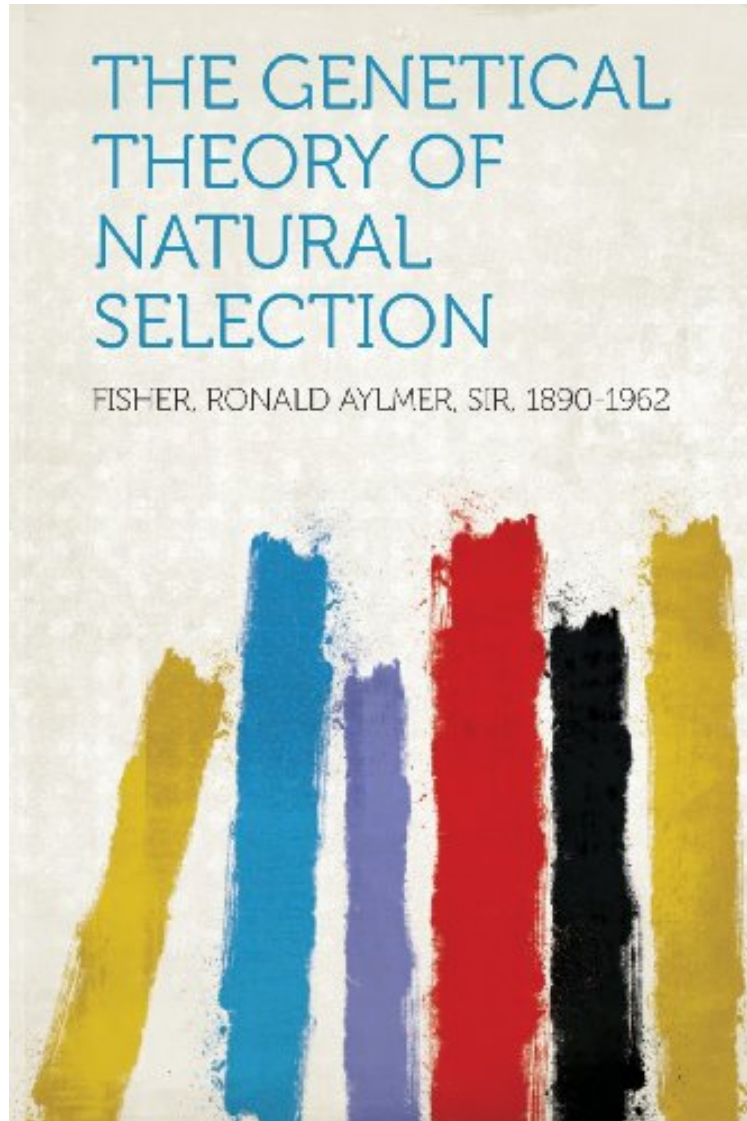


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# The Genetical Theory of Natural Selection

*Ronald Aylmer Fisher*

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**Ronald Aylmer Fisher : The Genetical Theory of Natural Selection** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Genetical Theory of Natural Selection:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Great readBy AnanyaIt was a seminal work, so loved reading it. Also my kindle version was perfect unlike some people.1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Stupendous and UnexpectedBy CogitusCopy details --- My copy is the HardPress Publishing ("January 28, 2013" Paperback, facsimile reproduction) of the original Oxford U. Press (1930) edition. It is mostly readily readable and clearly

