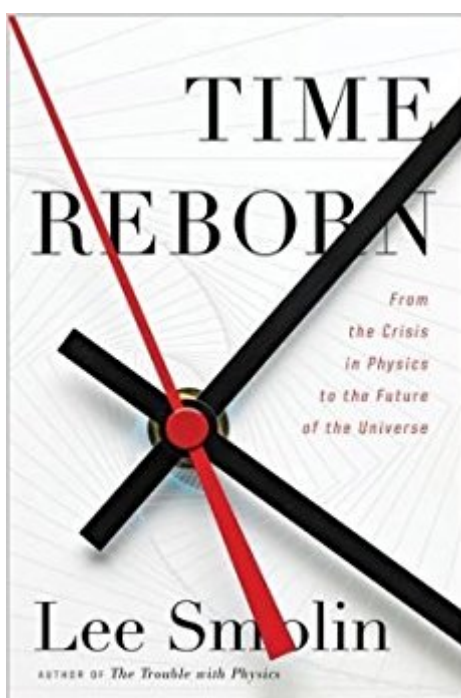


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TIME REBORN: Time Reborn: From The Crisis In Physics To The Future Of The Universe By Lee Smolin (Apr 23, 2013) (timereborn)



Synopsis

From one of our foremost thinkers and public intellectuals, a radical new view of the nature of time and the cosmos What is time? This deceptively simple question is the single most important problem facing science as we probe more deeply into the fundamentals of the universe. All of the mysteries physicists and cosmologists face-from the Big Bang to the future of the universe, from the puzzles of quantum physics to the unification of forces and particles-come down to the nature of time.

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Customer Reviews

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Book review () of Lee Smolin's 'Time Reborn', which implies that time is real Lee Smolin is a brilliant, leading physicist, who knows a lot about time, but not much about what the word "real" means. In this book (p.xiv) he says "Whatever is real in our universe is real in a moment of time, which is one of a succession of moments". He further differentiates between what was real, is real, and will be real. He does not say what "real" means. There are two meanings of the word "real", the everyday one held by today's physicists, where "real" means physically existing, such as a real thing on the floor. There is also the platonic meaning of the word "real", such that physical things are not real, only ideas or mental entities are real. We shall deal with each of these meanings in turn, but "time"

does not correspond to a thing, such as Smolin implies. We contend that only the platonic meaning applies, ie that time is not real in the physical (Smolin) sense, but only in the mental sense, which Smolin does not imply. Merriam Webster defines "real" as actually existing, by which they presumably mean at a place and time (in spacetime). So time itself is only one of the markers of existence, it itself does not exist; it is just a number. So to say that time exists, rather than things exist, is not true. One might as well try to convince us that blue exists. For blue is not a thing. Similarly the Oxford English Dictionary defines real as an adjective (not a noun), namely: "Actually existing as a thing or occurring in fact; not imagined or supposed: Julius Caesar was a real person a story drawing on real events -- her many illnesses, real and imaginary" The only definition that I can find of real in the sense imagined by Smolin is real numbers vs. imaginary one. But that has nothing to do with real existence. Leibniz, whom I follow rather than Smolin, based his philosophy on the case that only physical bodies exist. Anything else in our dual aspect monistic universe is mental. There is the physical, which exists, and the mental, which simply is (has being), or to say it, is real. This is what Platonists consider to be real. For example, truth, beauty and goodness would be real. This makes more sense to me than what Smolin is making a case of in his book, namely that time is real. It is real in the sense of being an idea, but not real as Smolin seems to imply, namely that time exists. It does not. It seems that what Smolin calls a crisis in modern physics has much to do with conflicting and vague definitions, ignorant and conflicting ontologies. Most physicists do not even know that quanta, according to the above, are mental, not physical. Thus the dual aspects of the world are quanta and particles. - Ever since Hume, science has imprisoned us in the dark cave of materialism and empiricism and needs to restore us to the quantum sunlight of Plato (Plotinus) -- see my website [...]

