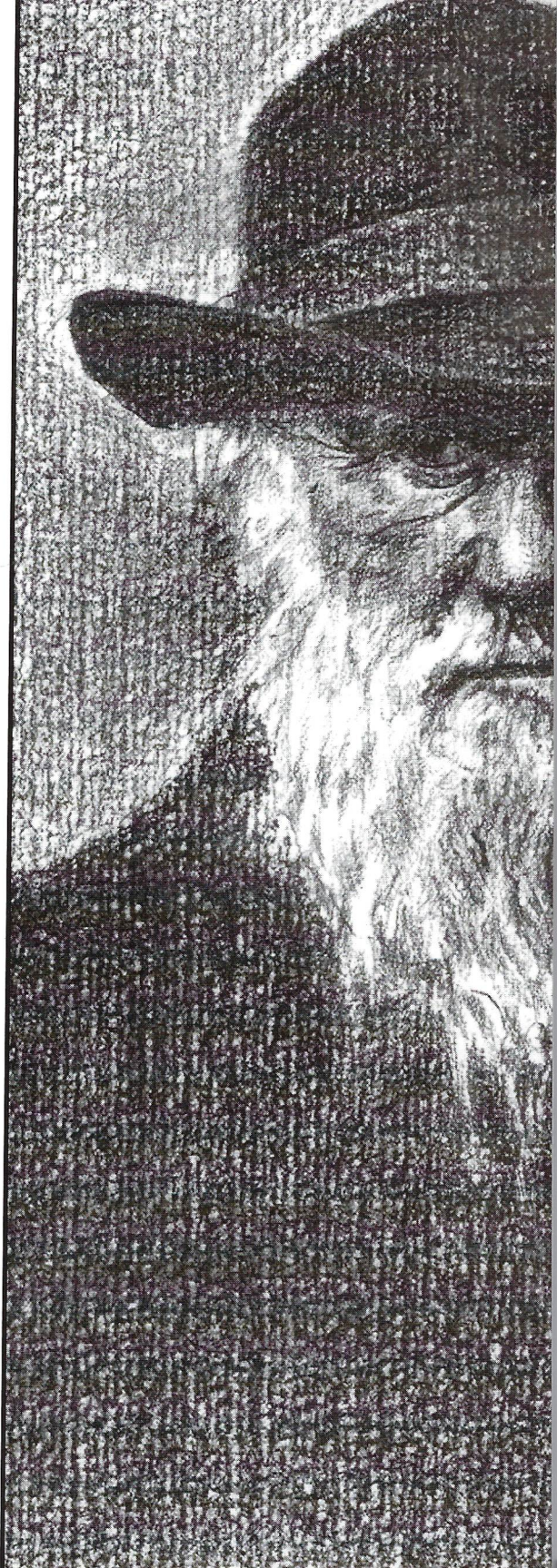


the  
single  
best  
idea,  
ever.

*Edited by  
Amanda Chesworth et al.*

with contributions from  
Richard Dawkins  
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Eugenie Scott  
John Rennie  
Ian Tattersall  
Colin Tudge

DARWIN DAY COLLECTION ONE





*This paper is an excerpt from a lecture presented to the Humanist Association of the Greater Sacramento Area, Atheists and Other Freethinkers, CSUS Anthropology Department, Sacramento Skeptics, and the Sacramento Organization for Rational Thinking for Darwin Day 2002.*

## THERE IS A GRANDEUR IN THIS VIEW OF LIFE

by Charles F. Urbanowicz

Perhaps no individual has done as much as Charles Robert Darwin did to help us (at least partially) to understand the question: “why are there so many different kinds of living things?” A decisive event that led to his perspective on the question was when he was chosen by Captain Robert FitzRoy to be the “gentleman naturalist” on board HMS *Beagle* (with no naval duties to perform). Darwin, however, conducted a great deal of research and in April 1832 Robert McCormick (1800-1890), who was the official naturalist on the *Beagle*, was “invalided out” back to England and Darwin was the naturalist for the rest of the voyage.

His observations in the Galápagos are particularly important to the evolution of his own thinking:

“The natural history of these islands is eminently curious, and well deserves attention... Hence, both in space and time, we seem to be brought somewhat near to that great fact – that mystery of mysteries – the first appearance of new beings on this earth.” [stress added]

His remarks on the finches are especially famous:

“Seeing this gradation and diversity of structure in one small, intimately related group of birds, one might really fancy that from an original paucity of birds in this archipelago, one species have been taken and modified for different ends.” [stress added]

Others went to the Galápagos Islands, perhaps most notably Louis Agassiz of glacial fame and saw the same “things” that Darwin saw, but did not “think” what Darwin thought. We observe behaviors and things through our eyes and interpret what we see according to our theoretical (and philosophical) framework(s). Facts do not speak for themselves. Darwin’s interpretation of the facts was tremendously influenced by his readings of Charles Lyell’s *Principles of Geology* and of the reverend Thomas Malthus’s *An Essay on the Principles of Population*. Malthus:

“argued for population control, since populations increase in geometric ratio and food supply only in arithmetic ratio, and influenced Charles Darwin’s thinking on natural selection as the driving force of evolution. Malthus saw war, famine, and disease as necessary checks on population growth.” [stress added] (Jones, 1996)

Yet people and ideas change over time. Darwin and his ideas changed, and as an examination of the current “Darwin Industry” shows, “Darwin interpretations” change with the times! Just as we view Darwin (in hindsight) as the genius he was, so the famous joint presentation of Darwin’s and Wallace’s by Charles Lyell at the Linnean Society on July 1, 1858 was viewed as nothing special by at least some of his contemporaries. The President of the Society later reported that “no particularly important papers had been read” in 1858.

