

MY IMPRESSIONS FROM READING Gerald L. Schroeder's

"The Hidden Face of God; How Science Reveals the Ultimate Truth"

(The Free Press, New York, 2001)

INTRODUCTION

Why this book? First because its title says that science reveals the ultimate truth, which was great news to me. Second because when I peeked into the book it mentioned Steven Pinker several times and it was not making either ambiguous or flattering statements. If you read the Huston Smith book on *Cleansing the Doors of Perception* you will know that he mentions Pinker once in at least a respectful way, wafting out some faint praise.

Schroeder, on the other hand, lets it all hang out: on his page 94 he essentially makes fun of Pinker for saying . . . "that we are purely 'the product of natural selection'" which Schroeder calls "assumed but untested wisdom. In a footnote he characterizes Pinker as believing that . . . "since our minds are limited, we may be unable to solve the enigma of how sentience arises from the brain." On page 103 he again pokes at Pinker for disregarding the complex facts in making simple assertions about evolution as cause and us and our minds as effect.

That is why I decided to insert this book review ahead of my one Steven Pinker book.

SCHROEDER'S MAIN THEME

Schroeder's book has much in common, in terms of facts used and approach taken, with Raymo's book though neither cites the other. He also has something in common with Huston Smith's *Cleansing the Doors of perception* book in the part where Smith debunks the ability of science to explain ultimate truth using his four questions. These four themes are also used by Schroeder in his Prologue opening to make almost the opposite point (page xi):

A single consciousness, an all-encompassing wisdom, pervades the universe. The discoveries of science, those that search the quantum nature of subatomic matter, those that explore the molecular complexity of biology, and those that explore the brain/mind interface, have moved us to the brink of a startling realization: all existence is an expression of this wisdom. In the laboratories we experience it as information first physically articulated as energy and then condensed into the form of matter. Every particle, every being, from atom to human, appears to have within it a level of information, of conscious wisdom. The puzzle I confront in this book is this: where does this arise? There is no hint of it in the laws of nature that govern the interactions among the basic particles that compose all matter. The information just appears as a given, with no causal agent evident, as if it were an intrinsic facet of nature.

Schroeder bugs me greatly with his physics-mystery explanations, on pages 3-5, and on page 8 he really makes my blood pressure rise with his explanation of the double-slit experiment as showing consciousness at work in elementary particles. Humbug! But then his expansion of these themes with Biblical insights, all the way to page 24, didn't offend me near as much as I expected it would. In

fact one paragraph within this whole body of potentially irritating pages sticks in my mind like a tenacious jingle I can't get rid of. It is on page 7 and just stopped me in my critical tracks:

Time provides an additional clue in the brain/mind puzzle. We drift in a river of time. There's no possibility of swimming upstream, of going back in time. Destroy every clock, every item that feels the passage of time. The flow of time continues unabated. Time is an intrinsic, ubiquitous quality of our universe, irrespective of whether or not we measure its passage. Might consciousness also be an intrinsic, all-present part of nature, of the universe? In that case every particle would have some aspect of consciousness within. The more complex the entity, the greater would be its awareness of the consciousness housed within.

Wow! That caught my attention! It is essentially what Huston Smith meant by his model of infusion of light from the One to all, it is what Brigham Young said about all matter having some portion of God's intelligence, with more intelligence impinging on the more complex, and the Godhead residing in every part of a human being, etc. This has little to do with quantitative outcomes of science experiments, but it is very good thinking.

Speaking of moving from the physical to the biological, that is exactly what Schroeder does in his book. Like Raymo he urges our looking at the complexity of what makes us tick, biologically, and asks us to discard simplistic notions of natural reactions and natural selection magically coming together to create the universe and then us. Hence his pique with Pinker's facile pronouncements of this nature.

Much of what is based on physics and lies in the first 44 pages is summarized in pages 153 through 159, where he dares offend me

by mentioning "nonlocality, of action at a distance," but again he redeems himself by saying descriptively, based on "science" what Huston Smith said based on Eastern religious insights since science was unable to shed light on the subject. The enlightenment of a person could not have been better stated by Smith than it is stated on page 159 by Schroeder:

All existence is joined through the expression of information. An idea, wisdom. Our mind is the emergent link that occasionally taps into that unity. You know when it happens as the surge of exhilarating emotion envelopes your entire body. At those moments, as one's local individuality dissolves into the unity that embraces all existence, we realize the full meaning of "the Lord is one."

Siddhartha would wholly agree. Enlightenment is knowing at the very deepest level, not just conceptually or intellectually, that the self is the Self, that *atman* is *brahman*. But though I intuitively agree with these summary statements of Schroeder's book, I believe that what his book really shows that such beliefs may safely be held because science has not contradicted them and can't contradict them.

I disagree that science is a foundation for such beliefs. But I agree wholeheartedly, intuitively, with Schroeder when he states and observes about the purpose of his book that (page xiv):

Exposing the awe of existence *within* the reality of daily life is what this book is about.

We are, each of us, a part of the universe seeking itself. We struggle between a world that seems totally material and the emotional, even spiritual, pull we all feel at times. To relegate, a priori, those feelings of love and joy and spirituality to some assumed function of our ancestors'

evolutionary drive for survival masks the greatest pleasure in life, the experiential realization of the metaphysical.

Amen, Brother Schroeder! That is exactly why I am writing these pages!

Schroeder also says something with which I agree in his discussion of the design of the universe and life in it. In explaining the utter inability to really comprehend, intellectually, the idea that God is One, and that reality is One (so, is God reality?) He makes the same observation I have made many times about myself and others (pp. 12-13):

We humans like to label things, to wrap our minds around a concept, to define and package it; in essence to limit it so that the concept finds harmony within our human definition of logic. But how does someone label or even think about that which is not part of our physical world? Confining the metaphysical to a physical description totally misses the "meta" aspect.

On page 14 he illustrates:

Everything, everything with no exception, is a manifestation of an eternal unity, a transcending ubiquitous consciousness, which many label as God. When you touch that unity, you perceive and also experience the wonder within which you and the rest of creation are embedded. As the rush of emotion sweeps through your body, your level of consciousness moves from the personal aspect of being self-aware and closes the gulf between the local physical and the universal metaphysical.

Again, Amen! But these are assertions and conclusions not contradicted by science, but by definition not within in the quantifying reach of any scientific experiment.

Schroeder's respectful mention of the Design idea for creation, in the face of the observed complexity of that nature, caused me to buy and read a book on that subject as well. But first I need to give you (me) some insight from a Steven Pinker book.