



The Seven Mysteries of Life: An Exploration of Science and Philosophy

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"All life in all worlds" -this was the object of the author's seventeen-year quest for knowledge and discovery, culminating in this book. In a manner unmistakably his own, Murchie delves into the interconnectedness of all life on the planet and of such fields as biology, geology, sociology, mathematics, and physics. He offers us what the poet May Sarton has called "a good book to take to a desert island as sole companion, so rich is it in knowledge and insight."

The Seven Mysteries of Life: An Exploration of Science and Philosophy Details

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From Reader Review The Seven Mysteries of Life: An Exploration of Science and Philosophy for online ebook

Todd Hansink says

I can't remember how I first heard of this book--probably from reading book reviews on Amazon. I must have been impressed with the reviews because I bought one but when I received my first copy I was disappointed to find that the copyright was dated 1978 and every third or fourth page was illustrated with detailed, hand-drawn sketches that reminded me of my high school Biology class where I made similar drawings of cells and plants. My first reaction was that the book was a little less than cutting-edge. Nevertheless it was a new book and I started to read it.

I had a hard time finding the rhythm of the book for many pages. It got better.

After several nights of reading the book in bed, I distinctly remember that one night I stopped reading, opened my eyes wider, looked at the cover of the book, and I said out loud, very slowly and deliberately, "This is a good book." The next night I said to myself, "Every single page of this book is full of interesting ideas. I could pick any page of this book at random and really enjoy reading each page." There was no filler in the book at all. Every page, even every sentence was a work of art, thought provoking, and delicious. I reconsidered my opinion of the hand-made illustrations and instead of seeing them as low-tech productions I saw them as the careful drawings of a masterful philosopher, scientist, poet, or artist--I wasn't sure which.

Guy Murchie began his book's preface with these words: "When I undertook this work in the spring of 1961, I was quite aware that I would almost certainly be thought presumptuous in attempting to write about all of life in one book. But I have to go ahead in the faith that any such seemingly impossible, if not harebrained, project on such a universal theme could hardly help being worthwhile--largely because of its rarity."

Rarity is an understatement. Murchie's book is more densely packed with great ideas than anything I had ever read before. Unlike many popular science books that spend 300 pages restating the same three ideas, or unlike other science books that are impenetrable because of a masochistic writing style that heaps abuse upon any would-be reader, Murchie's book is a sheer delight to read and constantly surprises the reader with insights about life, the universe, and what it all means--insights that are expressed so freshly that they seem new. Murchie took seventeen years to write this magnum opus and "averaged less than one finished sentence a day during all this time," he said in his preface. He called his writing, "painsstaking" which must be true because I can't imagine any poet laboring more over word choices than Murchie obviously did. His writing flows, is enchanting and reveals a universe that is more beautiful, rational, and caring than anything I had ever heard from science before--although later I would discover similar joy from guys like Carl Sagan and Richard Feynman.

Unlike a magician who astounds by what he does not reveal, Guy Murchie astounds by what he does reveal that we have not been seeing but which has always been in plain sight. Murchie is, then, in this sense, a revelator.

Toward the end of his book, on page 614, Murchie wrote some kind words about the prophet Baha'u'llah. I immediately started to worry that the author of this great book that I had been falling in love with would suddenly reveal himself to be an unbalanced follower of yet another cult leader. I researched the Baha'i Faith religion that Baha'u'llah founded and encountered what seemed to be a peace-loving-enough community. After reading a list of their core beliefs (and after reading Murchie's book), I honestly felt that I had never

read a one-page list of beliefs written by someone else that I could agree with more than this one. Nevertheless, I knew that what looks good on paper may not necessarily be so beautiful when practiced as an institutional religion. So I haven't attempted to learn much more about the Baha'is except to find out they conduct meetings in San Diego that I would like to attend once just to get an idea about how successful they have been at putting their wonderful ideas into the messy realm of organized religion. I wish them well.

