



Developmental Plasticity and Evolution

Mary Jane West-Eberhard

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The first comprehensive synthesis on development and evolution: it applies to all aspects of development, at all levels of organization and in all organisms, taking advantage of modern findings on behavior, genetics, endocrinology, molecular biology, evolutionary theory and phylogenetics to show the connections between developmental mechanisms and evolutionary change. This book solves key problems that have impeded a definitive synthesis in the past. It uses new concepts and specific examples to show how to relate environmentally sensitive development to the genetic theory of adaptive evolution and to explain major patterns of change. In this book development includes not only embryology and the ontogeny of morphology, sometimes portrayed inadequately as governed by "regulatory genes," but also behavioral development and physiological adaptation, where plasticity is mediated by genetically complex mechanisms like hormones and learning. The book shows how the universal qualities of phenotypes--modular organization and plasticity--facilitate both integration and change. Here you will learn why it is wrong to describe organisms as genetically programmed; why environmental induction is likely to be more important in evolution than random mutation; and why it is crucial to consider both selection and developmental mechanism in explanations of adaptive evolution. This book satisfies the need for a truly general book on development, plasticity and evolution that applies to living organisms in all of their life stages and environments. Using an immense compendium of examples on many kinds of organisms, from viruses and bacteria to higher plants and animals, it shows how the phenotype is reorganized during evolution to produce novelties, and how alternative phenotypes occupy a pivotal role as a phase of evolution that fosters diversification and speeds change. The arguments of this book call for a new view of the major themes of evolutionary biology, as shown in chapters on gradualism, homology, environmental induction, speciation, radiation, macroevolution, punctuation, and the maintenance of sex. No other treatment of development and evolution since Darwin's offers such a comprehensive and critical discussion of the relevant issues. Developmental Plasticity and Evolution is designed for biologists interested in the development and evolution of behavior, life-history patterns, ecology, physiology, morphology and speciation. It will also appeal to evolutionary paleontologists, anthropologists, psychologists, and teachers of general biology.

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