

**FUTUREtakes**

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### **Futurist Book Group Discussion**

### ***The Future of the Brain: The Promise and Peril of Tomorrow's Neuroscience***

**By Steven Rose  
Oxford University Press  
ISBN 0195154207**

*Synopsis of the July 2005 Futurist Book Group meeting; summarized by Ken Harris*

The chapter book group discussed *The Future of the Brain* by Steven Rose at its July 6 meeting. Rose is a Professor of Biology and Director of the Brain and Behavior Research Group at the Open University in the UK and a Visiting Professor in the Department of Anatomy and Developmental Biology at University College London. **FUTUREtakes** readers will not find *The Future of the Brain* an easily digestible read. All the readers agreed it should have been much better edited. The title and teaser on the dust cover lead the reader to think the book is mostly about the future of neuroscience, but just the opposite is true. In fact, the first six chapters set the stage for how the human brain evolved to the point it is at today. The remainder is a rather pessimistic view of where developments in neuroscience are taking us.

People who believe in the existence of a human soul will be very sympathetic to Rose's point of view that there is something about being human that cannot ultimately be explained by physics and chemistry, but the book does little to increase understanding of what that essence of humanness is. Humanness in Rose's view is something that is learned rather than built into each person biologically. He distinguishes "mind" from "brain", but he does not specifically define what the mind is. On the other hand, the book goes into great detail in explaining how human beings evolved over time with particular attention to the human brain. One of the great strengths of the human brain is its "plasticity" – its ability to assemble and disassemble neurons and synapses to perform specific tasks.

The most relevant section of the book for futurists is the last chapter. In it, Rose raises deep concern about the possibilities for increased state control of the individual resulting from advances in neuroscience – in particular the prospect that brain imaging might advance to a point at which it could predict an individual's pre-disposition to anti-social behavior and thus to potentially unwarranted restrictions on individual freedom.

This reviewer recommends *The Future of the Brain* only for the serious reader willing to put up with the poor editing to review of the current state of evolutionary science and/or to benefit from a perspective contrary to that of the biomedical techno-optimists, who can't wait for us to evolve into super humans.