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He was a prominent leader in the twentieth-century resurgence of the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas. Among his books are Methodical Realism, From Aristotle to Darwin and Back Again, The Unity of Philosophical Experience, The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy, and The History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages.

From Aristotle to Darwin and Back Again: A Journey in ...

Etienne Gilson is certainly a thinker and historian that knows philosophy well, in particular Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. Unfortunately this conditions heavily his book, which appears to be not so much a criticism of Darwin, but an exaltation of metaphysics.

From Aristotle to Darwin and Back Again: A Journey in ...

From Aristotle through to Darwin, the various theories naturalists pondered and posited are presented. None worked in isolation ☐ attributions do not always recognise this. Of Darwin it is written, ☐It was never enough for him simply to observe, he needed always to find the explanations underlying even the most commonplace phenomena.☐

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Aristotle's promotion to the pantheon, as an examination of the basis for Darwin's admiration of Linnaeus and Cuvier suggests, was most likely the result specifically of Darwin's late discovery that the man he already knew as 'one of the greatest... observers that ever lived!' (1879) was also the ancient equivalent both of the great modern systematist and of the great modern advocate of comparative functional explanation.

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From Aristotle to Darwin and Back Again: A Journey in ...

From Aristotle to Darwin Etienne Gilson, John Lyon Darwin's theory of evolution remains controversial, even though most scientists, philosophers, and even theologians accept it, in some form, as a well-attested explanation for the variety of organisms.

Darwin's theory of evolution remains controversial, even though most scientists, philosophers, and even theologians accept it, in some form, as an explanation for the variety of organisms. The controversy erupts when the theory is used to try to explain everything, including every aspect of human life, and to deny the role of a Creator or a purpose to life. The overreaching of many scientists into matters beyond the self-imposed limits of scientific method is perhaps explained in part by the loss of two important ideas in modern thinking—final causality or purpose, and formal causality. Scientists understandably bracket the idea out of their scientific thinking because they seek explanations on the level of material and efficient causes only. Yet many of them wrongly conclude from their selective study of the world that final and formal causes do not exist at all and that they have no place in the rational study of life. Likewise, many erroneously assume that philosophy cannot draw upon scientific findings, in light of final and formal causality, to better understand the world and man. The great philosopher and historian of philosophy, Etienne Gilson, sets out to show that final causality or purposiveness and formal causality are principles for those who think hard and carefully about the world, including the world of biology. Gilson insists that a completely rational understanding of organisms and biological systems requires the philosophical notion of teleology, the idea that certain kinds of things exist and have ends or purposes the fulfillment of which are linked to their natures—in other words, formal and final causes. His approach relies on philosophical reflection on the facts of science, not upon theology or an appeal to religious authorities such as the Church or the Bible.

This book traces the history of life-concepts, with a focus on the vegetable souls of Aristotle, investigating how they were interpreted and eventually replaced by evolutionary biology. Philosophers have long struggled with the relationship between physics, physiology, and psychology, asking questions of organization, purpose, and agency. For two millennia, the vegetable soul, nutrition, and reproduction were commonly used to understand basic life and connect it to (higher) animal and vegetable life. Cartesian dualism and mechanism destroyed this bridge and left biology without an organizing principle until Darwin. Modern biology parallels Aristotelian vegetable life-concepts, but remains incompatible with the animal, rational, subjective, and spiritual life-concepts that developed through the centuries. Recent discoveries call for a second look at Aristotle's ideas ☐ though not their medieval descendants. Life remains an active, chemical process whose cause, identity, and purpose is self-perpetuation.

From Aristotle to Darwin, from ancient teleology to contemporary genealogies, this book offers an overview of the birth and then persistence of Aristotle's framework into modernity, until its radical overthrow by the evolutionary revolution.

