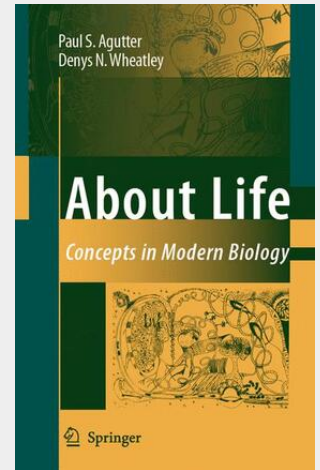


About Life

Concepts in Modern Biology

Thanks to the popular media, and to books by Dawkins, Fortey, Gould, Margulis and other writers, people are informed about many aspects of biology. Everyone seems to know a little about evolution, for example, and about DNA and the possibilities (good and bad) afforded by research in molecular genetics. Most people know some of the arguments for and against the likelihood of life on other planets. And so on. We are glad that these pieces of information have become so widely available. However, we do not assume any particular knowledge (other than the most basic) in this book. Our aim is to address general questions rather than specific issues. We want to enable our readers to join their disparate pieces of knowledge about biology together. The most basic of these general questions – and perhaps the most difficult – can be expressed in beguilingly simple words: “What is life”? What does modern biology tell us about the essential differences between living organisms and the inanimate world? An attempt to answer this question takes us on a journey through almost the whole of contemporary cell and molecular biology, which occupies the first half of the book. The journey is worth the effort. The provisional answer we attain provides a coherent, unifying context in which we can discuss evolution, the origin of life, extraterrestrial life, the meaning of “intelligence”, the evolution of the human brain and the nature of mind.

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