



What Darwin Got Wrong

By Jerry Fodor, Massimo Piattelli-Palmarini

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What Darwin Got Wrong is a remarkable book, one that dares to challenge the theory of natural selection as an explanation for how evolution works---a devastating critique not in the name of religion but in the name of good science. Combining the results of cutting-edge work in experimental biology with crystal-clear philosophical arguments, Fodor and Piattelli-Palmarini mount a reasoned and convincing assault on the central tenets of Darwin's account of the origin of species. This is a concise argument that will transform the debate about evolution and move us beyond the false dilemma of being either for natural selection or against science.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

The authors of this scattershot treatise believe in evolution, but think that the Darwinian model of adaptationism—that random genetic mutations, filtered by natural selection, produce traits that enhance fitness for a particular biological niche—is fatally flawed. Philosopher Fodor and molecular-biologist-turned-cognitive-scientist Piattelli-Palmarini, at the University of Arizona, launch a three-pronged attack (which drew fire when Fodor presented their ideas in the *London Review of Books* in 2007). For one thing, according to the authors, natural selection contains a logical fallacy by linking two irreconcilable claims: first, that creatures with adaptive traits are selected, and second, that creatures are selected for their adaptive traits. The authors present an ill-digested assortment of scientific studies suggesting there are forces other than adaptation (some even Lamarckian) that drive changes in genes and organisms. Then they advance a densely technical argument that natural selection can't coherently distinguish between adaptive traits and irrelevant ones. Their most persuasive, and engaging, criticism is that evolutionary theory is just tautological truisms and historical narratives of how creatures came to be. Overall, the scientific evidence and philosophical analyses the authors proffer are murky and underwhelming. Worse, their highly technical treatment renders their argument virtually incomprehensible to lay readers. (*Feb.*)

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From [Booklist](#)

Remaining staunchly atheist all the while, philosopher Fodor and cognitive scientist Piattelli-Palmarini challenge Darwinism more effectively than the entire creationist/intelligent-design movement has. Their short, deliberate, and—for readers consulting (and reconsulting) their dictionaries about the philosophical and scientific vocabulary the authors decline to dumb down—slow-reading tract lays out biological and conceptual arguments against natural selection. Natural selection as the driver of speciation has become decreasingly explanatory as research continues to appreciate the complexity of internal and external processes impinging on development. For one thing, inherent physical limitations of developing organisms nullify blind selection; adapt as they may, pigs will never grow wings. Conceptually, natural selection is faulty because it necessarily implies intentionality (selection is made by something), never mind that how something with adaptive effect is chosen is utterly elusive logically. There is a great deal more to Fodor and Piattelli-Palmarini's arguments, which ordinary general readers won't be able to articulate afterward but will gratefully refer others—and themselves—to again and again. Many may find this the hardest, absolutely essential reading they've ever done. --Ray Olson

Review

Praise for *What Darwin Got Wrong*

“[The] work acts as an important warning to those of us who think we understand natural selection.”

—Oliver Burkeman, *The Guardian*

“*What Darwin Got Wrong* is a trenchant, entertaining assault on the very basis of contemporary evolutionary theory.” —Kenan Malik, *Literary Review*

“[Fodor and Piattelli-Palmarini] make a persuasive case that the role of natural selection in evolution is ripe for reassessment. To say so should not be seen as scientific heresy or capitulation to the forces of unreason—it is a brave and welcome challenge.” —Philip Ball, *The Sunday Times* (London)

“[A] powerful little book . . . This book is, of course, fighting stuff, sure to be contested by those at whom it is aimed. On the face of things, however, it strikes an outsider as an overdue and valuable onslaught on neo-Darwinist simplicities.” —Mary Midgley, *The Guardian*

“Philosopher Fodor and cognitive scientist Piattelli-Palmarini challenge Darwinism more effectively than the entire creationist/intelligent-design movement has . . . Many may find this the hardest, absolutely essential reading they’ve ever done.” —Ray Olson, *Booklist*

“A challenging, intriguing argument that poses important scientific and philosophical questions about evolution . . . Fodor and Piattelli-Palmarini take a brave stance that will likely draw reaction . . . from across the scientific and theological spectrum. A dense, scholarly, engaging testament to modern scientific thinking and its ability to adapt and evolve.” —*Kirkus Reviews*

