

## Evolution of Everything book review: Does Darwinian evolution apply to all of human culture?

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Matt Ridley has made a discovery. The natural selection that Darwin described in *The Origin of Species* is only a particular example of a universal process. As he tells us at the start of this book, Darwinism is “the special theory of evolution”. But there is a general theory of evolution, too, and it applies to society, money, technology, language, law, culture, music, violence, history, education, politics, God, morality. The general theory says that things do not stay the same; they change gradually but inexorably; they show “path dependence”; they show descent with modification; they show selective persistence.

In the course of the book’s 16 chapters, which deal with the evolution of everything from the internet to leadership, Ridley repeats this mantra many times: Darwin’s mechanism of selective survival resulting in cumulative complexity applies to human culture in all its aspects, too. Our habits and institutions, from language to cities, are constantly changing, and the mechanism of change turns out to be surprisingly [Darwinian](#): it is gradual, undirected, mutational, inexorable, combinatorial, selective and “in some sense vaguely progressive”.

What Ridley does is what proponents of social evolution have always done: he fastens on some of the events of the past few decades, suitably bolstered by selective bits of history, and turns these fleeting episodes into unstoppable trends.

**Read full, original post:** [The Evolution of Everything by Matt Ridley review – the rightwing libertarian gets it wrong](#)