

Science and Myth: With a Response to Stephen Hawking's *The Grand Design*

By Wolfgang Smith

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Reviewed by Peter Samsel



That modern science has played a decisive role in the “disenchantment of the world”—to employ Max Weber’s famous phrase—is, by now, widely understood. For the contemporary individual facing this disenchanted, alienating vision of the cosmos, there would seem to be only two alternatives: to either accept—whether enthusiastically or resignedly—the scientific, secularized worldview which appears so overwhelming in its explanatory power yet inexorably opens to the abyss of existential nihilism and despair, or, alternatively, to reject this disenchanted understanding and its nihilistic implications and cling, in the face of the intellectual hegemony of the scientific, secularized worldview, to an earlier, yet enchanted, increasingly marginalized understanding of the nature of things. There is a third alternative—narrow and demanding, recognized by few—that avoids the nihilistic trap at the heart of modernity not by an act of willful rejection, nor by the philosophic undermining of scientific foundations—as valuable as this can be—but by the acceptance of and penetration through scientific ‘facts’ in such a way as to discern the lineaments of a sacred order—a

cosmology in the proper sense of the term—to which science stands in unrecognized witness.

Wolfgang Smith, at once a mathematician, physicist and traditional philosopher, is perhaps uniquely situated to carry out such a discernment, as evidenced in his earlier works, *Cosmos & Transcendence*, *The Quantum Enigma* and *The Wisdom of Ancient Cosmology*. His latest work, *Science & Myth*, is one very much in keeping with these earlier endeavors. Comprised of a number of independent articles written over the course of several years, they nevertheless embrace a common thread of concern: that of the recovery of the understanding of the cosmos as a theophany.

Before passing to more detailed considerations, it will be helpful to first briefly survey each of the book's chapters. In "Science and Myth," Smith clarifies the manner in which science, and particularly the interpenetrating ideology of scientism, is a particular kind of 'myth', one which, in its alienation from the sacred and the domain of meaning, is profoundly detrimental to the spiritual life. In "Modern Science and Guénonian Critique," he next corrects and expands upon René Guénon's critique of modern science, identifying it as the mode of knowledge in conformity with the possibilities inherent in the present age, "the reign of quantity": that of the quantitative residue of existence emptied of all essence. In "Science and Epistemic Closure," he explores the notion of "epistemic closure" introduced by Jean Borella, characterized as the elimination from scientific understanding of the being or essence of phenomena. In "The Enigma of Visual Perception," he surveys the work of James Gibson, an experimental psychologist who has determined empirically that perception is neither a representation nor a construction of the visual environment. In "Neurons and Mind," he explores the "binding problem"—the apparent unity of the mind as experienced, and a major riddle in contemporary neuroscience—in the context of the levels of soul common to both Aristotelian and Vedantic anthropology. In "Cakra and Planet," he presents the work of O.M. Hinze, detailing the remarkable isomorphism between the *cakra* descriptions of Kashmiri Tantrism and observable geocentric planetary geometries. In "Metaphysics as 'Seeing'," he explores Goethe's and Eckhart's teaching on the nature of 'seeing', and how such seeing is ultimately revelatory of the Divine intellect within man. Finally, in "Stephen Hawking's Physics-as-Philosophy: A

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