

What Does Erwin Schrödinger's Book: *"What Is Life?" Teach Us About Today's World*¹

Schrödinger's *What Is Life?* can serve as more than a scientific text. Although it was written in 1944 to explore the physical basis of living organisms, its central themes—order, entropy, information, interconnectedness, and the conditions that sustain life—provide a thoughtful lens for interpreting many of today's global challenges. Applying those themes to society is a philosophical interpretation rather than something Schrödinger explicitly argued, but it can be illuminating.

1. Life Creates Order in the Midst of Disorder

Schrödinger observed that living organisms survive by continually creating and maintaining order while existing in a universe that naturally tends toward disorder (entropy).

Today we might ask:

- Why do democratic institutions become fragile?
- Why do families and communities fracture?
- Why does misinformation spread so easily?
- Why does ecological degradation accelerate?

His work reminds us that order does not sustain itself. Healthy systems require continuous investment.

Applied socially, this suggests that:

- Trust must be cultivated.
- Communities need ongoing care.
- Relationships require maintenance.
- Institutions need renewal.
- Ecosystems require stewardship.

Without that work, disorder tends to grow.

2. Information Shapes Reality

One of Schrödinger's most influential ideas was that life depends on stored information.

Today, humanity is immersed in unprecedented amounts of information.

The challenge is no longer scarcity but discernment.

Questions become:

- Which information is reliable?
- Which narratives are misleading?
- How do algorithms influence what we believe?
- How do communities distinguish truth from noise?

¹ Created using ChatGPT, asking the question: How can Erwin Schrödinger's book "What Is Life?" help us look at what is going on in our world today? July 3, 2026 – www.lifesjourney.us

Healthy societies depend not simply on abundant information but on trustworthy information and the ability to evaluate it.

3. Everything Is Connected

At the end of *What Is Life?*, Schrödinger reflected on consciousness and drew on ideas from Vedanta, suggesting that individuality may arise from a deeper underlying unity.

Whether or not one accepts that philosophical conclusion, modern science increasingly highlights interdependence:

- Ecology shows species depend on one another.
- Public health demonstrates how diseases cross borders.
- Climate systems connect local actions with global consequences.
- Economies are deeply interconnected.

The lesson is that isolation is often an illusion. Decisions made in one place can have effects far beyond it.

4. Health Depends on Continuous Renewal

Living organisms constantly renew themselves.

Cells die.

New cells form.

Energy flows.

Repair occurs.

Similarly, healthy organizations and communities cannot remain static. They require:

- learning
- adaptation
- honest evaluation
- willingness to change

Systems that refuse renewal often become brittle and less able to respond to change.

5. Complexity Is Not Chaos

Living organisms are extraordinarily complex, yet they are not random.

Their complexity is organized.

Today's world is similarly complex:

- global supply chains
- artificial intelligence
- financial systems
- international politics
- ecosystems

Complexity itself is not the problem. The challenge is understanding relationships within complex systems rather than assuming simple causes or solutions.

6. Life Depends Upon Cooperation

Cells cooperate.

Organs cooperate.

Species cooperate within ecosystems.

Although competition exists in nature, modern biology also recognizes the importance of cooperation, from microbial communities to human societies.

This perspective encourages asking not only "Who wins?" but also "How do we build systems in which cooperation allows everyone to flourish?"

7. Resilience Requires Diversity

Biological systems tend to be more resilient when they contain diversity.

Similarly, societies often benefit from diversity of:

- perspectives
- skills
- cultures
- experiences

Diversity can contribute to adaptability, provided there are also shared norms and institutions that enable collaboration.

8. Energy Must Be Directed Constructively

Schrödinger explained that living systems remain organized by continually taking in usable energy.

Individuals and societies also direct energy—through attention, resources, creativity, and time.

Questions worth asking include:

- Where are we investing our attention?
- What kinds of work strengthen communities?
- What activities drain collective energy without creating lasting value?

These are ethical and civic questions rather than scientific ones, but the analogy is thought-provoking.

9. Small Changes Can Have Large Consequences

In genetics, a tiny molecular change can have significant effects.

In society, seemingly small actions can also accumulate:

- an act of kindness
- a policy decision
- a scientific breakthrough
- a technological innovation
- a false rumor

Complex systems often amplify small events.

10. Humanity Is Part of Nature, Not Separate From It

One implication of Schrödinger's work is that humans are subject to the same physical principles as every other living organism.

This perspective encourages humility.

Rather than viewing ourselves as outside nature, we are participants within it.

That has implications for:

- environmental stewardship
- agriculture
- resource use
- urban planning
- long-term sustainability

A Final Reflection

Schrödinger asked a deceptively simple question: **"What is life?"** One answer his work suggests is that life is not merely something that exists—it is something that continually creates, preserves, and renews relationships and order within a changing world.

Applied to our present moment, his book encourages us to ask not only how we survive, but how we participate in sustaining the conditions that allow people, communities, and the natural world to flourish. It suggests that resilience is built through truthful information, responsible stewardship, cooperation, adaptability, and recognition of our deep interdependence with one another and with the living systems of which we are a part.

More Reflection:

I think *What Is Life?* becomes even more profound when we move beyond asking the biological question "What is life?" and begin asking the civilizational question:

What makes a civilization truly alive?

Schrödinger was writing during one of humanity's darkest periods. Europe was engulfed in World War II. Nations were collapsing into violence, propaganda, fear, and destruction. Although his lectures focused on biology, they were delivered against a backdrop of immense social disorder. His inquiry into how life maintains order amid chaos carries a striking resonance today.

Life Is an Ongoing Process of Creating Wholeness

Schrödinger challenged the prevailing scientific view that life could be understood simply by breaking it into smaller and smaller pieces. Instead, he showed that something remarkable happens when matter becomes organized.

