

according to the general principle observed in all natural sciences, that we must accept and retain for the explanation of phenomena any theory which, though it has only a feeble basis, is compatible with the actual facts—until it is replaced by a better one. If we do not adopt it, we renounce a scientific explanation of phenomena, and this is, in fact, the position which many biologists still maintain. They look upon the whole domain of animate nature as a perfect mystery, and upon the origin of animals and plants, the phenomena of their development and affinities, as quite inexplicable and miraculous; in fact, they will not allow that there *can* be a true understanding of them.

Those opponents of Darwin who do not exactly wish to renounce a scientific explanation are in the habit of saying, "Darwin's theory of the common origin of the different species is only *one* hypothesis; we oppose to it *another*, the hypothesis that the individual animal and vegetable species have not developed one from another by descent, but that they have come into existence independently of one another, by a still undiscovered law of nature." But as long as it is not shown how this coming into existence is to be conceived of, and what that "law of nature" is—as long as not even *probable* grounds of explanation can be brought forward to account for the independent coming into existence of animal and vegetable species, so long this counter-hypothesis is in fact no hypothesis, but an empty unmeaning phrase. Darwin's theory ought, moreover, not to be called an hypothesis. For a scientific hypothesis is a supposition, postulating the existence of unknown properties or motional phenomena of natural bodies, which properties have not as yet been observed by the experience