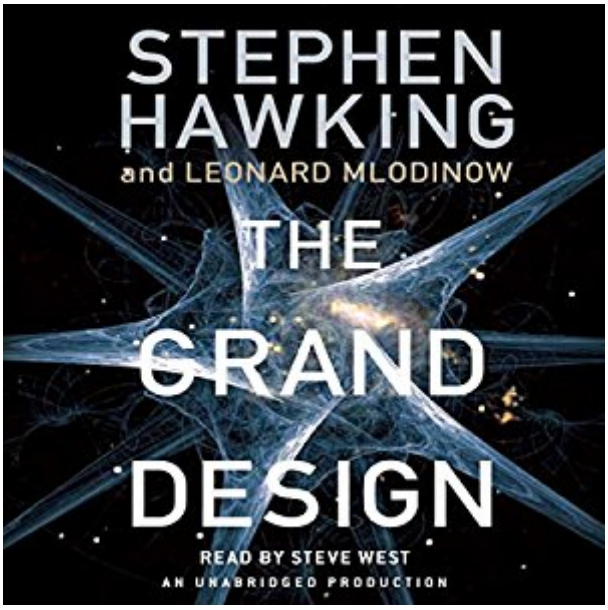
The Grand Design



Synopsis

THE FIRST MAJOR WORK IN NEARLY A DECADE BY ONE OF THE WORLD'S GREAT THINKERS-A MARVELOUSLY CONCISE BOOK WITH NEW ANSWERS TO THE ULTIMATE QUESTIONS OF LIFEWhen and how did the universe begin? Why are we here? Why is there something rather than nothing? What is the nature of reality? Why are the laws of nature so finely tuned as to allow for the existence of beings like ourselves? And, finally, is the apparent "grand design" of our universe evidence of a benevolent creator who set things in motion-or does science offer another explanation?The most fundamental questions about the origins of the universe and of life itself, once the province of philosophy, now occupy the territory where scientists, philosophers, and theologians meet-if only to disagree. In their new book, Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow present the most recent scientific thinking about the mysteries of the universe, in nontechnical language marked by both brilliance and simplicity. In The Grand Design they explain that according to quantum theory, the cosmos does not have just a single existence or history, but rather that every possible history of the universe exists simultaneously. When applied to the universe as a whole, this idea calls into question the very notion of cause and effect. But the "top-down" approach to cosmology that Hawking and Mlodinow describe would say that the fact that the past takes no definite form means that we create history by observing it, rather than that history creates us. The authors further explain that we ourselves are the product of quantum fluctuations in the very early universe, and show how quantum theory predicts the "multiverse"-the idea that ours is just one of many universes that appeared spontaneously out of nothing, each with different laws of nature.Along the way Hawking and Mlodinow question the conventional concept of reality, posing a "model-dependent" theory of reality as the best we can hope to find. And they conclude with a riveting assessment of M-theory, an explanation of the laws governing us and our universe that is currently the only viable candidate for a complete "theory of everything." If confirmed, they write, it will be the unified theory that Einstein was looking for, and the ultimate triumph of human reason.A succinct, startling, and lavishly illustrated guide to discoveries that are altering our understanding and threatening some of our most cherished belief systems, The Grand Design is a book that will inform-and provoke-like no other.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book began not with a Bang, but with a shudder. On the first page, I read the phrase (and yes it’s a proof so this may be changed in the actual version): "Philosophy is dead". No one can argue that there is a modern day philospher with the influence of Aristotle; but surely, philosophy can’t be dead!?However, reading onward, the authors made their point quite convincingly: philosophy is dead in the sense of answering the most mysterious of life’s questions. It is up to science, and scientific theory, to provide clues to the true answers, as philosphy in its most ancient forms has taken a back seat, but modern philosphy, that of scientific philosophy, has taken root.This book, you’ll find as you read, is dumbed down. But it’s not stupid or simple. While the math and the proofs of the math are essentially missing (a great boon for laymen like myself), the philosophical science is presented in a very interesting, detailed, and thought provoking way. It is not as difficult, and oft-maniacal, a read as Emmanuel Levinas, instead it’s somewhere closer to Lucretius’s On the Nature of Things (ironically).And so the authors move on in sequential and ordered fashion, trying to answer: Why is there something? Why do we exist? Why this set of natural law? The theories they expound upon are sometimes old, and sometimes groundbreakingly new, but all will either surprise you, educated you, or both; but in the least, make you think about reality and your own existence, and the reality of your existence.This book has illustrations every now and then. Most are of no use but to entertain you, in my opinion. Some are there to actually educate you in at least a small way.

In a mere 180 pages, Leonard Mlodinow, the author of the excellent "The Drunkard’s Walk" and of debates arguing against Deepak Chopra, and Stephen Hawking, expound a subjective interpretation of quantum physics, and offer a theory to try to unify all of the underlying forces of nature. A grandiose undertaking; along the way, they revisit the philosophical questions of Free Will,

the origin of the universe(s) without a creator-God, and vividly describe some of the counter-intuitive concepts generated by quantum physics' strangeness.They believe that we inhabit one universe in a multiverse version of quantum physics, in which there are an almost infinite number of universes that can arise spontaneously from the "big bang", and which then dictate the laws of nature that follow. This promotion of the so-called "strong anthropic principle" may offend some scientists and philosophers. The role of observation in determining quantum reality, and of its ability to alter the past in events in the quantum world, are just some of the seemingly bizarre concepts elaborated. This includes even the consequences of the delayed slit-lamp experiments. The cornerstone of their approach to quantum physics utilises Richard Feynman's theory of a sum of histories. Further underlying this, is the assumption that "reality" in our world is dependent on the model we use, and that if different models can successfully explain scientific phenomena, then each model must be considered equally "real".The clarity of the explanations are garnished with bits of humor that are tastefully incorporated without being intrusive. There is no math required, merely good use of logic in order to follow the arguments presented.

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