

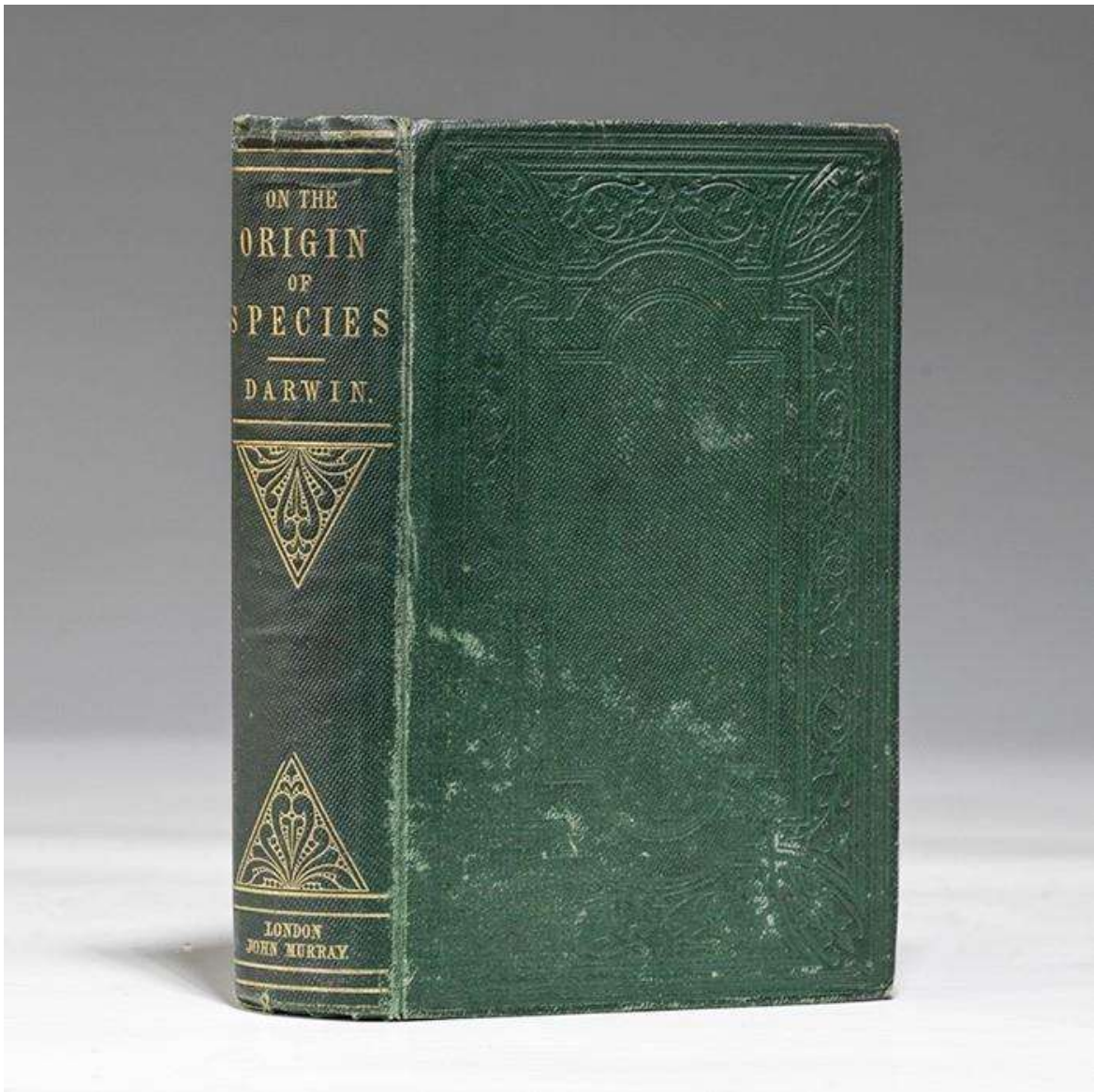
On the Origin of Species (second edition 1860) by Charles Darwin: A Canonical Book

Curated by Stephen A Batman

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Summary of this Particular Rare Second Edition

Charles Darwin, On the Origin of Species, 1860



ON

*Mr. Jenner
Edinburgh*

THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES

BY MEANS OF NATURAL SELECTION,

OR THE

PRESERVATION OF FAVOURED RACES IN THE STRUGGLE
FOR LIFE.

