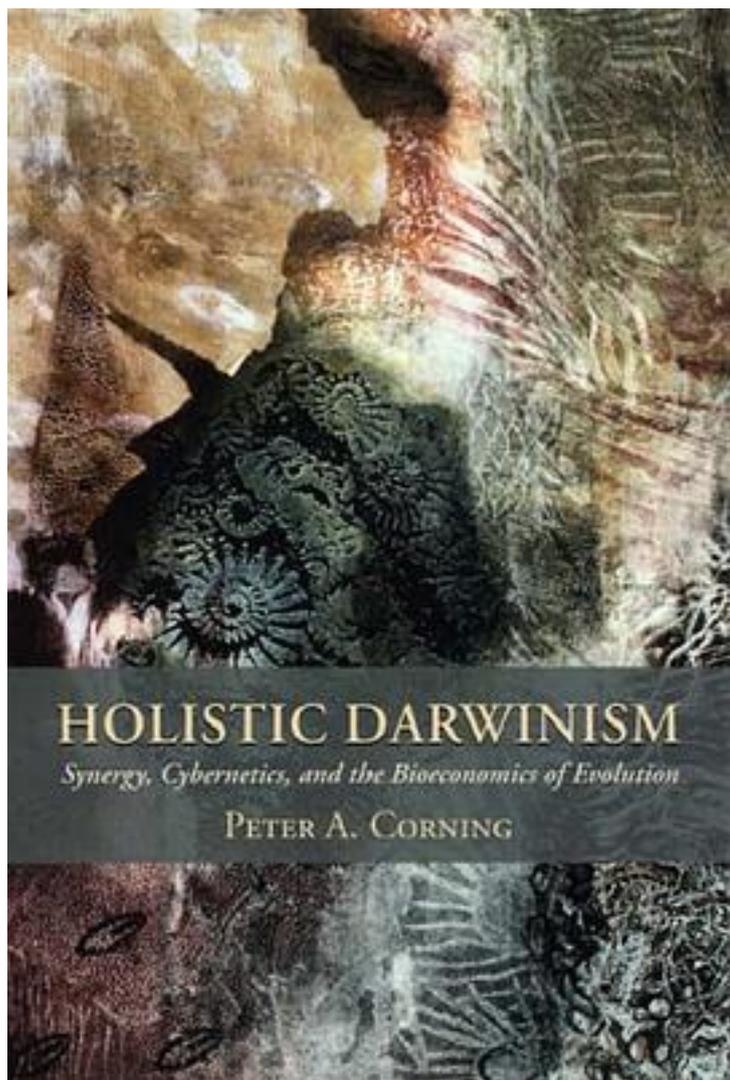


Holistic Darwinism



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Holistic Darwinism is a candidate name for a major paradigm shift that is currently underway in evolutionary biology and related disciplines. Important developments include (1) a growing appreciation for the fact that evolution is a multilevel process, from genes to ecosystems, and that interdependent coevolution is a ubiquitous phenomenon in nature; (2) a revitalization of group selection theory, which was banned (prematurely) from evolutionary biology over 30 years ago (groups may in fact be important evolutionary units); (3) a growing respect for the fact that the genome is not a "bean bag" (in biologist Ernst Mayr's caricature), much less a gladiatorial arena for competing selfish genes, but a complex, interdependent, cooperating system; (4) an increased recognition that symbiosis is an important phenomenon in nature and that symbiogenesis is a major source of innovation in evolution; (5) an array of new, more advanced game theory models, which support the growing evidence that cooperation is commonplace in nature and not a rare exception; (6) new research and theoretical work that stresses the role of nurture in evolution, including developmental processes, phenotypic plasticity, social information transfer (culture), and especially the role of behavioral innovations as pacemakers of evolutionary change (e.g., niche construction theory, which is concerned with the active role of organisms in shaping the evolutionary process, and gene-culture coevolution theory, which relates especially to the dynamics of human evolution); (7) and, not least, a broad effort to account for the evolution of biological complexity--from major transition theory to the "Synergism Hypothesis." Here I will briefly review these developments and will present a case for the proposition that this paradigm shift has profound implications for the social sciences, including specifically political theory, economic theory, and political science as a discipline. Interdependent superorganisms, it turns out, have played a major role in evolution--from eukaryotes to complex human societies.

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