagues were instrumental in the professionalization of science and the establishment of modern biomedical education. Their educational policies made the university into a force for modernization while leaving intact the academic culture of intellectual orthodoxy. Thus, the Darwinian revolution was not confined to biology but involves social science, higher education, political advocacy, and moral philosophy as well.

Nowadays, empirical research using Darwin's key concepts of adaptation and selection is known as evolutionary biology, but