

Biocivilisations: A New Look at the Science of Life

Pedrag B. Slijepčević

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Pedrag B. Slijepčević's compelling science book *Biocivilizations* disputes assumptions about the preeminence of humanity, arguing that much older forms of life have perfected skills that still elude human beings.

Citing thinkers including Lynn Margulis, E.O. Wilson, and Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, Slijepčević examines the flaws in mechanistic and Darwinian assumptions that human beings are the culmination of the chain of life and that the human brain is the true measure of intelligence. He contends that sentience and learning preceded humans by billions of years, and that life is a civilizing force that transcends human existence.

Noting that humans have been around for 0.008% of evolutionary time, the book asserts that humans are outliers, not a "godly species." Bacteria, for instance, evolved sophisticated communication, engineering, and civilizing forces that ensured their survival for three billion years. And social insects, including ants, termites, and honeybees, have thrived for fifty million years by perfecting the complexities of city-building, food production, specialization, and ecological balance. Human beings, meanwhile, engage in activities that are often disastrous to their own civilizations and the planet.

Constructed with care, these arguments integrate hundreds of examples from the natural world—as of the artistry of pufferfish, who create elaborate sand paintings to attract mates, or the resourcefulness of slime molds, which generate complex tubule networks to reach food sources. The prose is solid, impassioned, and informed by a variety of sources, though its intricate arguments become repetitious at times. Nevertheless, by defying entrenched and arrogant assumptions about human superiority, the book shows that people have much to learn from creatures like ants and bacteria.

Human intelligence and technology may not be enough to ensure the species' survival, notes *Biocivilizations*, a science text that lauds ancient species with far more evolutionary experience than people.

KRISTEN RABE (May / June 2023)

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