I searched for "Guy Murchie" on the internet and learned that he was a tall man and just as gracious and charming, by others' accounts, as I had imagined him to be. Although I would love to read a little biography about him, it is not really necessary for his writing sufficiently reveals the man Murchie to be one of my all-time favorite human beings whose hand I would be honored to shake while expressing a little gratitude for creating a work so beautiful that I can only describe it as art, an odd choice of words for the book that I would most like to take to a desert island.

John Rogers says

The best book I have ever read, and continue to read often. If you have an interest in restoring, growing or discovering your wonder, this is the book.

Murchie is a modern day Leonardo, who has mastered so many pursuits it's astonishing. The first half of the book is an exhaustive description of the natural world and how everything works from trees to individual cells, the life of dunes, to 26 human senses (not just 5). These things are described in ways that are revelatory...such new and excellent ways of explaining things we take for granted, and things we have never contemplated.

Then the second half is dedicated to 7 mysterious principles like Transcendence, Interconnectedness, the Omnipresence of Life, Life's analogies on Land, Sea and Sky, Living geometry and order, the polarity principle, the germination of worlds, and divinity.

You can open the book anywhere and become fascinated in seconds. He is a scientist who writes with the heart of a poet, so even when he is describing an intricate biological function, I find myself smiling and completely engrossed.

Especially great for writers, both as inspiration and reference.

Jeff says

The science and theoretical stretches Murchie attempts are generally weak (and maybe even a bit mystical or spiritually pious), but the whole is an effective and tremendously substantial meditation on the utter weirdness of biology. I like his scalar format, but there's a tendency toward extreme brevity that is sometimes frustrating in the more interesting parts. understandable, given the scope and goals of his book. I groaned at the fabulism of an exploration of the 'seven mysteries' of life (which, apparently, include both 'divinity' and transcendence'), but it turns out that Murchie scripted a rara avis with this book, a thoughtful and completely readable text that thinks about the broader implications of scientific knowledge.

Michael Holm says

The first part is a survey of scientific knowledge which highlights the great variety and variation in life forms. The second part introduces the seven mysteries that he has discovered in the world. The author had been a member of the B'Hai faith for many years when he published this book and B'Hai also has seven mysteries. His seven mysteries are Abstraction -the regularity and pattern of matter and energy, Interrelatedness of all things, Omnipresence of life everywhere, Polarity - the principle of symmetry, Transcendence - progression from finitude to Infinitude, Germination of worlds, and Divinity. I accept the concepts of mysteries in life and his first one. But the others seem to be made up in order to have seven like B'Hai.

Stephanie Middleton says

It's crazy to me that I never quite finished this book. It's such an AMAZING read, and I plan to finish it one of these days. It's super-long and very scientific though, so I always read it in small increments. If I put it down for too long, though, I forget what I learned and have to start over again!

I do want to go on record to say that this is still one of my favorite books. It's a perfect, non-didactic marriage between science, philosophy, and spirituality, and every time I pick it up I'm left marveling at the wonders of the natural world. The author is brilliant, yet maintains this contagious, almost childlike joy. My father lent this to me as a teen, and since then, I've lent it to and bought it for countless friends. If you're in the mood for some deep thought, I suggest you pick it up too (and tell me what you think!)

Tommy Estlund says

Nope.

Ryan says

I've only read a few pages of this book, but I can tell I'm going to love it. I did some additional research on Murchie, and apparently he left Christianity to join the Baha'i faith which originated in modern Persia. I also read about that particular religion, and it's fascinating. The basic idea reminds me of the whole point (or what I interpreted to be the point) of John Lennon's song Imagine.

I'm not about to drop Christianity in favor of Baha'i, but what I have read of this book makes a whole lot of sense to me.

Dean Mermell says

One of my favorite books ever, and though quite a tome, I'm due for a third reading. This book makes the connection between the natural world, physics, and "the divine". Murchie is a scientist who cannot quite accept that there is nobody behind the curtain, and yet this book never feels the least bit preachy or pedantic. It explores the unexplainable phenomena of life and says, "this is fantastic...how can such things be?" A must for anybody who has entertained the idea that they may be a pantheist. It celebrates wonder. It leaves you feeling like you are the tiniest part of a very grand event. It is, indisputably, fucking great.