Changing views continue, and Gillian Beer (2000) points this out in her most readable *Darwin’s Plots*:

“Darwin has grown younger in recent years. He is no longer the authoritative old man with a beard substituting for God. Instead his work and life are again in contention and debate. Sociologists, microbiologists, linguists, sociobiologists, philosophers, feminists, psychologists, biographers, geneticists, novelists, poets, post-colonialists, have their say.” [stress added]

The concept of change is definitely vital to an understanding of Darwin, whether you are reading Darwin himself or reading about him. In this context it is important to know that every edition of *Origin* published in Charles Darwin’s lifetime is different! He re-wrote every single one and all are different! Various sentences were deleted (“cut”), or re-written, or added for each edition. In everything I write about Darwin I emphasize this by including the following table, based on information in the excellent 1959 publication of Morse Peckham [Editor] entitled *The Origin Of Species By Charles Darwin: A Variorum Text*.

The Various Editions Of “Origin” From 1859-1872

Year	Edition	Copies	Cut	Re-Written	Added	Total	Percent Change
1859	1st	1,250				3,878	-
1860	2nd	3,000	9	483	30	3,899	7%
1861	3rd	2,000	33	617	266	4,132	14%
1866	4th	1,500	36	1,073	435	4,531	21%
1869	5th	2,000	178	1,770	227	4,580	29%
1872	6th	3,000	63	1,669	571	5,088	21-29%

One of the significant changes is demonstrated by a passage that is frequently quoted:

“Thus, from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of the higher animals, directly follows. *There is grandeur in this view of life*, with its several powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.” [stress added] (*Origin*, 1st. Edition 1859).

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An earlier version from the essay of 1842, is similar:

*"There is a simple grandeur in the view of life with its powers of growth, assimilation and reproduction, being originally breathed into matter under one or few forms, and that whilst this our planet has gone circling according to fixed laws, and land and water, in a cycle of change, have gone on replacing each other, that from so simple an origin, through the power of gradual selection of influential changes, endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been evolved."* [stress added]

The essay of 1844 however introduces "the Creator":

*"My reasons have now been assigned for believing that specific forms are not immutable creations. ... It accords with what we know of the laws impressed by the Creator on matter that the production and extinction of forms should, like the birth and death of individuals, be the result of secondary means. It is derogatory that the Creator of countless Universes should have made by individuals His will the myriads of creeping parasites and worms, which since the earliest dawn of life have swarmed over the land and in the depths of the ocean."* [stress added]

From 1860 onwards, the Creator appears in the *Origin*:

*"Thus, from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object of which we are capable of conceiving, namely the production of higher animals directly follows. There is a grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved."* [stress added]

Regarding this interjection, Martin Gardner writes:

*"Darwin himself, as a young biologist aboard H.M.S. Beagle, was so thoroughly orthodox that the ship's officers laughed at his propensity for quoting Scripture. Then 'disbelief crept over me at a very slow rate,' he recalled, 'but was at last complete. The rate was so slow that I felt no distress.' The phrase 'by the creator,' in the final sentence of the selection chosen here, did not appear in the first edition of Origin of Species. It was added to the second edition to conciliate angry clerics. Darwin later wrote, 'I have long since regretted that I truckled to public opinion and used the Pentateuchal term of creation, by which I really meant 'appeared' by some wholly unknown process.'" [stress added] (Gardner, 1984).*

The phrase "Darwin later wrote" by Gardner refers to a letter from Darwin to Joseph Hooker on 29 March 1863. Darwin continued his thoughts with the following sentence: "It is mere rubbish, thinking at present of the origin of life; one might as well think of the origin of matter."

The disbelief that crept over him "at a very slow rate" became complete on the death of his beloved daughter Annie, yet, at the end of his life, the Anglican establishment in England claimed him as one of their own. While visiting a friend in London

in December 1881, he suffered a mild heart seizure. On the 12th of February 1882, his 73rd birthday, he wrote to a friend that "my course is nearly run." Darwin had a fatal heart attack on Wednesday April 19, 1882; although he wished to be buried in the village of Downe, Kent, where he and his wife Emma had lived for forty years (1842-1882) it was not to be. On April 24, 1882, as a result of a request by various individuals, Charles Robert Darwin was buried in Westminster Abbey, London. His final place is a few paces away from the resting places of Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727), Sir Charles Lyell, Michael Faraday (1791-1867), and William Herschel (1792-1871). Darwin's pall bearers included the President of the Royal Society, the American Minister to the British Isles (Robert Lowell), the churchman Cannon Farrar, an earl, two dukes, and the three leading British biologists of the times who were among his closest scientific friends: Thomas Huxley, Sir Joseph Hooker, and Alfred Russel Wallace. Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) thought the occasion of Darwin's internment at the Abbey "worthy enough [to attend] to suspend his objections to religious ceremonies" (Himmelfarb, 1959). ∞

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[ABOUT THE AUTHOR]

Charles F. Urbanowicz is a professor of anthropology at the California State University in Chico. He has written several papers on the life and work of Charles Darwin, including one that explores teaching about Darwin and evolution through theatre. Professor Urbanowicz has traveled extensively and maintains a comprehensive website of his studies.

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[ADDITIONAL RESOURCES]

- Charles Urbanowicz' Homepage: <http://www.csuchico.edu/~curban/>
- California State University Sacramento Department of Anthropology: <http://www.csus.edu/anth/>
- Sacramento Freethought: <http://www.rthoughtsrfree.org/>
- Sacramento Organization for Rational Thinking (SORT): <http://www.quiknet.com/~kitray/index1.html>

Molleen Matsumura's review  
featured on the Darwin Day  
collection from the author.

BOOK REVIEW:  
**DARWIN, THIR**  
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by Philip Appleman (Ed.)  
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