A living cell is not merely a collection of molecules.

A forest is not merely a collection of trees.

Likewise, a healthy community is not merely a collection of individuals.

The organization—the relationships among the parts—is what gives rise to life.

That insight speaks powerfully to many of the fractures we see today.

We often focus on individual problems:

- poverty
- loneliness
- addiction
- violence
- political polarization
- ecological degradation

Yet these are interconnected. Schrödinger's perspective invites us to ask whether these challenges arise not only from individual failures but from damaged relationships within larger systems.

Entropy Is More Than a Scientific Principle

Entropy is often described as "everything falls apart."

More precisely, it is the tendency for systems to become less organized unless energy is continually invested in maintaining them.

We can see this everywhere:

A garden becomes overgrown if left untended.

A friendship weakens without attention.

A marriage requires continual care.

Organizations lose vitality if they stop learning.

Democracies require active participation.

None of these decline because someone intended them to. They decline because maintenance stopped.

Viewed this way, many of today's social challenges resemble increasing social entropy.

Examples include:

- declining trust in institutions
- growing isolation
- weakening civic engagement
- fragmented public discourse
- environmental degradation

Schrödinger reminds us that life is not passive. It is an active resistance to disorder through continual renewal.

We Have More Information Than Ever—But Do We Have More Wisdom?

One of Schrödinger's central insights was that heredity depends on information.

Today, information has become one of humanity's defining resources.

Yet we live in an age where information is abundant while shared understanding can be scarce.

The question has shifted from:

"Can we access information?"

to:

"Can we discern what is true, trustworthy, and worth acting upon?"

Schrödinger's work highlights that information has value when it supports coherent, life-sustaining organization. Information that consistently fragments understanding or undermines trust can have the opposite effect. While people may disagree about which information is accurate, the broader principle remains: healthy systems depend on reliable ways of learning, correcting errors, and sharing knowledge.

Life Lives Through Relationships

Modern biology increasingly shows that life is relational.

The human body contains trillions of microorganisms.

Forests communicate through fungal networks.

Bees pollinate flowers.

Oceans regulate climate.

Nothing truly lives alone.

This has profound implications for our culture.

Many societies prize individual achievement.

Schrödinger's work suggests another truth:

Life flourishes through relationships.

Perhaps one reason loneliness has become such a significant concern is that human beings evolved as profoundly social creatures.

Fear Contracts; Life Expands

Although Schrödinger never framed his ideas this way, biology offers a useful analogy.

When organisms face immediate danger, they redirect energy toward survival.

Growth slows.

Repair slows.

Long-term development pauses.

Once safety returns, growth resumes.

Human communities show similar patterns.

Periods marked by fear or crisis often narrow attention toward immediate threats. Communities may become more cautious or defensive. Periods of greater stability can create space for learning, creativity, generosity, and long-term planning. This does not mean fear is always harmful—it can be protective—but living indefinitely in a survival mode can make it difficult to invest in the kinds of relationships and institutions that support flourishing.

This observation parallels themes in your work with Dr. Michael Obasz and Richard Rohr. While their frameworks are theological and psychological rather than biological, they likewise explore movements from fear toward greater trust, compassion, and connection.

Evolution Rewards Adaptability

One of biology's deepest lessons is that survival is not simply about strength.

Adaptability matters enormously.

Species that cannot adapt often disappear.

Civilizations face similar challenges.

Rapid technological change, demographic shifts, and environmental pressures require ongoing adaptation. Schrödinger's perspective encourages humility: systems that refuse to learn or adjust may become less resilient over time.

Human Consciousness May Be Evolution Becoming Aware of Itself

The final pages of *What Is Life?* are perhaps its most surprising.

Schrödinger turns from genetics to consciousness.

Influenced by Vedanta, he proposes that consciousness may ultimately be one rather than many.

This idea remains philosophical rather than scientifically established, but it continues to provoke reflection.

If consciousness is fundamentally interconnected, then compassion becomes more than a moral preference—it becomes a way of recognizing our participation in a shared reality.

What Is Really Dying Today?

Schrödinger invites another question.

Perhaps the greatest threat is not simply environmental decline or technological disruption.

Perhaps the deeper question is:

What patterns sustain life, and what patterns erode it?

Across many societies, people express concern about:

- declining trust
- increasing loneliness
- polarization
- ecological stress
- weakening civic participation

Different observers diagnose the causes differently, but Schrödinger's framework suggests looking beyond isolated symptoms to the health of the larger system and the relationships that hold it together.

The Spiritual Dimension

Although he wrote as a physicist, Schrödinger ended with reflections that sound surprisingly spiritual.

Many traditions speak of humanity as deeply interconnected.

For example:

- Richard Rohr writes of recovering awareness of the **True Self**, understood as our identity grounded in God rather than ego.

- Dr. Michael Obsatz emphasizes movement from separation toward greater connection and interdependence.
- Many Indigenous traditions describe humans as part of a larger web of relationships.
- Ecological thinkers emphasize that humans are embedded within living systems rather than standing apart from them.

These perspectives arise from different disciplines and traditions, but they share a common intuition: flourishing depends on recognizing and honoring our interconnectedness.

Reading *What Is Life?* in 2026

If Schrödinger were writing today, he might still ask, "What is life?" But he might also ask:

- How do societies cultivate resilience instead of fragmentation?
- How can technology serve human flourishing rather than merely efficiency?
- What kinds of institutions help communities renew themselves?
- How do we maintain truthful communication in an age of overwhelming information?
- What habits strengthen our shared capacity to respond to change?

These are not questions biology alone can answer, but biology reminds us that life is dynamic, relational, and continually renewed.