Bernard says

I saw this book while browsing in a book store; I read a few pages and was very interested. But then I noticed it had been published in 1978. that turned me off, since it is an exploration of science and philosophy. It is surely outdated. Back at home I googled it and found a review of the book on Goodreads by someone who had the same concern that I had but read it anyway, he gave it 5 stars. So I decided to give it a try. By the way, that is the day I joined Goodreads.

I'm reading this one really slow. I would say I'm nibbling at it every other day(70 pages in 2 weeks), and when I do read it, I'm always stopping to go on Wikipedia to learn more about this plant and that other tree I have never heard of. I very much enjoy it but I will be at it for months at this pace.

Chris says

If I were to pick one book to bring with me before being marooned on a desert island, *The Seven Mysteries of Life* would be it. It's thick, full of interesting information, and the language is gorgeous. Murchie's transcendental prose describes the miracles of two of the greatest fascinations in life: science and the soul. He wasn't a scientist, but he believed that science could prove intangible things like the existence of the soul, the spirit, and astral planes. The first part of the book was all about hooking his readers in with interesting facts about the more unique attributes of different species. He leaves out no kingdom, phylum, or even non-organic material; everything from metamorphic rocks to dangling monkeys are covered here. The facts might seem trivial at first, but then comes the middle part of the book, which is as mind-expanding as a DMT trip. Here Murchie writes about the psychology of different species and their extrasensory perceptions. The third part- the one about the seven mysteries- is a very poetic bridging of science and the spirit. In this part, he uses biological abnormalities to explain transcendence. Some of the chapters here changed my perception of life and "what it all means". I've probably learned more things from this book- factual and philosophical- than from any other. *The Seven Mysteries Of Life* is a true gift to humanity, and it's a shame that it is not a genre standard when it comes to philosophy, the new age movement, or even science.

Scott says

This is one of the most influential books I've ever read. I own multiple copies and I've read it many times. Murchie spent 18 years writing it. He illustrated it by hand. Every page has its own title. I've never read a book so lovingly created. He makes hard science read like poetry.

Martin says

One of the best books I have ever read. Definitely gives you a new perspective on all tangible aspects of life. Plus the story itself how long this book took for the author. (18 years in total. That would make on average a sentence a day, making it really though out and compressed. And he even illustrated it himself.) I guess you could call Guy Murchie a true renaissance man delivering knowledge from all endless categories of science to the fields of spirituality. I would recommend this book to everyone to read. Although it's published in 1978 - so I could only assume that perhaps some of those ideas and bits have got more resolution or new insight to them by now. But I am certain that the main mysteries still remain the same for all humanity.

Jjohnson The Delicatemonster says

A nearly bottomless book of inspiration and delight--one of those take to a deserted islands books...part biology, part math, part mystery. Transformational and poetic.

Now here's an anecdote to explain how good this book was. Every other weekend for about four months I have to go to gym meets which are by turns excruciatingly boring events (hour upon hours of the routines, by the approximate same level of talent) with the occasional flashes of mind numbing anxiety and fear (at least for a parent). Murchie's book saw me through an entire season and then some.

Read his book, it'll either save your life, or get you through the lassitudes of gym season :-)

Justin says

Which came first: the hen or the egg? If you consider this question as classic and unanswerable, then your knowledge of science needs brushing up! Of course, the egg is easily proclaimed the winner by half a billion years as the hen has only been here for fifty million years.

This is just one of the lighter gems found in one of the most wonderful books ever written: *The Seven Mysteries of Life* by Guy Murchie. Here, a look at the first mystery which he calls The Abstract Nature of the Universe. Murchie's writing is so insightful and provocative that any summary or analysis runs the risk of extending beyond the length of an accessible review, so I will procure brevity.

"... this is the world where objects, without much plausible reason, shrink with distance, where thrushes pull up worms to turn them into songs, where an acorn becomes a giant oak in a century because it was forgotten by a squirrel. In other words, there is ... something fundamentally and profoundly abstract" about this world which in turn is so importantly mysterious that it almost unavoidably falls into place as the first of the Seven Mysteries of Life.