The theory of evolution by natural selection did not spring fully formed and unprecedented from the brain of Charles Darwin. The idea of evolution had been around, in various guises, since the time of Ancient Greece. And nor did theorizing about evolution stop with what Daniel Dennett called "Darwin's dangerous idea." In this riveting new book, bestselling science writers John and Mary Gribbin explore the history of the idea of evolution, showing how Darwin's theory built on what went before and how it was developed in the twentieth century, through an understanding of genetics and the biochemical basis of evolution, into the so-called "modern synthesis" and beyond. Darwin deserves his recognition as the primary proponent of the idea of natural selection, but as the authors show, his contribution was one link in a chain that extends back into antiquity and is still being forged today.

Foreword by Christoph Cardinal Schönborn Darwin's theory of evolution remains controversial, even though most scientists, philosophers, and even theologians accept it, in some form, as an explanation for the variety of organisms. The controversy erupts when the theory is used to try to explain everything, including every aspect of human life, and to deny the role of a Creator or a purpose to life. The overreaching of many scientists into matters beyond the self-imposed limits of scientific method is perhaps explained in part by the loss of two important ideas in modern thinking—final causality or purpose, and formal causality. Scientists understandably bracket the idea out of their scientific thinking because they seek explanations on the level of material and efficient causes only. Yet many of them wrongly conclude from their selective study of the world that final and formal causes do not exist at all and that they have no place in the rational study of life. Likewise, many erroneously assume that philosophy cannot draw upon scientific findings, in light of final and formal causality, to better understand the world and man. The great philosopher and historian of philosophy, Etienne Gilson, sets out to show that final causality or purposiveness and formal causality are principles for those who think hard and carefully about the world, including the world of biology. Gilson insists that a completely rational understanding of organisms and biological systems requires the philosophical notion of teleology, the idea that certain kinds of things exist and have ends or purposes the fulfillment of which are linked to their natures—in other words, formal and final causes. His approach relies on philosophical reflection on the facts of science, not upon theology or an appeal to religious authorities such as the Church or the Bible. "The object of the present essay is not to make of final causality a scientific notion, which it is not, but to show that it is a philosophical inevitability and, consequently, a constant of biophilosophy, or philosophy of life. It is not, then, a question of theology. If there is teleology in nature, the theologian has the right to rely on this fact in order to draw from it the consequences which, in his eyes, proceed from it concerning the existence of God. But the existence of teleology in the universe is the object of a properly philosophical reflection, which has no other goal than to confirm or invalidate the reality of it. The present work will be concerned with nothing else: reason interpreting sensible experience—does it or does it not conclude to the existence of teleology in nature?" Etienne Gilson

Leading paleontologist J. David Archibald explores the rich history of visual metaphors for biological order from ancient times to the present and their influence on humans' perception of their place in nature, offering uncommon insight into how we went from standing on the top rung of the biological ladder to embodying just one tiny twig on the tree of life. He begins with the ancient but still misguided use of ladders to show biological order, moving then to the use of trees to represent seasonal life cycles and genealogies by the Romans. The early Christian Church then appropriated trees to represent biblical genealogies. The late eighteenth century saw the tree reclaimed to visualize relationships in the natural world, sometimes with a creationist view, but in other instances suggesting evolution. Charles Darwin's On the Origin of Species (1859) exorcised the exclusively creationist view of the "tree of life," and his ideas sparked an explosion of trees, mostly by younger acolytes in Europe. Although Darwin's influence waned in the early twentieth century, by midcentury his ideas held sway once again in time for another and even greater explosion of tree building, generated by the development of new theories on how to assemble trees, the birth of powerful computing, and the emergence of molecular technology. Throughout Archibald's far-reaching study, and with the use of many figures, the evolution of "tree of life" iconography becomes entwined with our changing perception of the world and ourselves.

From Aristotle to Darwin, from ancient teleology to contemporary genealogies, this book offers an overview of the birth and then persistence of Aristotle's framework into modernity, until its radical overthrow by the evolutionary revolution.