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Chapter 6 Summary

Thanks to a naturalist named Charles Darwin (1809-1882), and his travels to Tahiti and South America in order to study plant and animal life, the theory of evolution was born. He published “On the Origin of Species by means of Natural Selection”, after 22 years of research. Some of Darwin’s key points were traits ideally suited for the environment would be retained, while those not adequate for the weather would be eliminated. He referred to this phenomenon as the “survival of the fittest.” Darwin saw that evolution could be swift.

He went on to have a tremendous influence on the discipline of psychology as it was during his tenure that the functionalists rose up and caused a shift in the field towards researching actual functions of the mind and its ability to adapt to its surroundings. This meant real world issues would be studied with an emphasis on practical application. It was an outright rejection of Tichener’s and Wundt’s way of thinking. Researchers were eager to know what exactly the mind does and how. Surprisingly, the evolution revolution did not begin with Darwin. A few other naturalists, including Erasmus Darwin, the grandfather of Charles, also believed that the earth and animals evolved in stages. Biblical accounts were openly challenged during this time, while biology and the studies of species took front and center. As fossils were unearthed which did not resemble any creature living, the world of science began to change. There was the mechanistic spirit which came to be more accepted in the mainstream. Values and cultural norms shifted and relationships of humans gained interest. Data and methodologies from various scientific fields, as well as measurements and descriptions of individual differences can all be traced back to the significance of Darwin’s work.

Next came Francis Dalton (1822-1911) and his emphasis on individual differences in terms of each person’s capabilities as a result of Darwin's influence. Dalton was especially keen on mental inheritance and the study of genius. He developed intelligence tests and was a proponent of eugenics. He also refined the use of statistical methods.

Animal psychology and the development of functionalism can clearly be credited to the zeitgeist of Darwin’s evolution revolution as it was believed that the functions of animals could provide insight to the functioning of humans. George John Romanes (1848-1894), ordered animals in regards to their level of functioning and published his work in his book, “Animal Intelligence.” However, C. Lloyd Morgan disagreed with Romanes and crafted the “law of parsimony” stating that animal behavior is not necessarily indicative of human behavior. The age of the structuralist was at an end.