"Consciousness implies an appreciable awareness (and control) of matter, an interaction involving both the developing body and the emerging mind that is at once abstract and close to the quick of life. Indeed the fact that you can move your legs and walk, or your tongue and talk, makes you alive. And so does the fact that you can control the engine and wings and tail of your airplane when you fly. You may object that the airplane is not really alive because it is not a natural organism but only man-made and artificial. But I reply

that so is a bird's nest artificial for it is bird-made and not strictly a part of the bird's body. And so too is coral artificial in the sense that it is made (or excreted) by the coral polyps. And so is the oyster's shell built of calcareous substances out of the sea. And so also are the shells of bird's eggs and a bird's feathers made of things the bird eats. And so are even your teeth and bones and your fingernails and hair, in fact your whole body. There is no definite line, you see, where artificiality begins. And there is no absolute boundary between life and the world. ... Just as your house is your shell and your coat your pelt, in effect, so does your consciousness form your aura of personal life..."

Perhaps the least abstract thing we can imagine is our body for it allows us contact with other material substances. However, "the reason a living body can be made of such everyday stuff" as water, fat, carbon, phosphorus, magnesium, etc... "of course is that it is complex and flowing and the stuff is not really the body but only what passes through it, borrowed in the same sense that an ocean wave borrows the water it sweeps over." In this sense, if we could ignore time then a wave could be considered material, but as we cannot ignore time it can only be considered abstract as "science knows a wave to be made not of matter at all but purely of energy, which is an abstraction."

"...reflecting on it at length and in the full context of time, the body progressively becomes as abstract as a melody - a melody one may with reason call the melody of life. ...although I had intuitively assumed life itself abstract, the physical body had always seemed simply material and I did not see how it could be otherwise. Then I tried to define the physical boundaries of the body and began to realize they are virtually indefinable, for the air around any air-breathing creature from a weed to a whale is obviously a vital part of it even while it is also part of other creatures. The atmosphere in fact binds together all life on Earth, including life in the deep sea, which 'breathes' oxygen (and some air) constantly. And the water of the sea is another of life's common denominators noticeable in the salty flavor of blood, sweat and tears, as are the solid Earth and its molecules present in our protoplasm compounded of carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen and a dozen lesser elements."

"... practically all of our material selves is replaced within a year" and if we consider even the most stubborn atom of iron in hemoglobin and even the bones which are continually dissolving and reforming, after five years one can presumably consider one's physical body completely new down to the very last atom.

"Assuming this is approximately so, then of what does the body really consist? For a while I thought the body's essence might somehow lurk in the nucleus of each cell where the genes physically direct growth and development. ... Essentially no single atom or molecule or combination of them can be indispensable to a body for they are all dispensed by it. It is only the pattern with its message that proves really vital to life. On the ocean one could make the analogy that it is not the saltwater but the abstract energy that shapes and powers the wave. Likewise it is not the atoms in the DNA but their geometric relation that makes the gene. And it is not the paper and ink but the words and meanings that compose the book."

"The point is that it is the pattern of design itself that is the indispensable thing, and not just its representation on paper or in bricks and mortar. Of course the design is not really a thing in the material sense for it is abstract. Indeed it is a kind of intangible essence, something like Lao-tzu's best knot which, as he explained, was tied without rope. ... Thus our very bodies that we always thought were material ... turn out to be essentially only waves of energy, graphs of probability, nodes of melody being mysteriously played in our time."

As logical as this sounds, it is still challenging to grasp and its implications seem way beyond my current understanding. Our bodies are supposed to be material and the mysterious union formed with the soul is the necessary arena in which the soul can be tried, tested and matured. But, if the body is essentially abstract, then exactly what is the "material" context in which the soul progresses? Must this context be, as we seem to

have conceived so far, such a concrete thing or is the illusion of tangibility enough to do the trick? Is the illusion of solidity what differentiates this earthly plane from such purely spiritual realms characterized by immortality and similar limitlessness?

This is just a look at a bit of the first mystery, the others are just as fantastic. This is an absolute must read for basically everybody.

Justin says

Comprehensive, well written and longer than my attention span
