

# Evolutionary Theory in the 1920s: The Nature of the 'Synthesis'

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## Abstract

This paper analyzes the development of evolutionary theory in the period from 1918 to 1932. It argues that: (i) Fisher's work in 1918 constitutes a not fully satisfactory reduction of biometry to Mendelism; (ii) that there was a synthesis in the 1920s but that this synthesis was mainly one of classical genetics with population genetics, with Haldane's *Causes of Evolution* being its founding document; (iii) the most important achievement of the models of theoretical population genetics was to show that natural selection sufficed as a mechanism for evolution; (iv) Haldane formulated a prospective evolutionary theory in the 1920s whereas Fisher and Wright formulated retrospective theories of evolutionary history; and (v) in the context of the history of evolutionary biology, the differences between Fisher, Haldane, and Wright are as important as their similarities.

**Keywords:** evolutionary theory, Fisher, Haldane, modern synthesis, population genetics, Wright.

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