



Darwinism: The Refutation of a Myth.

review by Gert Korthof
28 Mar 1998 (updated 19 Aug 2003)

- "In this book I propose to show that the answer to (1) 'Is Darwin the founder of the theory of evolution ?' (2) 'Does his theory of natural selection give an acceptable explanation of the mechanism of evolution ?' is in both instances 'no'. And if I am right, we obviously end up in a rather awkward situation as far as present-day biology is concerned."
- "I do not know when I first began to suspect that there is something questionable in the state of current evolutionary thought, but I know who aroused my suspicions - Karl Ernst von Baer and Richard B. Goldschmidt, and it is *because* I am an embryologist that their teachings had this effect."
- "I came to understand that in the last century, hardly anybody, not even Darwin himself, believed that natural selection can accomplish all the events necessary for the occurrence of organic evolution."
- "I discovered that the history of evolutionary thought, as it is told today, contains a large number of mistakes and misrepresentations - to express it fairly mildly - all of them aimed at adulating Darwin and debunking his opponents."
- "I present an alternative theory of evolution, which stands up to the problems which have remained unsolved by Darwinism. At this stage, when, in my opinion, the Darwinian myth has been refuted, it may be appropriate to scrutinise it and try to understand why it arose in the first place."

Darwinism: The Refutation of a Myth.
 by **Søren Løvtrup**
 (Sören Løvtrup, Soren Lovtrup)
 1987
 Croom Helm
 ISBN 0-7099-4153-6
 469 pages

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1. The Four Theories of Evolution
2. The Pioneers
3. Jean-Baptiste de Lamarck
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Which myth is refuted?

The theory of evolution is a myth? Darwinism a myth? Neo-Darwinism a myth? A myth is a story that many people believe, but which is not true. Exactly what story is false? The whole evolution-story? Everything what has been written by Darwin and the Darwinists? Is it possible to reject part of evolution or Darwinism and accept the remainder? What are his motives? Creationists talk about "Shattering the Myths of Darwinism"; Is Løvtrup a creationist? Contrary to what the title *Darwinism: The Refutation of a Myth* suggests, Sören Løvtrup is neither a creationist nor an outsider. He is a professional biologist specialising in Systematics and Developmental Biology. He wrote textbooks in those fields. He is quoted by professional biologists. All this makes this book very unusual.

In the first place he makes clear distinctions. And that is what I like about this author. He distinguishes between:

1. the reality of evolution (often called 'the fact of evolution');
2. the history of evolution (or: 'history of life');
3. the mechanism of evolution (the causes; the explanation)

His opinion about (1) the reality of evolution, is surprising:

"Indeed, the nature and the wealth of the corroborating evidence are such that the theory on the reality of evolution turns out to be one of the best substantiated theories in biology, perhaps in the natural sciences."

At the same time he denies that Darwin's theory of natural selection gives an acceptable explanation of the mechanism of evolution. Since he accepts the fact of evolution and wants to argue about the mechanisms of evolution, he is not as radical as the title of his book suggests. An implication of accepting the reality of evolution is that it pushes him in a particular position regarding the truth of the theory of evolution: the reality of evolution is not dependent on the answers to (2) and (3). In other words: from the reality of evolution *follows* that all living beings *must* be genetically related ('common descent') and it imposes a particular order of appearances in the history of life. He notes these implications, but he does not see them as problematic. For example if we cannot possibly find a mechanism for the origin of an organism or structure: does it invalidate the 'fact of evolution' or does it mean we have to wait for future scientific progress?

For Lovtrup problems in the *mechanisms* of evolution do not falsify the existence of evolution. The author makes again a valuable distinction in the theory of mechanisms of evolution:

- a. the creation of novel organisms, which is an **epigenetic** phenomenon and not controlled by natural selection
- b. the survival of those organisms, which is an **ecological** phenomenon and is controlled by natural selection

Lovtrup has interesting and critical things to say about value of Darwin's ideas (p126), and about Darwin's method of reasoning, especially when dealing with falsifying evidence (p165-176), for example ad hoc explanations (p161).

Lovtrup's answer to the question 'Is Darwin the founder of the theory of evolution?' is 'NO', but it is a *historical* question, a question of priority. He means that 'evolution' was Lamarck's theory, not Darwin's theory (4). In my opinion the more important question is: 'Is the Lamarckian theory of evolution true?'. I doubt Lovtrup could give a positive answer. Lovtrup ignores the question: 'Does the theory of evolution (common descent) give an acceptable explanation of the known biological facts?' or 'Is evolution a fact?'. Lovtrup accepts its truth without question. Lovtrup is deeply interested in the historical question of priorities and how 'Darwin and his friends' reacted to criticism (not always fair). Lovtrup seems to aim at a total debunking of Darwin. But if it was not Darwin, who else convinced him that evolution is a fact? Was it really Lamarck who convinced him of evolution? Did Darwin contribute nothing to his belief in evolution? Or does he only mean that Darwin's contribution has been overrated? And what facts convinced him of the reality of evolution? There is an extreme imbalance in his uncritical acceptance of evolution and his fierce criticism of Darwin.

For me it is still a mystery why anybody who believes in evolution would write such an anti-Darwin book. It could have something to do with his background in embryology, the exclusion of embryology from the Evolutionary Synthesis, his belief in macromutations, the dogmatic promotion of micromutation by orthodox Darwinists, the feeling that injustice has been done to the Darwin-critics and his drive to debunk Darwin.

The Critics

Especially noteworthy is his attempt to do justice to Mivart, and his description of how Darwin and his friends reacted to Mivart's criticism of Darwin. It is part of his chapter 'The Critics' in which he discusses Jenkin, Mivart, and Butler. Mivart was excommunicated from the scientific Establishment and later from the Catholic Church.

In discussing the critics it appears that Lovtrup is defending macro-mutations, and he rejects micro-mutations as the sole mechanism of evolution (p261,274). Indeed on p369 we find:

"It thus appears that all the objections against the macromutation theory may easily be met, and this is in itself perhaps the most compelling evidence in its favour."

This book deserves further study. ■

About the author:

Sören Løvtrup is a professional biologist specialising in Systematics and Developmental Biology. He is the author of *Epigenetics: A Treatise on Theoretical Biology*(1974) and *The Phylogeny of Vertebrata*(1977). Professor Sören Løvtrup, of the Dept. Animal Physiology, University of Umeå, Sweden, headed the organisation Swedish Developmental Biologists, SDB, from 1979 to 1987. He served as the first chairman. (3). He is mentioned 7 times in David Hull's *Science as a Process*(1990); Hull included him in the group of cladists; and has 4 publications in the index, but *Darwinism: The Refutation of a Myth* is not one of them. Wallace Arthur(2000) lists Lovtrup(1974) in his References, but not the current reviewed book.

Notes:

1. This book was listed at Barnes & Noble USA, but disappeared. It is listed at Amazon as out-of-print and has 1 customer review. See: books.google.com .
2. I thank Susan Korthof-Huis for making this book available to me from the Royal Library, The Hague.
3. [SWEDBO](#), The Swedish Developmental Biology Organization.
4. Orthodox Darwinist Ernst Mayr(2001) *What Evolution is*, page 5 simply states "Lamarck had proposed in 1809 a full-fledged evolutionary theory" (50 year before Darwin). Mayr doesn't seem to be interested in questions such as: Did Darwin himself and the Darwinists admit Lamarck's priority? Did Mayr himself admit this priority clearly in his earlier works? On the other hand Lamarck had not invented Common Descent and natural selection, which was Darwin's contribution.