I cannot remember having read a better popular physics book, and I can confidently say that this is simply the most creative popular physics book I have ever read. I must warn the more knowledgeable reader that this book has a slower start than one would like. So stay with it, and give it a chance to develop. One of the things I found so wonderful about this book is that I gleaned a great deal from it on all levels of reading - at the level of joy reading, at the level of general intellectual level, and at the level of scholarship. Not since I was young, reading Hawking's "Brief History of Time" and Einstein's popularized "Relativity," has a book of this genre so impacted me, and I have many reasons as to why this is the case. First of all, many physicists, particularly those endeavoring into the world of writing to the non-expert, are not intellectuals, in the sense that they lack such compositional elements as style and a sense of general intellectual articulation. It is safe

to say the Smolin has no issue on these points. He is a great in-text discussant, and is very much cognizant of his audience as non-experts. Such cannot be said of many big name popular-physics writers. In addition to Smolin's growing experience in discussing his thoughts to diverse audiences and interdisciplinary scholarly forums, Smolin is a student of philosophy and history of science, which makes his language and perspective so much more inviting and accessible to the general reader. However, while all of these aspects are important to know, when considering this book, the substance is, by far, the most important aspect of this book. I honestly believe that this is the most creatively thought out book I have read, which is properly a work in popular physics. Smolin has some great ideas employing philosophical techniques, some of the derived from philosopher and physicist, Leibniz, and I think that the popular physics realm provided fertile ground for Smolin to lay these ideas. In physics literature (journal publications, etc.), it is pretty much unacceptable to talk about philosophy, except minimally when talking about either a "speculative point" or "conceptual foundations" of physics. What Smolin is able to do in this book, essentially, is let loose, and allow the rational, philosophical glue of his thinking bring together many theses that he has developed in technical physics. He posits this "glue" as "principles" that philosophically guide the discussion of the physics, illustrating how the ideas work together. Without giving too much of the book away, he (re-)proposes Leibniz' "Principle of Sufficient Reason," which states something like, "if there is more than one possibility for things to be as they are, then there must be a sufficient reason for actual outcome being the case, as opposed to one of the other possibilities." By doing this, he attacks the theistic/deistic centerpiece, called the "Anthropic Principle," and, in the greater scope of the book, ties together issues in quantum gravity, cosmology (introducing a principle of natural cosmological natural selection), and other modern areas of physical inquiry. The scope and coherence of Smolin's thought is really quite refreshing, whether you are a neophyte, not knowing much physics, or an intellectual with a sustained interest in the oft-heady ideas floating around in the physics community. In all of this, the vantage point that Smolin collectively provides can be appreciated by all readers of all levels of experience with the material. (I should note that Smolin's arguments have a number of shortcomings, many of which he acknowledges, save a couple.) On the level of scholarship, I was tremendously pleased with this book for the meticulously appended endnotes. The endnotes, which may also interest general intellectuals, historians (or students of history) of science, philosophers (or students of philosophy) of science, and scientists-in-training, represents the technical versions of each piece of the book discussed. The endnotes contain citations which can guide readers through the more technical versions of what Smolin is discussing (the works cited varying in the amount of mathematics required, so there are many works that will be accessible to

the non-mathematically inclined intellectual, for instance). In all, I found Smolin's endnotes to successfully bridge the gap between general intellectual discussion and the forum of scholarship, creating a space for thought where all may enter. This is a phenomenon that I have only seldom encountered in my experience -a best of all possible worlds, as far as popularizing this kind of material without "selling out." There are a few missteps, in the early goings, as far as the history of science is concerned; but rather than point these out, I just want potential readers to know that Smolin's philosophy of science is much better than his history of science (though one may very well complain that Smolin has not properly understood Popper and "falsificationism"). Great book, recommended to all. If you are interested in the subject matter, it is a must-read. I am not sure this is a great first book for readers of the genre, but it is accessible, and I am sure the intelligent first-time reader of this genre, in choosing this book, will gain much.

The author provides a great presentation on the concept of time from a physicist's perspective but without the mathematics of Roger Penrose, et.al. that would muddle the subject for those who are not so familiar with math. Dr. Smolin uses a great deal of intuition and philosophy interspersed with theories espoused by the great physicists such as Newton, Penrose, and many others and scientists and philosophers such as Aristotle, Galileo, etc. to establish the reality of time where he adheres to the scientific technique of valid experimentation to prove this concept. The one failing I encountered in Dr. Smolin's book is in his epilogue where he seems to abandon the rigors of the scientific approach and adopts the pseudo science of the global warming alarmists by using consensus as a valid conclusion that man can control climate by subduing carbon dioxide emissions and other supposed pollutants which is pure nonsense. Dr. Smolin seems to have abandoned all logic and his penchant for adhering to the scientific approach in this instance, and seems to adopt the fatalist's agenda of condemning mankind for his nature of making life ever easier for himself on this planet. Why he did this surprised and shocked me, and I wonder if his quest for grant money swayed his opinion. However, the book is worth the time and effort to read, and I do recommend it as a lay person with a great deal of interest in physics.

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