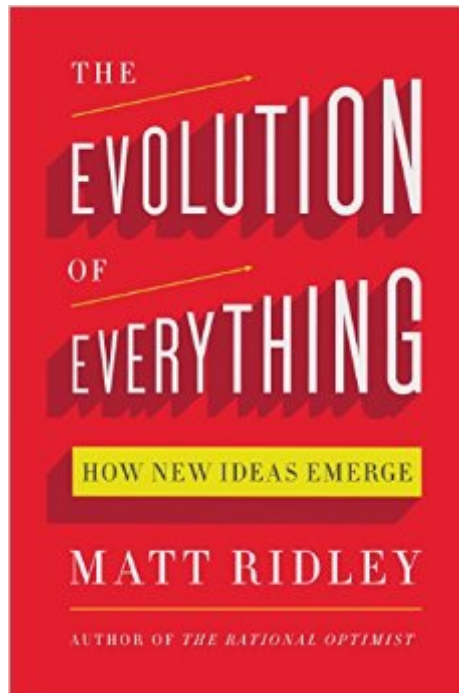


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The Evolution Of Everything: How New Ideas Emerge



Synopsis

The New York Times bestselling author of *The Rational Optimist* and *Genome* returns with a fascinating, brilliant argument for evolution that definitively dispels a dangerous, widespread myth: that we can command and control our world. *The Evolution of Everything* is about bottom-up order and its enemy, the top-down twitch—the endless fascination human beings have for design rather than evolution, for direction rather than emergence. Drawing on anecdotes from science, economics, history, politics and philosophy, Matt Ridley's wide-ranging, highly opinionated opus demolishes conventional assumptions that major scientific and social imperatives are dictated by those on high, whether in government, business, academia, or morality. On the contrary, our most important achievements develop from the bottom up. Patterns emerge, trends evolve. Just as skeins of geese form Vs in the sky without meaning to, and termites build mud cathedrals without architects, so brains take shape without brain-makers, learning can happen without teaching and morality changes without a plan. Although we neglect, defy and ignore them, bottom-up trends shape the world. The growth of technology, the sanitation-driven health revolution, the quadrupling of farm yields so that more land can be released for nature—these were largely emergent phenomena, as were the Internet, the mobile phone revolution, and the rise of Asia. Ridley demolishes the arguments for design and effectively makes the case for evolution in the universe, morality, genes, the economy, culture, technology, the mind, personality, population, education, history, government, God, money, and the future. As compelling as it is controversial, authoritative as it is ambitious, Ridley's stunning perspective will revolutionize the way we think about our world and how it works.

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Customer Reviews

Matt Ridley has a theory: everything evolves. Building on biological evolution, which he terms a special theory of evolution, Matt Ridley develops in this book a general theory of how evolution lets new ideas emerge in technology, culture, science, economics, history, politics and philosophy. Something like Charles Darwin's natural selection operates in all these areas to ensure that the fittest ideas survive while the weakest die out. Trial and error rules, not command and control. Things evolve not by design, but by chance. Not from the top down, but from the bottom up. The process of evolution is slow, gradual, chaotic, brutal, unpredictable and impossible to stop. (The word "evolution" originally meant "unroll" or "unfold".) Things happen; they are not planned and implemented. They have no cause; there is no effect. Not that design and intention by leaders and directors play no part. But for the most part, purposeful design takes a back seat to emergent evolution. Matt Ridley has the background to build this bold theory. A biologist by training, his 1994 book *The Red Queen: Sex and the Evolution of Human Nature* looked at how sexual selection influences biological evolution. In his 2010 book *The Rational Optimist: How Prosperity Evolves*, he moved from looking at evolution in biology to seeing its mark in social phenomena. Matt Ridley has the chops to make that leap.

Nearly 35 years ago, 1974 Nobel Prize winner in economics F.A. Hayek wrote: "We understand now that all enduring structures above the level of the simplest atoms, and up to the brain and society, are the results of, and can be explained only in terms of, processes of selective evolution." Mr. Ridley's fantastic book will greatly help mankind finally catch up to Hayek. To properly understand how the world works one must understand how at a fundamental level evolution is like an algorithm for creating order and everything around us. That is the essence of Hayek's quote and Mr. Ridley's book. Ridley cleverly titled his chapters as "The Evolution of Life", "The Evolution of Genes", "The Evolution of" etc. The chapters are bite sized chunks of evolutionary explanations that neatly tie everything together leaving the reader with a remarkably simple yet profound way of understanding how the entire world works. Hayek would have been proud. Mr. Ridley was awarded the Manhattan Institute's 2011 Hayek prize for his previous and also highly recommended book "The Rational Optimist". In his acceptance speech he mentions how sort of shocking it is that someone like himself can get a PhD from one of England's finest universities without ever hearing of intellectual giants like Adam Smith and

much less F.A. Hayek. He says: "Many of the insights that I thought I had discovered in my own readings and writings...it turns out Hayek had long before me." Yes! And I'm sure this happens to people all the time as they inevitably stumble upon the fact that "processes of selective evolution" are what shape all order. In chapter 7 titled "The Evolution of Technology" Ridley mentions Brian Arthur from the famed "Santa Fe Institute".

I agreed with Ridley's comment previously quoted and regret that so many misconceptions remain concerning Charles Darwin's General Theory of Evolution is and isn't. If evolution is a process, who can say with certainty that a divinity did or did not create it? Over centuries, the concept of creationism has evolved. In fact, all concepts evolve including articles of faith embraced by each of the world's largest religions. Moreover, the process of natural selection does not preclude faith in a divinity. I am among those who believe it confirms such faith. According to Ridley, "evolution is happening all around us. It is the best way of understanding how the human world changes, as well as the natural world. Change in human instructions, artifacts and habits is incremental, inexorable, and inevitable. It follows a narrative, going from one stage to the next; it creeps rather than jumps; it has its own spontaneous momentum, rather than being driven from outside; it has no goal or end in mind; and it largely happens by trial and error -- a version of natural selection." Ridley then adds: "This truth continues to elude most intellectuals on the left as well as on the right, who remain in effect 'creationists.' The obsession with which those on the right resist Charles Darwin's insight -- that the complexity of nature does not imply a designer -- matches the obsession with which those on the left resist Adam Smith's insight -- that the complexity of society does not imply a planner. In the pages that follow, I shall take on this creationism in all its forms." And indeed he does.

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