

Book Reviews

evolutionary ecology and co-evolution. Who could deny that the historical context is important in the discussion of any evolutionary question, and the techniques espoused obviously have a niche in the armoury of techniques available to the evolutionary biologist. But I remain to be convinced that it is, in the words of Douglas Adams, the answer to the ultimate question of life, the universe, and everything.

MARK R. MACNAIR

From Gaia to Selfish Genes: Selected Writings in the Life Sciences. Edited by CONNIE BARLOW, 1991 (London: The MIT Press) [Pp. 273.] Price £15.75. ISBN 0 262 02323 7.

This book is not the usual 'Collected readings in...', but a paean in praise of curiosity-driven biology assembled by a science writer whose interest in biology was re-awakened (after having been extinguished by education!) by chancing upon Lovelock's Gaian synthesis. The broad, majestic sweep of modern-day biology *From Gaia to Selfish Genes* was thereby unlocked. In gathering together and creatively welding these essays into a conducted tour of current biological thought and controversy, the author seeks to make this universe even more accessible to a thinking lay-public. We are fortunate indeed that the profundities of modern biology have such passionate advocates as Stephen Jay Gould, E. O. Wilson, James Lovelock, Robert Axelrod and Richard Dawkins (to name a few) who give the lie to the notion of scientists as illiterates. Barlow weaves a rich tapestry of biological thought as it is, juxtaposing the holistic with the reductionist, the selfish with the co-operative and charts a clear path through the undergrowth of sociobiology with the help of Games Theory and the universal conundrum encompassed by The Prisoner's Dilemma. 'Know thyself'—the Pompeiians had the right idea.

Few academic biologists in Britain (by definition true altruists) will not have been prisoner in recent years to one dilemma: should they be doing mundane science for contract money (and laboratory overheads), or following their curiosity wherever it may chance to lead (and hang the consequences)? These essayists indubitably did the latter. 'What is this life, if full of care, we have no time to stand and stare?' Exactly. If we have any chance at all of reversing the decline in the popularity of science amongst the British young and countering the avaricious dash towards accountancy, it is through capturing their collective imaginations that it will happen. What better volume, and at a reasonable price, to ignite such a spark as this one. I am about to read it through all over again to re-savour every word.

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