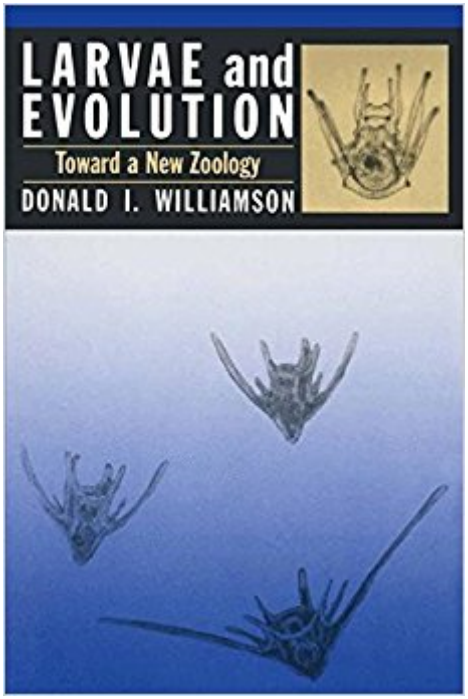
Larvae And Evolution: Toward A New Zoology (Protected Areas Programme)



Synopsis

Many biological facts are irreconcilable with the assumption that larvae and adults evolved from the same genetic stock. The author of this book draws attention to these, and presents his alternative hypothesis that larvae have been transferred from one taxon to another.In his previous book (Larvae and Evolution, 1992), the author used larval transfer to explain developmental anomalies in eight animal phyla. In the present book, he claims that the basic forms of all larvae and all embryos have been transferred from foreign taxa. This leads to a new, comprehensive theory on the origin of embryos and larvae, replacing the discredited 'recapitulation' theory of Haeckel (1866). Metamorphosis, previously unexplained, represents a change in taxon during development.

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Customer Reviews

Williamson points out that there are many examples in sea life in which the larval forms of species that are considered closely related differ very significantly; whereas for some species that are very remotely related, the larval forms are almost indistinguishable. In many of these cases, the metamorphosis from larval to juvenile or adult form is "catastrophic", with the surviving entity growing inside the larva and then casting it off or eating it, rather than absorbing it.Williamson conjectures that such species are descendants of misbegotten hybrids between highly unrelated critters, that somehow managed to mate and have fertile eggs that hatched into new critters that look like one parent for the early part of their lives, and turn into the other parent for the later part of

their lives. That's the theory.It's wildly improbable, but, as Williamson points out, other explanations need a lot of stretching to approach these phenomena as well. It's unfortunate that the proponent is retired now and not in position to pursue an active program of research. His manner of operation seems like much more that of a 19th-century zoologist than of today's high-tech biologists. He has done a few experiments that he interprets as being favorable to his theory, but some other biologists just think that the experiments were not done carefully enough.For this to work, Nature should have done some pretty high-powered bioengineering to mold two separate genetic strings together and then gotten really really lucky, so that they miraculously turned out to be compatible and lifestyle-joinable. It seems to be too much to be true; but then the phenomena he's describing are hard to visualize as emerging from a stepwise evolutionary process, either.In a follow-up book, "Origins of Larvae", Williamson updates this theory with some new evidence and with rejoinders to critics. In particular, he extends the idea to the caterpillar/butterfly being a descendent of a worm/butterfly hybrid; and he suggests an experiment to try to hybridize the worm with a cockroach. However, I haven't been able to obtain a look at this book, because I can't get it in any German library, and it's too expensive for me to buy on a lark. I would be interested if anybody gets a look at this newer version and has something to say about it.

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