“From the shocking title onward, Fodor and Piattelli-Palmarini have set the cat among Darwin’s pigeons. In arguing why the operation of natural selection says nothing about the causal mechanisms underlying the evolution of coextensive traits in an organism, they take us to the conceptual fault line at the heart of Darwin’s theory. My prediction is that Fodor and Piattelli-Palmarini’s book will raise hackles galore wherever the theory of natural selection is all too glibly misused, not only in studies of the ontogeny and phylogeny of biology, but also in those great overlapping disciplines of philosophy, psychology, linguistics, and behavior—in short, human nature. This book will set the agenda for years to come. It cannot be ignored if the study of evolution is to be honest with itself.” —Gabriel Dover, Professor of Evolutionary Genetics, Universities of Leicester and Cambridge, and author of *Dear Mr. Darwin: Letters on the Evolution of Life and Human Nature*

“Evolution needs a persuasive theory if the struggle for public acceptance is to be won. Jerry Fodor and Massimo Piattelli-Palmarini’s bold treatise, *What Darwin Got Wrong*, convincingly shows that natural selection is not that theory. Drawing on scientific literature spanning the molecular, behavioral, and cognitive scales, with sophisticated excursions into evolutionary-developmental biology and the physics of complex systems, the authors perform a philosophical dismantling of the standard model of evolutionary change that is likely irreversible. Their unambiguous grounding in the factuality of evolution renders this work a service to science and a setback for its opponents.” —Stuart Newman, Professor of Cell Biology and Anatomy, New York Medical College

“In this provocative, enlightening, and very entertaining book, Fodor and Piattelli-Palmarini argue that natural selection (NS) *cannot* explain how evolution occurs. The argument is largely conceptual and proceeds in two steps: (1) that theories of NS are conceptually parallel to Skinnerian theories of learning and so share most of the same debilitating problems, and (2) that NS is actually in *worse* conceptual shape when its central explanatory notion, ‘selecting for,’ is properly unpacked. This argument will annoy a lot of important people, both for its conclusion and for the evident delight the authors display in getting to it. The ensuing fireworks should be delightful, and (possibly) enlightening.” —Norbert Hornstein, Professor of Linguistics, University of Maryland

“This highly informative and carefully argued study develops two central theses. First, there are alternatives to classical neo-Darwinian adaptationist theories that are plausible, and very possibly capture principles that are the rule rather than the exception even if the basic adaptationist account is accepted. Second, that account

cannot be accepted. The two theses are sufficiently independent so that they can be evaluated separately. Whatever the outcome of intellectual engagement with this stimulating work, it is sure to be a most rewarding experience.” —Noam Chomsky

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Adam Nelson:

Have you spare time for just a day? What do you do when you have much more or little spare time? Sure, you can choose the suitable activity regarding spend your time. Any person spent their spare time to take a stroll, shopping, or went to typically the Mall. How about open or perhaps read a book allowed What Darwin Got Wrong? Maybe it is to get best activity for you. You know beside you can spend your time along with your favorite's book, you can cleverer than before. Do you agree with it is opinion or you have additional opinion?

Charlie Seymour:

The book What Darwin Got Wrong has a lot of knowledge on it. So when you make sure to read this book you can get a lot of help. The book was published by the very famous author. Mcdougal makes some research previous to write this book. This specific book very easy to read you can get the point easily after reading this article book.

Delaine Valencia:

You can spend your free time you just read this book this book. This What Darwin Got Wrong is simple to create you can read it in the playground, in the beach, train along with soon. If you did not have much space to bring the printed book, you can buy typically the e-book. It is make you better to read it. You can save the book in your smart phone. Therefore there are a lot of benefits that you will get when you buy this book.

Joseph Robison:

What is your hobby? Have you heard that question when you got pupils? We believe that that issue was given by teacher for their students. Many kinds of hobby, Every individual has different hobby. So you know that little person like reading or as reading through become their hobby. You should know that reading is very important as well as book as to be the factor. Book is important thing to increase you knowledge, except your teacher or lecturer. You will find good news or update regarding something by book. A substantial number of sorts of books that can you take to be your object. One of them is What Darwin Got Wrong.

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