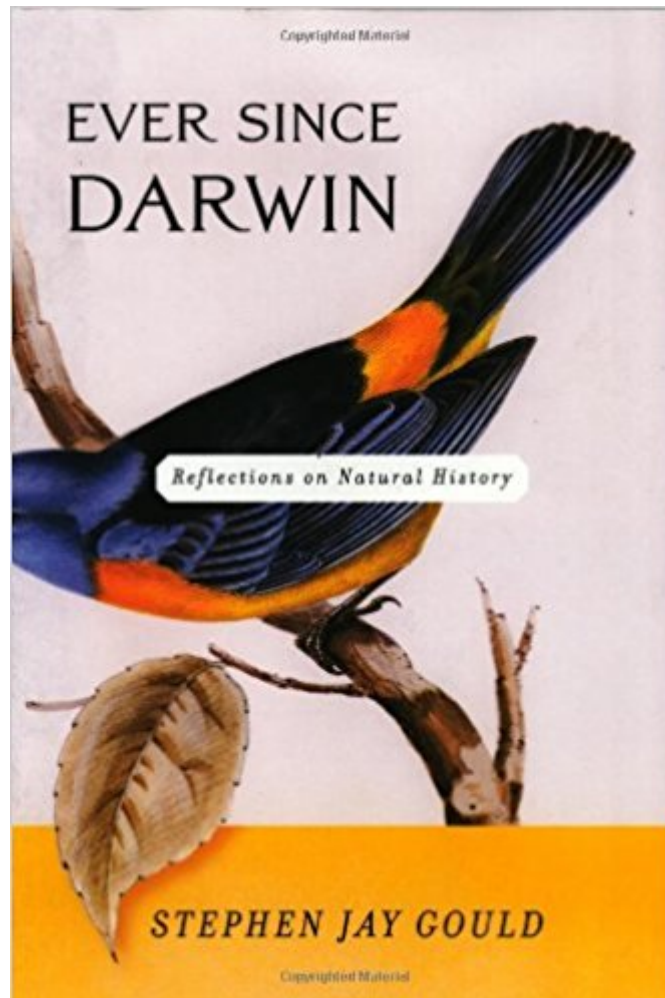




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Ever Since Darwin: Reflections In Natural History



Synopsis

More than any other modern scientists, Stephen Jay Gould has opened up to millions the wonders of evolutionary biology. His genius as an essayist lies in his unmatched ability to use his knowledge of the world, including popular culture, to illuminate the realm of science. Ever Since Darwin, Stephen Jay Gould's first book, has sold more than a quarter of a million copies. Like all succeeding collections by this unique writer, it brings the art of the scientific essay to unparalleled heights.

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Customer Reviews

“A remarkable achievement by any measure. [Gould] is profoundly intelligent, a writer of great natural wit, and his sophistication and learning range far beyond the parameters of his academic field, biology. . . . One is hard pressed to single out past writers who could wear the sobriquet of natural history essayist with such distinction.” - David Walsten, Chicago Tribune

“A shrewd and learned intellectual whose essays on Charles Darwin have the style and address of what in other circumstances might be the writing of a literary critic upon Stendhal or Proust or other such major figure in the world of letters.” - P. B. Medawar, The Sciences

Stephen Jay Gould (1941-2002) was the Alexander Agassiz Professor of Zoology and Professor of Geology at Harvard University. He published over twenty books, received the National Book and National Book Critics Circle Awards, and a MacArthur Fellowship.

When it comes to popular writings on Evolution, the two names I most often hear are Dawkins and Gould. While I've read several books from Dawkins, this is my first one from Gould. This one is in the essay format which it seems is the norm for Gould's books. Overall the essays vary in quality but for the most part they're good, although some are a little dated (which happens with any science books published 35-40 years ago). My favorite ones were the first section over Darwin and a section which looks at odd organisms. In this later section, you get some interesting essays such as one over the Irish Elk and my favorite essay about the lampshell mussel, which makes itself look like a swimming fish in order to get attacked by larger fish, then it shoots spores into the larger fish. This book makes me want to read more of his works.

In January, I reviewed, the Sixth Extinction (by the journalist, Elizabeth Kolbert) and, like others, found it wanting. I thought it better to read books by scientists with good editors. So I tried to find such a book structured as Kolbert's, i.e. short treatments of disparate matters touching upon evolution and extinction. This 1977 collection of essays fit the bill. Even now, Gould's work stands up and provides the depth lacking in Kolbert's. If this format appeals to you, I recommend this book.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. This is a series of essays by Gould, on a variety of topics in evolution, from the history of Darwinism, to the political and social ramifications of biological determinism. Insightful and eloquent, Dr Gould never makes the reader bored nor encumbered them with jargon too complex to understand. A truly well written book.

This was a wonderful reading experience. Dr. Gould is a truly gifted writer with a wonderful wit and colorful style. He has a broad range of interests and knowledge and an interesting circle of friends and colleagues upon whose wisdom he also draws (Astronomer Sagan, Geologists Press and Siever, were among those with whose work I was familiar). He also manages to approach "accepted" theories from unusual directions, sometimes with novel and provocative results! The collection of essays includes an interesting work on the effects of the personality of the Captain of the Beagle on the formulation of Darwin's theories; a subject that had certainly never occurred to me. There is also an interesting discussion of the human baby as an unfinished embryo, with interesting implications for the upper limit on brain size and for human evolution as a whole. The effect of size on intellectual potential of the brains of different species, for instance ants vs humans, is the topic under discussion in the Sizing up of Human Intelligence. The interaction of planetary size and surface area and the concomitant implications for development of life is the subject of

another article. The effect of social milieu on the development and acceptance of scientific theories is also discussed as is the hindsight criticism of "wrong" theories and their proponents. Probably most interesting, and certainly most urgently in need of repetition even now, is the tendency to use scientific "fact" or verbal slight of hand to support social status quo or even abuse by those with a political agenda. Many of the essays could be well used in high school classes to teach and encourage critical thinking and novel approaches to what is commonly held as "fact." I would not just recommend the book to you, I would encourage you to read it cover to cover!

I've always had a general understanding of evolution and natural selection but Gould's explanations make it much more understandable. It's a shame that he died so young. I plan on reading some of his books written just before his death, and I plan on reading some of Dawkins' books at the same time. Interesting, to me, at least, how two men who agreed on so much could have had such a battle.

Many articles were published in earlier works

Gould's first collection and one of my favorites.

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