By CHARLES DARWIN, M.A.,

FELLOW OF THE ROYAL, GEOLOGICAL, LINNEAN, ETC., SOCIETIES;
AUTHOR OF 'JOURNAL OF RESEARCHES DURING H. M. S. BEAGLE'S VOYAGE
ROUND THE WORLD.'

FIFTH THOUSAND.

LONDON:
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET.
1860.

The right of Translation is reserved.

"THE MOST IMPORTANT SINGLE WORK IN SCIENCE": SECOND EDITION OF DARWIN'S *ORIGIN OF SPECIES*, PUBLISHED ONLY TWO MONTHS AFTER THE FIRST, A LOVELY COPY

Second edition, second issue, as always (the first issue known in only a few copies), of "certainly the most important biological book ever written" (Freeman), published less than two months after the first edition. A lovely, unrestored copy.

"This, the most important single work in science, brought man to his true place in nature" (*Heralds of Science* 199). Darwin "was intent upon carrying Lyell's demonstration of the uniformity of natural causes over into the organic world... In accomplishing this Darwin not only drew an entirely new picture of the workings of organic nature; *he revolutionized our methods of thinking and our outlook on the natural order of things. The recognition that constant change is the order of the universe had been finally established and a vast step forward in the uniformity of nature had been taken*" (PMM 344).

The *Origin* was recognized immediately as important, revolutionary, and highly controversial; the small first edition of only 1250 copies sold out very quickly, and is extremely rare today. By the late autumn of 1859 the publisher Murray was asking Darwin to begin revising at once for a new edition. This copy is the second edition, published in January of 1860, with "fifth thousand" on the title page and three quotations opposite the title page, rather than two as in the first edition. This is the *second issue*, as usual, with 1860 on the title page; the first issue, with 1859 on the title page, is known in only a few copies.

Alterations between the first and second editions are minor, though it is notable that Darwin shortens the "whale-bear" story. Freeman's binding variant a, no priority established. Freeman 376. See Horblit, 23b; Dibner, 199; PMM 344b.

Owner pencil signature on title page and bookplate of Charles Jenner of Edinburgh: "A man of great energy as well as business acumen, Jenner was well known to contemporaries as a man of science, an accomplished amateur botanist and geologist, and a patron of the arts. From 1851 he was a member of the Botanical Society of Edinburgh and in 1865 he was elected to the élite Botanical Society Club. A previously unknown alpine moss, discovered by Jenner in 1867 while on one of his many scientific tours in Europe, was officially named *Didymodon jennerii* in his honor... Jenner was a founder of the Edinburgh Philosophical Institution in 1864" (ODNB). Another bookplate; occasional pencil underlining and sideling.

DARWIN, Charles. *On the Origin of Species By Means of Natural Selection, Or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle For Life...* Fifth Thousand. London: John Murray, 1860. Octavo, original blind and gilt-stamped green cloth. Housed in a custom chemise and clamshell box.

Some foxing to fore-edge, text generally clean. Cloth with minor discoloration to covers and a few rubs to corners, gilt quite bright. A lovely unrestored copy, with a nice scientific provenance.

Introduction

Charles Darwin's "On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life," commonly known as "The Origin of Species," stands as one of the most influential scientific works ever published. The second edition, released on January 7, 1860, followed rapidly after the first edition's publication on November 24, 1859, which had sold out its initial print run of 1,250 copies on the day of release[7]. The second edition, consisting of 3,000 copies, represents Darwin's first opportunity to respond to criticisms and refine his revolutionary theory[1][13].

Darwin's motivation for writing this groundbreaking work stemmed from his observations during his five-year voyage on HMS Beagle (1831-1836) and his subsequent twenty years of meticulous research and contemplation[3]. He had actually formulated his theory of natural selection by 1838 but delayed publication, partly due to his awareness of the controversy it would generate and partly to develop a thoroughly evidenced argument[8]. The delay ended when Alfred Russel Wallace independently developed similar ideas, prompting a joint presentation of their theories to the Linnean Society in 1858, followed by Darwin's rushed completion of "The Origin of Species" in just thirteen months[3][11].

