



Evolutionary Theory: A Hierarchical Perspective

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The natural world is infinitely complex and hierarchically structured, with smaller units forming the components of progressively larger systems: molecules make up cells, cells comprise tissues and organs that are, in turn, parts of individual organisms, which are united into populations and integrated into yet more encompassing ecosystems. In the face of such awe-inspiring complexity, there is a need for a comprehensive, non-reductionist evolutionary theory. Having emerged at the crossroads of paleobiology, genetics, and developmental biology, the hierarchical approach to evolution provides a unifying perspective on the natural world and offers an operational framework for scientists seeking to understand the way complex biological systems work and evolve.

Coedited by one of the founders of hierarchy theory and featuring a diverse and renowned group of contributors, this volume provides an integrated, comprehensive, cutting-edge introduction to the hierarchy theory of evolution. From sweeping historical reviews to philosophical pieces, theoretical essays, and strictly empirical chapters, it reveals hierarchy theory as a vibrant field of scientific enterprise that holds promise for unification across the life sciences and offers new venues of empirical and theoretical research. Stretching from molecules to the biosphere, hierarchy theory aims to provide an all-encompassing understanding of evolution and—with this first collection devoted entirely to the concept—will help make transparent the fundamental patterns that propel living systems.

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