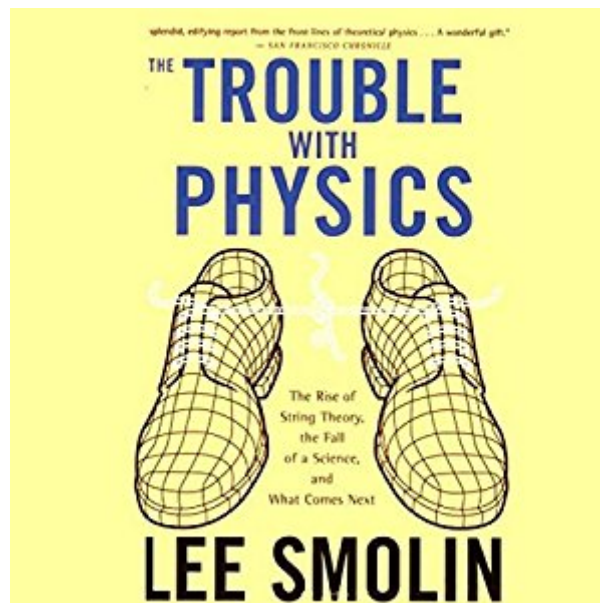




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The Trouble With Physics: The Rise Of String Theory, The Fall Of A Science, And What Comes Next



Synopsis

"The Trouble with Physics" is a groundbreaking account of the state of modern physics: of how we got from Einstein and Relativity through quantum mechanics to the strange and bizarre predictions of string theory, full of unseen dimensions and multiple universes. Lee Smolin not only provides a brilliant layman's overview of current research as we attempt to build a 'theory of everything', but also questions many of the assumptions that lie behind string theory. In doing so, he describes some of the daring, outlandish ideas that will propel research in years to come.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Before reading this book I heard many positive reviews from my friends, and having finished it I'm not disappointed. Not only does it give a very interesting history of the ideas of unification in physics (I did my project work in the UK on the original Kaluza Klein Theory), but also gives a glimpse of the community doing the science. Belief in what you do is necessary to do a good job, but belief can also backfire and become blind. This is most likely what has happened to String theory, that has had unfortunate repercussions for alternative theories such as loop quantum gravity, twistors, and other visionary ideas. On top of this, Smolin also rightly criticises Universities to encourage "standard" Science and discourage visionaries from positions and jobs. This is a much more serious development and is (among other things) an effect of Big Science as Just Any Job, subject to tests, evaluations, peers, making a career for tenure, etc. I see this in my own country where scientists with original ideas have a hard time surviving in a bureaucratic tangle of committees, evaluations, politically correct research grant applications and heavy teaching burdens. I think the most

interesting research these days come from hightech companies, and independent research insititutes like the Perimeter Institute and Santa Fe Institute for non-linear science, to mention a few. If I was financially independent with more brains than I actually have, I would open an institute like that. The research topic? Building artificial minds and trying to understand human and animal intelligence and cognition. And having a lot of fun at work without red tape getting in your way, which is what science and exploring the world is really about.

This book is wonderful because the author knows precisely what a layman might find interesting about theoretical physics, and from the start it's his goal to explain real discoveries and the power of theory in a way that is easy to grasp. You will learn why the LHC is really important to physicists and why the Higgs boson is overhyped. The book was written before the LHC was turned on but I was able to intuitively grasp that the Higgs boson was not an exciting experimental discovery for physics, which was very gratifying. Smolin is a real science writer among the best, like Hawking or Stephen Jay Gould. The complex concepts involved might make it a slow read, but it is gripping from the start and not only makes a strong case against string theory but helps you understand the standard model, particle physics in general, and even why science works at all. It made me wonder what the reaction to this book was in the scientific community because it lays out the flaws of the string theory world so precisely. I wonder whether it has had a notable impact 7 years on.

Lee Smolin has the ability to take a complex, almost indecipherable subject, like quantum physics and make it totally fascinating. This is not the usual egg-head type book and perhaps, that's the shame of it. Just the word, "Physics" almost put me off. I am not one to understand the inner workings of an atom or a star. But, this book was a complete and fascinating surprise for me. I almost could not put it down. I think I read it in four sittings. You will come away with a bit of an understanding of the time-space-thingy. but, you will really know about the fascinating world of physicists and the politics of learning institutions and the interrelationships between people of very high intellect- some are magnanimous, others insanely petty and selfish and still others are out right thieves and liars- Oh! Just like regular people, eh? An excellent reading experience and I strongly recommend it.

An interesting book, and although the topic itself is too esoteric for many readers, Smolin successfully makes his point that physics has been at a standstill for a few decades now without any major breakthroughs in our understanding of our universe. Science suffers from its enormous

success. Boundries of physical science has been pushed beyond the point where experimental verification is no longer feasible or very difficult. Where experiment lacks, there is theory to fill in the void, and when theory can not be backed up by solid experiment, measurement and data, fads and politics take over. Does it have to be this way? Smolin argues that it does not have to be and if the String Theory had not sucked all the oxygen out of the system, we may have had a chance to investigate other maybe more productive avenues. He even presents some very interesting examples and possibilities. One problem with the book is it is actually two books in one. While the first half is dedicated to the history of development of String Theory and its significance, accomplishments and failures, the second half is an indictment of academic politics in general. He is obviously qualified to expand on both topics, but makes the book a little disjointed. In any case, writing is easy on the reader, there is considerable name dropping and some airing of laundry. Recommended if the topic is of general interest.

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