The cultural and political climate surrounding the book's publication was complex. Victorian England was experiencing rapid industrialization and social change, while still maintaining strong religious convictions. The scientific community was increasingly embracing naturalistic explanations for phenomena, yet most scientists and the general public held firm to the belief in special creation—the idea that God had created each species individually[4]. Previous works like "Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation" (1844) had already stirred controversy by suggesting evolutionary ideas, but Darwin's work provided a comprehensive mechanism—natural selection—that made evolution scientifically credible[15].

The second edition, while largely similar to the first, contained several significant changes. Darwin made approximately 7% of the total changes that would appear across all editions of the book, including dropping nine sentences, adding thirty, and altering 483[13]. Most notably, he added the phrase "by the Creator" in the book's concluding paragraph, a concession to religious sensibilities that reflected the tension between scientific advancement and religious tradition in Victorian society[7][13].

The Author

Charles Robert Darwin (1809-1882) was born into a wealthy and intellectually distinguished English family in Shrewsbury, Shropshire. His grandfather, Erasmus Darwin, was a prominent physician and natural philosopher who had himself speculated about evolution, while his maternal grandfather, Josiah Wedgwood, was a successful industrialist and prominent abolitionist[3]. This privileged background afforded Darwin educational opportunities and the financial independence that would later enable his scientific pursuits.

Darwin's early education included attendance at Shrewsbury School and Edinburgh University, where he began medical studies but found them distasteful. He subsequently attended Christ's College, Cambridge, intending to become a clergyman, though his passion for natural history flourished during this period[3]. The pivotal moment in Darwin's life came when he secured a position as a naturalist aboard HMS Beagle for its five-year surveying expedition around the world. This voyage, particularly his observations in the Galapagos Islands, provided the empirical foundation for his later theoretical work[3][8].

Upon returning to England, Darwin established himself as a respected geologist and naturalist. He married his cousin Emma Wedgwood in 1839, with whom he would have ten children, and they settled at Down House in Kent in 1842, where Darwin would spend the remainder of his life[3]. Despite suffering from chronic ill health—possibly Chagas disease contracted during the Beagle voyage—Darwin maintained a rigorous research program, corresponding extensively with scientists worldwide and conducting meticulous experiments.

By 1838, Darwin had conceptualized natural selection as the mechanism of evolution, inspired partly by reading Thomas Malthus's essay on population. However, aware of the controversial nature of his ideas, he spent the next twenty years gathering evidence and refining his theory[3]. During this period, he published works on coral reefs, volcanic islands, and barnacles, establishing his scientific credibility before venturing into the more contentious territory of evolution.

Darwin was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1839 and continued to receive scientific accolades throughout his life[3]. Despite his revolutionary ideas, he was personally conservative and avoided public controversy when possible. He was deeply concerned about how his theory would affect his devoutly religious wife and the broader religious establishment. This sensitivity is evident in the revisions he made to the second edition of "The Origin of Species," including the addition of references to a Creator[7][13].

By the time of his death in 1882, Darwin had published numerous additional works, including "The Descent of Man" (1871), which explicitly applied evolutionary theory to humans. Despite initial controversy, he was honored with burial in Westminster Abbey, signifying his acceptance into the scientific and cultural establishment[3]. Darwin's legacy extends far beyond his lifetime, with his theory of evolution by natural selection becoming the cornerstone of modern biology.

Why this is a Canonical Book

"On the Origin of Species" must be included in the canon of books containing major ideas that have profoundly shaped America's politics, governance, economics, and culture, while simultaneously generating significant adverse reactions due to perceived conflicts with core American values. The second edition, published in 1860, is particularly significant as it represents Darwin's first response to public reaction and includes subtle but important modifications to his original text.

First, Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection fundamentally transformed humanity's understanding of its place in the natural world. By proposing that humans evolved through the same natural processes as all other species, Darwin challenged the exceptional status of humanity in creation, a concept deeply embedded in American religious and cultural identity[4][12]. This scientific naturalism provided an alternative framework for understanding human origins and development, one based on empirical evidence rather than religious authority.

Second, the book established evolutionary biology as a scientific discipline, introducing methodological naturalism that has become the foundation of modern scientific inquiry in America[8]. Darwin's meticulous gathering of evidence, careful reasoning, and willingness to address potential objections to his theory exemplified the scientific method at its best. His work demonstrated how complex natural phenomena could be explained through observable natural processes, an approach that has influenced American scientific education and research for generations.

