

BOOK REVIEW

Douglas R. Hofstadter: *Gödel, Escher, Bach: an Eternal Golden Braid*, 20th-anniversary Edition: with a new preface by the author, New York: Basic Books, 1999, P23 + xxi + 777 p.

One should not need to introduce the contents of this book to the readers, for it became a classic in the twenty years what have passed since its first publication. Hundred-thousands read it in different language editions throughout the world. After the great success of this epoch-making work one should not need to explain to the readers of *Symmetry: Culture and Science*, what did these three geniuses Gödel, Escher and Bach bring together, as well as what is the relation of the message of the theme to symmetry.

Nevertheless, there remained certain misunderstandings around the topics and aims of the work, what inspired the author to emphasise in the new *Preface* what he wrote to the Twentieth-anniversary Edition.

Interdisciplinary approach caused always some confusion, both in readers and booksellers, librarians. Where to classify this book: to math, general science, philosophy or cognitive science? Really, one of the goals of this work was just to evaporate the solid barriers among disciplines, fields of knowledge. Such barriers exist only in artificially sliced curricula, not in the round pie of human knowledge. We can state: Douglas Hofstadter successfully contributed to making these barriers broken down. In part, GEB delved "fugues and canons, logic and truth, geometry, recursion, syntactic structures, the nature of meaning, Zen Buddhism, paradoxes, brain and mind, reductionism and holism, and colonies, concepts and mental representations, translation, computers and their languages, DNA, proteins, the genetic code, artificial intelligence, creativity, consciousness and free will - sometimes even art and music, of all things! - that many people find impossible to locate the core focus."

The author makes a new attempt to tell the goals and the essence of GEB in his new *Preface*. Frankly, he does it as excellently, as excellent the original book itself was. This relatively short, 23 pages *Prolegomena* is as delightful reading, as the whole book itself was. An individual intellectual work in itself. However - this is the reviewer's opinion - there is needless to explain the book for the sophisticated readers, and hopeless for those who did not understand its goals. Fortunately, most understood, this was the key of the success. Yet, we were poorer, if this *Prolegomena* would have not been born.

For example, he presents us new contributions to Kurt Gödel's relation to Bertrand Russell before he concludes: "For GEB, the most crucial aspect of Gödel's work is its demonstration that a statement's meaning can have deep consequences, even in a supposed meaningless universe." Then he explains again the "level-crossing feedback loop", and the role of the person, the "I". In this respect he expresses his surprise, that the elapsed time did not bring out that debate what he had intended to provoke. Really, why did not?

One can learn a lot from the history how the idea and the work were born. This makes us better understand the attitudes of the author to his intellectual product. Highlighted by these personal backgrounds I can propose to re-read the book, at least partially, even for those, who have read it twenty (or less) years ago. Note, not only the author looks at his spiritual son with more mature eyes, our mind has evolved too during the decades. Anecdotes like, how the French translation helped to reconsider a prejudice, colour the story.

Finally, the reader may be curious why did not Hofstadter bring the GEB up to date after twenty years? I will not share his response with you, let's leave some experience for the reading his new *Preface* and for the mind-inspiring, revealing adventure of re-reading the book.

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