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For more than two decades the concept of phenotypic plasticity has allowed researchers to go beyond the nature-nurture dichotomy to gain deeper insights into how organisms are shaped by the interaction of genetic and ecological factors. Phenotypic Plasticity: Beyond Nature and Nurture is the first work to synthesize the burgeoning area of plasticity studies, providing a conceptual overview as well as a technical treatment of its major components.

Phenotypic plasticity integrates the insights of ecological genetics, developmental biology, and evolutionary theory. Plasticity research asks foundational questions about how living organisms are capable of variation in their genetic makeup and in their responses to environmental factors. For instance, how do novel adaptive phenotypes originate? How do organisms detect and respond to stressful environments? What is the balance between genetic or natural constraints (such as gravity) and natural selection? The author begins by defining phenotypic plasticity and detailing its history, including important experiments and methods of statistical and graphical analysis. He then provides extended examples of the molecular basis of plasticity, the plasticity of development, the ecology of plastic responses, and the role of costs and constraints in the evolution of plasticity. A brief epilogue looks at how plasticity studies shed light on the nature/nurture debate in the popular media.