Third, "The Origin of Species" sparked a profound and ongoing debate about the relationship between science and religion in American society[9][12]. The controversy that followed its publication—and continues to this day—reflects America's unique religious landscape and the tension between scientific advancement and religious tradition. This debate has shaped educational policy, legal jurisprudence on the separation of church and state, and public discourse about the proper role of science in a democratic society.

Fourth, Darwin's ideas have been appropriated and misappropriated in various social and political contexts in America. Concepts like "survival of the fittest" (a phrase actually coined by Herbert Spencer, not Darwin) were used to justify laissez-faire economics and social policies that minimized government intervention in the late 19th and early 20th centuries[5]. These Social Darwinist interpretations, though not endorsed by Darwin himself, influenced American economic thought and policy.

Fifth, the book's publication in 1860, on the eve of the American Civil War, coincided with intense debates about human equality and rights. While Darwin did not directly address human evolution in this work, his theory would later be used both to challenge and, unfortunately, to reinforce racial hierarchies in American society[5]. The complex legacy of Darwinian thought in American race relations underscores the book's profound cultural impact.

Finally, "The Origin of Species" exemplifies intellectual courage and integrity in the face of anticipated controversy[10]. Darwin's willingness to follow evidence to conclusions that challenged prevailing orthodoxies, despite personal reservations and awareness of potential backlash, embodies values central to American intellectual tradition: free inquiry, evidence-based reasoning, and the pursuit of truth regardless of established authority.

The second edition specifically, with its subtle modifications in response to criticism—such as the addition of "by the Creator" in the concluding paragraph and the tempering of the "whale-

bear" example—demonstrates Darwin's engagement with his critics while maintaining the integrity of his scientific argument[1][13]. This balance between responsiveness and principled commitment to evidence makes the second edition particularly illustrative of how transformative ideas navigate public reception in a democratic society.

Five Timeless Quotes

1. "There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed by the Creator into 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." [7]

This concluding passage from the second edition (with the notable addition of "by the Creator" not present in the first edition) encapsulates Darwin's vision of evolution as a process of magnificent creativity and diversity. Its relevance today lies in its suggestion that scientific understanding of natural processes need not diminish our appreciation for the wonder and beauty of life. In our current era of environmental crisis, this perspective encourages us to value biodiversity as the product of billions of years of evolutionary history. The quote also demonstrates Darwin's attempt to reconcile his scientific findings with religious sensibilities, a balancing act that remains relevant in contemporary American discussions about science and faith.

2. "It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change."

This quote, often attributed to Darwin though not appearing verbatim in his works, captures the essence of his theory of adaptation through natural selection. Its importance today lies in its application to organizational and social adaptation in a rapidly changing world. In business, education, governance, and personal development, the ability to adapt to changing circumstances often determines success. This principle has particular relevance in our current era of technological disruption, climate change, and global interconnection, reminding us that flexibility and adaptability are crucial survival skills.

3. "In the long history of humankind (and animal kind, too) those who learned to collaborate and improvise most effectively have prevailed."

Another concept derived from Darwin's work, this idea emphasizes that cooperation, not just competition, plays a crucial role in evolutionary success. This understanding counters simplistic "survival of the fittest" interpretations that overemphasize ruthless competition. Today, as we face global challenges requiring unprecedented international cooperation—from pandemic response to climate change mitigation—this Darwinian insight reminds us that our capacity for collaboration has been essential to human flourishing throughout our evolutionary history.

4. "If it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed, which could not possibly have been formed by numerous, successive, slight modifications, my theory would absolutely break down."[6]

This statement demonstrates Darwin's scientific integrity in acknowledging potential falsifiability of his theory. In our current era of science skepticism and polarized debates, Darwin's willingness to specify conditions under which his theory could be disproven exemplifies the intellectual honesty essential to scientific progress. This approach to knowledge—provisional, evidence-based, and open to revision—remains a vital counterweight to dogmatism and ideological rigidity in public discourse.

