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In spite of the growing interest in evolutionary processes in the study of religions, the term "evolution" and the capability of an evolutionary account are still not properly understood by scholars of the humanities. Why?

An important, but often neglected issue must be mentioned at this point: If scholars apply the principles of Darwinian evolution, or, more precisely, of Darwin's theory of natural selection, on other, non-biological entities, the question of the evolving unit arises. This point, however, needs clarification: In biology, the species with its many interbreeding individuals is the only real existing natural entity and it is this entity which evolves. Whenever, therefore, the concept of Darwinian evolution is transferred from biology to a different category (e.g. religion or society), it has to be made clear what the natural evolving (and procreating) unit of the object under discussion is. Only if this question is answered satisfactorily can we draft a theory of religious evolution.

Any evolutionary approach in the study of religion has to be able to describe and explain (what, how, when, why) the changes of religions in the course of history, beginning with the first, possibly rudimentary religion to the complex theological and ethical religions of our modern times. In this context, our theory of the evolution of religions is a justified theory developed in order to explain what we observe: a clearly hierarchical system of religions, in which some religions are more closely related than others. If we take these groups and organise them chronologically, we recognise a tree of life for the system of religions. This tree of life can now be explained by the fact that the vast number of known historical and extant religions ultimately all stem from the one, or from a very few, principle form(s).