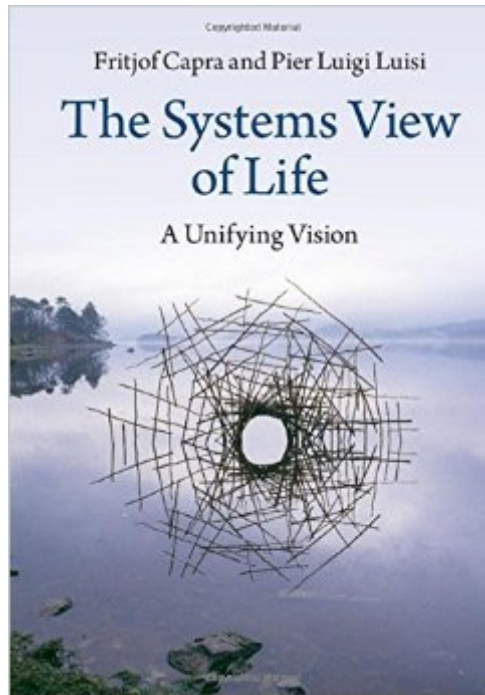


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The Systems View Of Life: A Unifying Vision



Synopsis

Over the past thirty years, a new systemic conception of life has emerged at the forefront of science. New emphasis has been given to complexity, networks, and patterns of organisation, leading to a novel kind of 'systemic' thinking. This volume integrates the ideas, models, and theories underlying the systems view of life into a single coherent framework. Taking a broad sweep through history and across scientific disciplines, the authors examine the appearance of key concepts such as autopoiesis, dissipative structures, social networks, and a systemic understanding of evolution. The implications of the systems view of life for health care, management, and our global ecological and economic crises are also discussed. Written primarily for undergraduates, it is also essential reading for graduate students and researchers interested in understanding the new systemic conception of life and its implications for a broad range of professions - from economics and politics to medicine, psychology and law.

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Customer Reviews

As of 2014, there has been much written in the complexity sciences on the all-purpose topics of complex systems and networks and their related scientific methods - I am thinking here, for example, of Byrne and Callaghan's excellent "Complexity Theory and the Social Sciences" or Mitchell's "Complexity: A Guided Tour." What really hasn't been written, however, is a cohesive or comprehensive review of the content (the actual empirical outcome) of this cutting-edge research - which, in almost every way imaginable, is creating an entirely new view of human life and the global ecosystem that sustains it. Enter Capra and Luisi's new textbook "The Systems View of Life." For

those new to the complexity science literature (or professors thinking about adopting this book for class), one couldn't ask for a better writing partnership. Capra, a physicist by training, is world-renown for his twin books on systems and complexity science ("The Web of Life" and "The Hidden Connections"), as well as his provocative assessment - from a philosophy of science perspective - of the limits of conventional, mechanistic science and the need for a new, holistic, ecologically responsible systems science ("The Tao of Physics," "The Turning Point" and "The Science of Leonardo"). In turn, Luisi is an internationally recognized professor of biochemistry and complexity science, having done primary research into such core issues as cellular autopoiesis and synthetic biology. He is also well known for his in-depth academic books, as well as his two popular works, "The Emergence of Life" and "Mind and Life.

Fritjof Capra has been a consistently interesting and deservedly popular thinker for many years now. I have always been impressed by the clarity and economy with which he has been able to communicate complex ideas, often in considerable depth, to a general audience. Equally, I have always been impressed by the breadth of his intellectual interests and his rare ability to combine these wide-ranging interests into coherent and far-reaching syntheses. Now, together with his co-author Pier Luigi Luisi, who has himself made significant contributions to the discussion of the emergence of life (see, e.g., Luisi's *The Emergence of Life: From Chemical Origins to Synthetic Biology*), Capra and Luisi have outdone themselves. Their 500 page book *The Systems View of Life: A Unifying Vision* (with many words per page, given its large-page format) is, purely and simply, a magnum opus, it really is. It surely represents the culminating statement of Capra and his co-author's work over several decades now on the development of a scientifically-informed unified vision of the world that incorporates and integrates the biological, ecological, cognitive, philosophical, social, political, and even the spiritual dimensions of life. The last time I read such an all-embracing, well-informed, and richly rewarding synthesis as this was when I read Charles Birch and John Cobb's *The Liberation of Life: From the Cell to the Community* (also from Cambridge University Press) - and that was published back in 1981!

It's been a long time since I've been so excited about reading a non-fiction book, let alone a text book. But this one has captivated my interest by pulling together so many ideas and threads of scientific knowledge and wisdom. The core message of this book is that it is time to replace the mechanistic, atomistic model of science, based on Cartesian and Newtonian thinking, which has been dominant for several centuries, not only in science, as a paradigm, but in culture, as a

metaphor used as a lens through which the world is viewed. This top-down mechanistic model does not work to explain ecology, ecosystems, and life, nor does it adequately explain sub-atomic particle physics. Perhaps an even bigger problem is that the mechanistic model, applied as a metaphor by people in all walks of life, has created a mindset in society that has led to non-sustainable ways of thinking about how we live, do business, even relate to each other and spiritually, one that embraces the pathological economic model of unlimited consumption. The answer is to replace both the scientific model and the metaphor with a bottom-up, systems view based on the core idea that properties are based on relationships and manifest in interconnected networks where small actions or changes can produce big effects (another systems characteristic that is not explained in the mechanistic model.) The bottom-up system view metaphor is a much healthier, profoundly more sustainable one that our culture must embrace if we are to transition to a future that includes bio-diversity and the continued existence of the human race. It shouldn't be that hard. That's the way humans evolved and existed for 99.99 percent of their five million years of existence. It's only a few hundred year old habit we have to let go of.

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