5. "I have called this principle, by which each slight variation, if useful, is preserved, by the term of Natural Selection, in order to mark its relation to man's power of selection."[6]

This definition of natural selection, the core mechanism of Darwin's theory, revolutionized our understanding of how species change over time. Its contemporary relevance extends beyond biology to fields like artificial intelligence, where evolutionary algorithms inspired by natural selection solve complex problems, and medicine, where understanding evolutionary processes helps address challenges like antibiotic resistance. This concept continues to provide a powerful framework for understanding adaptive change in biological and non-biological systems alike.

Five Major Ideas

1. Natural Selection as the Mechanism of Evolution

Darwin's most revolutionary contribution was identifying natural selection as the primary mechanism driving evolutionary change. He observed that in any population, individuals vary in their traits, some variations provide advantages in survival and reproduction, and advantageous traits tend to be passed to offspring[6]. Over time, this process leads to the accumulation of beneficial adaptations and, eventually, the formation of new species. This idea transformed biology from a descriptive science into one with a unifying explanatory framework. Today, natural selection remains the cornerstone of evolutionary biology, with applications ranging from understanding antibiotic resistance to developing new agricultural varieties adapted to changing climates.

2. Common Descent of All Life Forms

Darwin proposed that all species share common ancestors, with life diversifying from one or a few original forms through a branching process of evolution[6]. This concept revolutionized our understanding of biological relationships, replacing the view of species as fixed, separate creations with a dynamic model of interconnected life forms. The common descent principle underpins modern biological classification, comparative genomics, and medical research. By recognizing our evolutionary kinship with all living things, this idea also provides a scientific

foundation for environmental ethics and conservation biology, emphasizing humanity's place within, rather than apart from, the web of life.

3. Gradualism in Evolutionary Change

Darwin emphasized that evolutionary change occurs through the accumulation of small, incremental modifications over vast periods of time[6]. This gradualist perspective challenged catastrophist views prevalent in his era and highlighted the importance of deep time in understanding biological diversity. While modern evolutionary theory recognizes that rates of change can vary (including periods of rapid evolution), Darwin's emphasis on gradual change remains important for understanding most evolutionary processes. This concept reminds us that significant transformations often result from accumulated small changes—a principle relevant to social and technological evolution as well as biological evolution.

4. Divergence of Character and Speciation

Darwin explained how new species form through the divergence of populations adapting to different environmental conditions[6]. This process of speciation through adaptive radiation accounts for the tremendous biodiversity on Earth. The concept of divergence helps explain both the unity and diversity of life—why organisms share fundamental similarities while displaying remarkable specializations. In our era of biodiversity loss, understanding the processes that generate and maintain species diversity is essential for conservation efforts and sustainable development.

5. Struggle for Existence and Population Dynamics

Influenced by Thomas Malthus's work on population growth, Darwin recognized that organisms produce more offspring than can survive, creating competition for limited resources[6]. This "struggle for existence" drives natural selection by determining which variants are most likely to survive and reproduce. This insight connects evolutionary biology with ecology and has implications for understanding human population dynamics, resource management, and sustainability. As humanity faces growing resource constraints and environmental challenges, Darwin's recognition of the relationship between population growth, resource limitation, and adaptation remains profoundly relevant.

Three Major Controversies

1. Religious Opposition and the Challenge to Special Creation

The most immediate and enduring controversy sparked by "The Origin of Species" was its challenge to the doctrine of special creation—the belief that God created each species individually and unchangeably[4][7]. This theological conflict was particularly pronounced in America, where religious fundamentalism developed partly in response to Darwinian

evolution[12][14]. The controversy intensified in the early 20th century with the rise of the anti-evolution movement, culminating in the famous Scopes "Monkey Trial" of 1925, where William Jennings Bryan prosecuted a teacher for teaching evolution in violation of Tennessee law[12][14].

This conflict has continued to shape American education and politics. In the 1960s, following the Supreme Court's stricter interpretation of the separation of church and state, religious conservatives developed "Scientific Creationism" and later "Intelligent Design" as attempts to introduce religious concepts into science education while circumventing legal restrictions[12][14]. These movements have generated numerous legal battles over science education standards, textbook content, and classroom teaching. The controversy reflects deeper tensions in American society regarding the proper relationship between religious belief and scientific knowledge, the scope of religious freedom, and the content of public education.

