

# What Does Natural Selection Explain?

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## **Abstract**

Recent philosophy of biology has increasingly questioned whether natural selection can explain the production of (adaptive) traits – as opposed to merely explaining their spread or prevalence. In recent papers and a new book with a coauthor Jerry Fodor has taken up some aspects of this discussion arguing that there (often) cannot be natural selection for a trait at all – and thus that Darwinism doesn't explain much. Although Fodor does indeed make a (minor) point about the peculiarity of counterfactuals in natural-selection explanations, much of his criticism is based on a misunderstanding about the notion of "selection for" that seems to be shared by many philosophers of biology. I shall try to illuminate the problems involved in viewing natural selection as "creative" of adaptations by comparing it to another controversy in philosophy of biology between the genetic explanation of traits and trait differences.