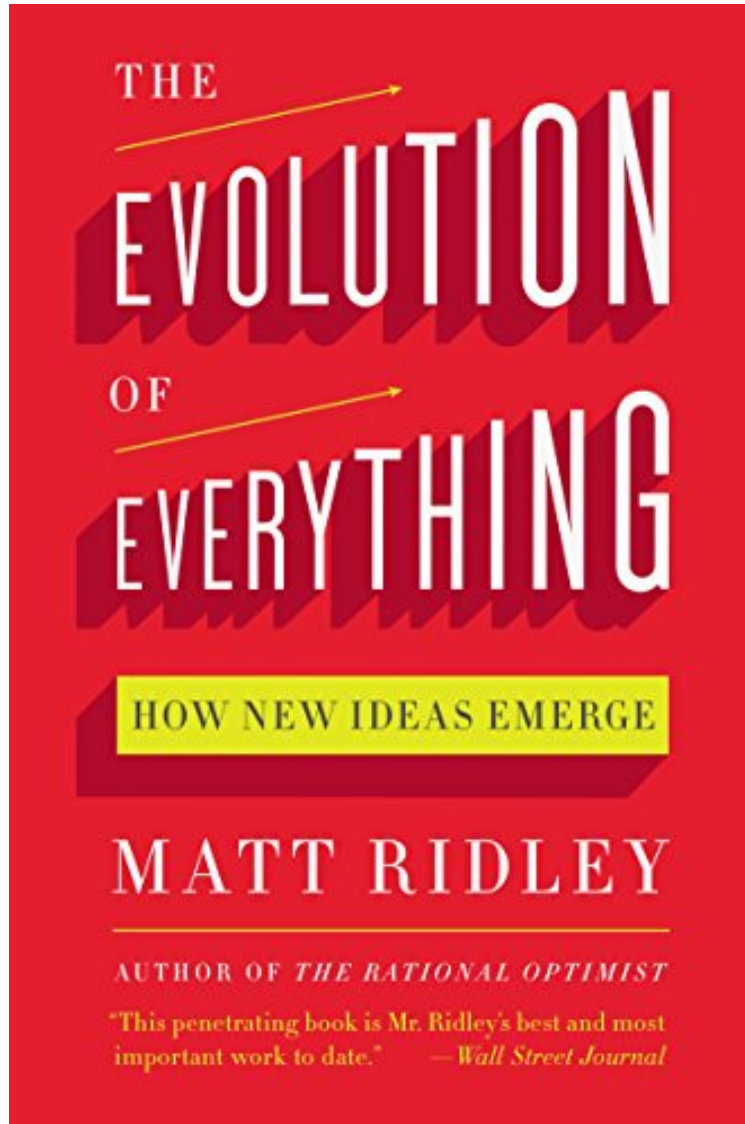


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The Evolution of Everything: How New Ideas Emerge

Matt Ridley

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Matt Ridley : The Evolution of Everything: How New Ideas Emerge before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Evolution of Everything: How New Ideas Emerge:

78 of 83 people found the following review helpful. Shades of Herbert Spencer's "Social Darwinism", but more evolved thinking. By Etiam si omnes, ego non. 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. He has long been a science writer and was American editor of the *Economist*, but he also is a member of the British House of Lords. He saw economic evolution in action as chairman of the British bank Northern Rock, which in the mid 2000s experienced the first run on a British bank in 150 years and failed (Matt Ridley resigned, and the bank was bailed out by the government and nationalized). This book is ambitious. Matt Ridley starts by sketching out the general theory of evolution. He then gets specific, with chapters discussing evolution in: the universe, morality, life, genes, culture, the economy, technology, the mind, personality, education, population, leadership, government, religion, money, and the internet. Finally, he ends with evolution of the future. How exactly does this evolutionary process work? To take just one example that everyone will quickly grasp, the English language just evolves. No one is in charge of it or directs it. No one could. Changes in the language just happen as millions of people use it. Popular changes become accepted and entrenched. Unpopular changes die out and disappear. Evolution in the language happens slowly, but it never stops. The book has its weaknesses (no footnotes, for example -- just "sources and further reading" listed by chapter at the end), but for me, it was 320 pages of fun. Never hesitant to stretch his theory, but always ready to back up his ideas, Matt Ridley makes a strong case for the general theory of evolution. And he notes how this idea is not new, tracing its genesis back to Epicurus and then Lucretius in his *De rerum natura* (the story of which is chronicled in *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern*) and then through Charles Darwin, Adam Smith, and others. I don't buy everything Matt Ridley argues. There are shades of the largely discredited "Social Darwinism" of Herbert Spencer and others in Matt Ridley's thinking. Some of the pegs are a little too round to fit comfortably in the square hole he tries to force them into. But generally, I think he is right. Politicians like to think they are in charge of society, and they can make it work. Instead, I think that comes from "we the people", and what emerges is not always what we want.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Just Plain Awesome! By bowen zhao This is perhaps my favorite book from Matt Ridley, and that is saying a lot since I've read all of his books and loved every single one of them. The main theme is emergentism or up-down processes not just in nature but also in society. Too many religious conservatives are creationists with regard to nature. They believe in top-down design and planning from an omniscient creators. But so are people on the left. Instead of top-down thinking about nature, liberals think society should be organized from the top, with a omniscient government that can handle every problem in society. However the top-down view of society is purely and illusion. Society is so complex and randomness such a huge factor that no governmental body is capable to organizing everything. Society is just like nature. Both are emergent, bottom-up phenomena. The writing is lucid and persuasive as usually. Even though this book's theme might sound dry and intellectual from the way I describe it, it has a lot of heart and humanity. Ridley decries the crimes against humanity by top-down authoritarian governments from the past and today. He gives you a clear view of how the inhumane actions of these governments destroy human creativity and free expression. I love this book. Even as an master's student in evolutionary psychology, there are things about evolution in this books that I haven't considered and brought to me many new perspectives to think from.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Rationalist look into the evolutionary of (almost) everything By A. Menon The evolution of everything is Matt Ridley's most recent published book coming after the *Rational Optimist*. It is a brief history from a rationalist point of view of a host of interesting topics ranging from hard sciences to philosophy. At times it can seem quite cold but it is always based on reason and thus the perspective is always worth reading, even if it is disagreed with. If one wants to get a sense of how many of mankind's culture evolved this book is a great resource. The evolution of everything gives a synthesis of a host of topics that often define humanity. The author begins with the Universe and starts by introducing the idea of a skyhook. In particular that when at a loss for explanation defer to the divine as a hook to hang the answer on. Matt Ridley endeavors to remove skyhooks across a host of topics throughout the book. He begins with Morality and discusses how Smith in *Theory of Moral Sentiments* was on to a very important idea when he discusses how morality evolves to create social stability. The book is a great composition of history, science and philosophy. The author discusses evolution as an idea and how intelligent design has been shown to hang itself on skyhooks that time has removed. The author discusses genes and the idea of the selfish gene and in particular that genes don't evolve to fit a function but rather surviving genes somehow improve chances of success in unbeknownst to them. The author gives great overviews of how culture can change over time and is contextual he tackles how the economy evolved. The author gets into topics like education and will likely cause alarm with his criticisms of modern education. In particular the author discusses how the modern education system was developed to modernize the Prussian state and doesn't encourage creativity. The author gets into the benefits of the Montessori system. The author also discusses historically

sensitive subjects like population and how Malthusian and Social Darwinist ideas dominated the last 200 years inclusive of even recent history. In particular the author is highly critical of population containment policy advocated even in the last two decades towards poor countries as paternalist and Malthusian. The author is critical of government and discusses how the state arose not out of benevolence but as a kind of social parasite preying on the productivity of its citizens. The author also documents how societies function much better than imagined in the absence of government and the Hobbesian outcome of life being brutish and short in the absence of government is an overstatement. There is an extremely strong libertarian narrative throughout the book. The author spends a lot of time discussing how the idea of government sponsored research as being the bedrock of modern development is nonsense and how ideas like the internet being developed by the government reinforce his point. In particular the author feels strongly that individuals don't make as large of a difference as is usually advocated and that important developments are usually being considered by contemporaneous citizens (calculus, the lightbulb, the steam engine all had multiple simultaneous people realizing their significance). The author takes aim at lots of people including those fearful of global warming. These arguments aren't taken as anti scientific but rather that becoming obsessed with an idea that isn't well understood can be similar to becoming religious about the cause. The author discusses things like bitcoin as well and the likely creator and ends with the internet which is of course a force that we are still coming to grips with. It is hard not to learn something from the evolution of everything. Personally there is much that I agree with and much that I don't but everything in the book has supporting evidence and is argued with reason. It is not all fact as reasoned opinion remains opinion but one should not dismiss any of this commentary because it disagrees with one's beliefs. Definitely an enjoyable read, most sections retain the reader's interest, others draw sympathy and some cause irritation but they do not bore.