2. Social Darwinism and Misappropriation for Political Ends

Although Darwin himself did not explicitly extend his biological theory to human social systems, his ideas were quickly appropriated and misappropriated for various political and social agendas[5]. "Social Darwinism," associated primarily with Herbert Spencer's phrase "survival of the fittest," applied evolutionary concepts to justify laissez-faire economics, colonialism, and social inequality. In America, industrialists like Andrew Carnegie embraced these ideas to oppose government regulation and social welfare programs, arguing that economic competition naturally selected the most fit individuals for success.

This misapplication of Darwin's ideas contributed to harmful social policies, including eugenics programs that sought to "improve" the human species through selective breeding. In the early 20th century, many American states enacted forced sterilization laws targeting those deemed "unfit," a practice eventually upheld by the Supreme Court in *Buck v. Bell* (1927). These distortions of Darwin's scientific theory for political ends highlight the dangers of applying biological concepts to social systems without careful ethical consideration—a lesson that remains relevant as advances in genetics and biotechnology raise new questions about human intervention in evolution.

3. Scientific Objections and Methodological Debates

Beyond religious and social controversies, "The Origin of Species" also generated significant scientific debate. Some of Darwin's scientific contemporaries, including Adam Sedgwick and John Herschel, criticized his methodology as too speculative and insufficiently rigorous[7][8]. Others, like Richard Owen, accepted evolution but rejected natural selection as its mechanism, preferring theories that maintained a more direct role for divine guidance[15].

A particularly contentious scientific issue was Darwin's estimate of Earth's age, which he initially calculated at 300 million years for the denudation of the Weald (reduced to 100-150 million years in the second edition)[13]. This timeline was challenged by physicists like Lord

Kelvin, who calculated a much younger age based on thermodynamics. This controversy was not resolved until the discovery of radioactivity in the early 20th century, which validated Darwin's need for vast time scales.

These scientific controversies, though less politically charged than religious objections, illustrate how revolutionary scientific theories face rigorous scrutiny within the scientific community itself. The eventual resolution of these debates through additional evidence and theoretical refinement demonstrates the self-correcting nature of science—a process that continues today as evolutionary theory incorporates new findings from genetics, developmental biology, and other fields.

In Closing

Civic-minded Americans should read "On the Origin of Species," particularly the second edition of 1860, for several compelling reasons. First, this work represents one of the most transformative scientific theories ever proposed, one that continues to shape our understanding of the natural world and humanity's place within it. As informed citizens in a democracy increasingly confronted with complex scientific issues—from pandemic response to climate change—understanding the foundations of modern biology is essential for meaningful civic participation.

Second, the book exemplifies the highest standards of scientific inquiry and evidence-based reasoning. Darwin's meticulous gathering of evidence, careful consideration of potential objections, and willingness to revise his ideas in response to criticism model the intellectual virtues essential to a functioning democracy. In an era of misinformation and polarization, Darwin's approach to knowledge—provisional, evidence-based, and open to revision—offers a valuable counterweight to dogmatism and ideological rigidity.

Third, the controversy surrounding "The Origin of Species" illuminates enduring tensions in American society regarding the relationship between science and religion, individual freedom and collective welfare, and tradition and progress. By engaging with this seminal work and its reception, citizens gain insight into the historical roots of contemporary debates about science education, religious freedom, and the proper scope of scientific authority in public policy.

Fourth, Darwin's theory has been both properly applied and misappropriated in various social and political contexts. Understanding the original work helps citizens distinguish between legitimate scientific applications and ideological distortions, fostering more nuanced engagement with evolutionary concepts in public discourse.

Finally, as a work that challenged prevailing orthodoxies and expanded human understanding despite significant opposition, "The Origin of Species" embodies the spirit of intellectual courage essential to democratic progress. In a time when conformity to ideological positions often takes precedence over pursuit of truth, Darwin's example reminds us that meaningful advancement

sometimes requires challenging established beliefs and enduring controversy in service of greater understanding.

The second edition specifically, with its subtle modifications in response to criticism, demonstrates how transformative ideas navigate public reception in a democratic society. By reading this canonical work, civic-minded Americans participate in the ongoing conversation about evolution, science, religion, and society that Darwin initiated over 160 years ago—a conversation that continues to shape our collective future.

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