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Review: Why Evolution Works (and Creationism Fails)

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When you think of books on science, emotion isn't always the first word that comes to mind. Facts, sure. Rational arguments, absolutely. Only those arguments are too often couched in dispassionate terms. The best science writing (and science writers) understand that "just the facts" doesn't have to make a work as dull as Joe Friday plodding through a case. In [Why Evolution Works \(and Creationism Fails\)](#), writer and physicist Matt Young and evolutionary biologist Paul Strode deliver plenty of facts, plenty of rational arguments, and plenty of illuminating examples, but they also deliver a passionate argument for the importance of evolution both in nature and in the classroom.

Above all, what they may have delivered here is the best handbook you could look for when going into discussion on the subject. If you're just interested in learning some of the science behind evolution, you'll find that here -- with nice examples that include some of the odd evolutionary tracks left behind in the human body. If you're interested in the history of the dispute over evolution, you'll find that in the book as well, with a neat review of the important court cases along the front lines of the science vs. anti-science war. And if you have any doubt that the opposition to evolution is based out a disregard for science, you'll find the other side of the argument (whether in the older clothing of creationism or wearing a new "intelligent design" suit) thoroughly dissected and discredited.

If that sounds dry, it's only because my description of the book doesn't match up to the energy and insight that make the work extremely readable. Even when getting into the technical aspects of how the age of the Earth was established, showing how the arguments for ID are nothing more than misdirection, or dealing with the testimony delivered before courts and school boards, the book manages to keep the story moving without ever dumbing down its arguments.

This isn't really a book on evolution (though there are some chapters with neat looks at some of evolution's implications). If you're unfamiliar with the concepts, you'll get the basics, but really this is more a book about how evolution fits into our knowledge of the universe, how fundamental that knowledge is to science, and how important it is to prevent the substitution of non-science and nonsense for this critical concept. Young and Strode take the time to show, point by point, why this isn't a fight between two opposing scientific theories, but an argument between the rational and irrational.

If your only experience with evolution since getting out of high school is hearing the term pop up on the news when Kansas or Texas or some local school board decides to foist the latest version of creationism on children, I'd recommend that you read this book to understand both the history and importance of the fight. If you need to argue the case for evolution, whether it's before your own local school board or just a skeptical friend, then this book serves as a terrific reference.

On the other hand, if you're looking for a book to give to that skeptical friend, you might want to hold off shipping them a copy of *Why Evolution Works*, if only because it is so effective. For anyone taken in by creationism, this book is going to hit like a 2x4 between the eyes, and if that skeptical person really is a friend, you might want to cushion the blow by first reading it yourself and breaking it to them gently.