The New York Times bestselling author of *The Rational Optimist* and *Genome* returns with a fascinating argument for evolution that definitively dispels a dangerous, widespread myth: that we can command and control our world. Human society evolves. Change in technology, language, morality, and society is incremental, inexorable, gradual, and spontaneous. 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. Much of the human world is the result of human action but not of human design: it emerges from the interactions of millions, not from the plans of a few. Drawing on fascinating evidence from science, economics, history, politics, and philosophy, Matt Ridley demolishes conventional assumptions that the great events and trends of our day are dictated by those on high, whether in government, business, academia, or organized religion. On the contrary, our most important achievements develop from the bottom up. 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 happens without teaching, and morality changes for no reason other than the prevailing fashion. Although we neglect, defy, and ignore them, bottom-up trends shape the world. The Industrial Revolution, cell phones, the rise of Asia, and the Internet were never planned; they happened. Languages emerged and evolved by a form of natural selection, as did common law. Torture, racism, slavery, and pedophilia—all once widely regarded as acceptable—are now seen as immoral despite the decline of religion in recent decades. In this wide-ranging and erudite book, Ridley brilliantly makes the case for evolution, rather than design, as the force that has shaped much of our culture, our technology, our minds, and that even now is shaping our future. As compelling as it is controversial, as authoritative as it is ambitious, Ridley's deeply thought-provoking book will change the way we think about the world and how it works.

"A highly intelligent and bracingly iconoclastic view of the world. It forces us to see life through new eyes." (New York Times Book Review) "A compelling argument...a fascinating work...The way the book frames the argument is delightfully novel...Ridley has amassed such a weight of fascinating evidence and anecdote that the pages fly by." (The Times (Saturday)) "Ridley shows how hard it has been for even the most definite evolutionists to fully abandon the notion of a guiding intelligence...Yet that is what the hard evidence...that Ridley adduces in every chapter compels us all to do." (Booklist (starred review)) "This penetrating book is Mr. Ridley's best and most important work to date...there is something profoundly democratic and egalitarian—even anti-elitist—in this bottom-up approach: Everyone can have a role in bringing about change." (Wall Street Journal) "An exceptional book: exceptionally easy to read, easy to understand, easy to appreciate...Of the many good general texts on the subject, *THE EVOLUTION OF EVERYTHING* emerges as the fittest to champion the case for the ubiquity of evolution." (Washington Times) "Ridley is a provocative, occasionally pugnacious writer and his book is intriguing and artfully argued." (London Sunday Times) "Highly readable, invariably interesting...Ridley's laudable aim is to disenthral us of our intuitive creationism and make us see evolution at work everywhere...Ridley succeeds in spades...He possesses the rare power to see the world in a different light - one made not by great men or women but by undirected, incremental change." (New Scientist) "An ingenious study...fascinating...thought-

provokinghellip;difficult to put down.rdqquo; (Kirkus, starred review)ldquo;Impressivehellip;Readers of evolutionary theory, sociology, history, anthropology and philosophy shall be highly entertained by this thought-provoking read.rdqquo; (Library Journal)ldquo;Building on the timeless insights of Lucretius, Ridley examines how civilization inexorably organizes itself. Wrong-headed social theories, he and Lucretius agree, just get in the way.rdqquo; (Stewart Brand, Author, Whole Earth Discipline)From the Back CoverThe New York Times bestselling author of *The Rational Optimist* and *Genome* returns with a fascinating argument for evolution that definitively dispels a dangerous, widespread myth: that we can command and control our world. Human society evolves. Change in technology, language, morality, and society is incremental, inexorable, gradual, and spontaneous. 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. Much of the human world is the result of human action but not of human design: it emerges from the interactions of millions, not from the plans of a few. Drawing on fascinating evidence from science, economics, history, politics, and philosophy, Matt Ridley demolishes conventional assumptions that the great events and trends of our day are dictated by those on high, whether in government, business, academia, or organized religion. On the contrary, our most important achievements develop from the bottom up. 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 happens without teaching, and morality changes for no reason other than the prevailing fashion. Although we neglect, defy, and ignore them, bottom-up trends shape the world. The Industrial Revolution, cell phones, the rise of Asia, and the Internet were never planned; they happened. Languages emerged and evolved by a form of natural selection, as did common law. Torture, racism, slavery, and pedophilia—all once widely regarded as acceptable—are now seen as immoral despite the decline of religion in recent decades. In this wide-ranging and erudite book, Ridley brilliantly makes the case for evolution, rather than design, as the force that has shaped much of our culture, our technology, our minds, and that even now is shaping our future. As compelling as it is controversial, as authoritative as it is ambitious, Ridley's deeply thought-provoking book will change the way we think about the world and how it works.

About the Author Matt Ridley is the award-winning, bestselling author of several books, including *The Rational Optimist: How Prosperity Evolves*; *Genome: The Autobiography of a Species in 23 Chapters*; and *The Red Queen: Sex and the Evolution of Human Nature*. His books have sold more than one million copies in thirty languages worldwide. He writes regularly for *The Times* (London) and *The Wall Street Journal*, and is a member of the House of Lords. He lives in England.