reproduced, and offers much-needed margins for the serious reader. It contains significant underlining, but that is not bothersome; it pales in comparison to my own underlining and notes (unprecedented for me!), needed in following and digesting Fisher's terse development. On two consecutive pages, it shows "folded" results which obscure bits of the text, but these are small and can be easily recovered by recourse to an online source. Also, a couple of bar graphs are missing their bars (Chapter 4), and Plate 1 of the two "butterfly" plates has a blank "description" page, both of which can also be easily remedied via an online source. The Book --- I came to "The Genetical Theory of Natural Selection" by way of Richard Dawkins' "The Selfish Gene". Not a biologist myself, but fascinated by evolution ever since "dinosaurs" and my "first love" in science, high-school biology, I had been vaguely aware of "The Selfish Gene" since its initial wave of rave reviews many years ago, but never bothered to read it because, as it was advertised, its main theme(s) and results seemed pretty obvious. But, being "retired", something recently piqued my curiosity again, not sure what that was now, but I finally decided to take a look. It turned out to be a wonderful book, provocative, seminal, and entertaining, but left some basic issues too enticingly enigmatic to resist. So, following Dawkins' references to Fisher ... "The Genetical Theory of Natural Selection" is a stupendous book, full of marvels and insights that ought to be available and understandable to all. Including such seminal results and insights as the so-called "Modern Synthesis" (Darwin + Mendel, Darwin rendered mathematical!); Fisher's "Fundamental theorem of Natural Selection" (a stupendously seminal and revelatory discovery in and of itself); "Fisher's Principle" (the explanation of the surprisingly uniform 50:50 the sex ratio, "probably the most celebrated argument in Evolutionary Biology"); the many fruits of Mimicry (Theory Exp't); MANY beautifully-reasoned arguments (a feast for the mind for the sheer beauty of the logic itself); and much, much more; but Fisher doesn't stop there, he goes on, in the final 5 chapters, on Mankind, to pose the historical enigma of the universal decay and demise of human civilizations, and to develop, with painstaking support, what is surely the only credible explanation ever offered. "The Genetical Theory of Natural Selection" is one of the most mind-expanding and satisfying books I have ever "read". That said, I put quotes around 'read' because to get all, or at least most, of what this book has to offer, one cannot simply read it. One must work one's way through it. Fisher is often incredibly terse, difficult to follow, opaque, even enigmatic. One can be terse if one is clear, otherwise saying a thing only once, and in one way, is fraught with peril: Fisher often left me confounded. His development often proceeds by leaps and bounds, where step-by-step is needed. A little math can often be more confusing than none at all, for it sucks you in to try and understand more fully. I spent several months, on and off, on "The Genetical Theory of Natural Selection" and in the end "got" most of it, with the exception of a couple of asides from beyond far "right field" in Chapter 4. But this requires considerable math, not so much in terms of a high level, but enough facility to invent derivations of his assertions on one's own, without much in the way of a hint. [I felt better about this when I read, in a "side trip", that a contemporary researcher of Fisher's once said of his works (paraphrased): "Whenever I encounter the word "evidently", I blanch, knowing I am in for at least two hours of trying to figure out how he got that"!]

At times it is not so much the derivations that are mysterious, but the logic: How the reasoning goes, and from what starting assumption(s); indeed, there are several instances where cause and effect seem reversed. Partly, I think, this is because Fisher was the truly "synthetic" member of the founders of "the modern synthesis", the others being mostly analytic. In school we are pretty much used to following the logical "analysis" shown to us by our teachers, who start from general principles and derive their consequences. Synthesis is more unusual; it is "putting known things together" to infer the source principle(s) from which they (and much more) follow. Synthesis (unlike analysis) relies greatly on "intuition", and in large part it doesn't matter how you get to that flash of inspiration, only that you DO get there. Finally, in fairness, I must make one negative remark. I wish Fisher had stopped at the end of Chapter 11, and left the "political ideas" of Chapter 12 un-detailed, or implicit. Chapter 12 treats rudimentary eugenic possibilities to solve human civilizations' (his, in particular) "decay problem", and although there is nothing wrong with the idea of eugenics (other than its being fraught with moral and historical perils) and much that is right, and in fact we engage in eugenics or dysgenics whatever course we choose, Fisher's Chapter 12 is, for him, as a remarkable scientist, and as a thinker of the highest caliber, certainly *infra dig*. "The Genetical Theory of Natural Selection" is worth whatever time, effort, basis, and objectivity which you are able to bring to it; it will reward you in kind. You wouldn't be reading this review if you didn't have the most important ingredients: interest and a desire to think and understand. It will expand your thinking and your understanding.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.  
This was a present for one of my best friends and he was so excited.  
By Jillian Morelli  
This was a present for one of my best friends and he was so excited. He loves science and I don't remember what he said exactly but this book was very important in some of the topics he was/is studying.

Unlike some other reproductions of classic texts (1) We have not used OCR (Optical Character Recognition), as this leads to bad quality books with introduced typos. (2) In books where there are images such as portraits, maps, sketches etc We have endeavoured to keep the quality of these images, so they represent accurately the original artefact. Although occasionally there may be certain imperfections with these old texts, we feel they deserve to be made available for future generations to enjoy.

"This work is cited in Books for College Libraries, 3d ed. Fisher's original 1930 text is reproduced here in facsimile, including the original preface, table of contents, list of colored plates (here included as black and white) and text. Providing a synthesis of Darwinian selection and Mendelian genetics and marking a turning point in the development of evolutionary thought, this work is one of the most frequently cited references in modern evolutionary biology. Added to the facsimile is a brief foreword about Fisher and the work's reception. An appendix provides an annotated list of other papers on genetical theory by Fisher."--SciTech Book News

About the Author  
Sir Ronald A Fisher is one of the best-known statisticians of this century. After becoming disaffected with the UK academic environment, he moved to the University of Adelaide, to whom he entrusted the copyright of all his works. Professor Henry Bennett worked with him at the University of Adelaide and has access to all of Fisher's material, published and unpublished.  
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