

## Book Review

# Review of Suzan Mazur's Book: The Altenberg 16: An Exposé of the Evolution Industry

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### ABSTRACT

Suzan Mazur describes the evolution industry in crisis, given an apparent emptiness in the neo-Darwinian account. Mazur interviewed many world-wide scholars, and not just those that attended the 2008 meeting in Altenberg, Austria. Stewart Newman, Antonio Lima-de-Faria and Lynn Margulis provide among of the most interesting and credible accounts of an evolution that is not stuck in a dogmatic and hopeless neo-Darwinism. This is not to say that most scientists don't still over prescribe Darwin's simplistic theory, and some of these folks are interviewed in Mazur's book. You can find this book at Amazon [http://www.amazon.com/Altenberg-16-Expos%C3%A9-Evolution-Industry/dp/1556439245/ref=cm\\_cr-mr-title](http://www.amazon.com/Altenberg-16-Expos%C3%A9-Evolution-Industry/dp/1556439245/ref=cm_cr-mr-title).

**Key Words:** evolution, Darwinism, expose, neo-Darwinism, Stewart Newman, Antonio Lima-de-Faria, Lynn Margulis, Altenberg 16.

Suzan Mazur's "The Altenberg 16" describes the evolution industry in crisis, given an apparent emptiness in the neo-Darwinian account. Mazur interviewed many world-wide scholars, and not just those that attended the 2008 meeting in Altenberg, Austria. Stewart Newman, Antonio Lima-de-Faria and Lynn Margulis provide among of the most interesting and credible accounts of an evolution that is not stuck in a dogmatic and hopeless neo-Darwinism. This is not to say that most scientists don't still over prescribe Darwin's simplistic theory, and some of these folks are interviewed in Mazur's book. You will find Richard Dawkins interviewed.

There is no guarantee that The Extended Synthesis (when it comes out) will reflect the best thinking. The worst science is still hung-up on Darwinism, religion, politics, and campaigns of persuasion that are empty of factual disclosures. The outspoken will have their say and even drown out the voices of reason, if our history is any guide. Perhaps my expectation will be disproved. We will see!

Mazur also described the 2009 meeting in Rome, titled "Biological Facts and Theories." She presented the abstracts for each of 8 talks. It was on page 225 that I found the most remarkable abstract authored by Robert Ulanowicz, for a talk called "Process and Ontological Priorities in Evolution." Ulanowicz's three-paragraph abstract follows:

"Charles Darwin, a fervid admirer of Isaac Newton, nonetheless describes evolution as a process, rather than as the actions of laws upon objects. Against this bold initiative, the Grand Synthesis of Fisher and Wright and the ensuing discoveries in molecular biology ushered in the Neo-Darwinian scenario wherein ontological emphasis has reverted to material objects and mechanisms. Other life sciences, however, continue to lend themselves more naturally to description in terms of processes." "The dynamics of the ecosystems, for example, can be seen to rest upon a set of fundamental postulates corresponding to the attributes of processes. Mutuality stands at the ontological core of this perspective, known as process ecology. By comparison, competition is seen to be accidental and

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derivative. Unlike in the Newtonian/Darwinian schema, selection in process ecology can occur internal to the system, rather than solely via the exogenous agency of natural selection."

"The monist dictum of survival of the fittest appears to relate to only one side of a broader Heraclitean/Hegelian agonism. Such discrepancies with orthodox evolutionary theory suggest that a far richer picture of evolution (and the ethos that informs) may be possible by reverting to Darwin's initial instinct to describe the living nature primarily as process. Adopting the process perspective mitigates many of the ostensible conflicts between science and religion."

What is remarkable in this abstract is the apparent understanding that there is something wrong with our naive notion of "law" as it pertains to "process." "Law" carries the connotation of "equation," and equation can be transformed into a pure abstraction and given life in Plato's world of ideal forms. This one-sided exaltation and abstraction is completely wrong-headed, and Ulanowicz was smart enough to pick up on this. I am not sure that Lima-de-Faria understands this fine point even when he (page 83) goes so far to write: "... life has no beginning; it's a process inherent to the structure of the universe."

The laws are better described as Kantian synthetics, which means that they are two-sided as I have explained in my Amazon review of Fodor and Piattelli-Palmarini's "What Darwin Got Wrong." Even the second law of thermodynamics is found two-sided. This better understanding of law is finding agreement with the emerging field of information-physics. The implication is that a one-sided causation must be relaxed, and this is where neo-Darwinism fails. The middle-term that holds the two-sided laws together remains undeclared.

Ulanowicz's better account of evolution can now find agreement with a Trinitarian vitalism of a kind described in my book. The better account can find agreement with Amit Goswami's theory of evolution:

#### [Creative Evolution: A Physicist's Resolution Between Darwinism and Intelligent Design](#)

There remains an issue of a presumed rejection of vitalism by those that still over prescribe biochemistry, and chemistry, or the "laws" of form. Lima-de-Faria (page 90) departs further from the truth (in my view) by hinting that life's self-assembly has no need of vitalism. In fact, life can't be fully explained by chemistry or by synthetical laws that are two-sided. The laws of physics are time symmetric, or two-sided as in the case of the second law. To say that laws explain away vitalism is to exclude the middle term that holds the two-sided laws together; it can't be done. To say that vitalism is safely excluded is to commit the fallacy of excluded middle. Life's vitality is self-evident by the fact that the whole is not explained by its parts, and hence the middle-term is found active and is found impacting on the question of causation. The middle-term is the driver of evolution, thereby agreeing with Ulanowicz. It's the process!

## References

Suzan Mazur, 2010, *The Altenberg 16: An Exposé of the Evolution Industry*. North Atlantic Books.