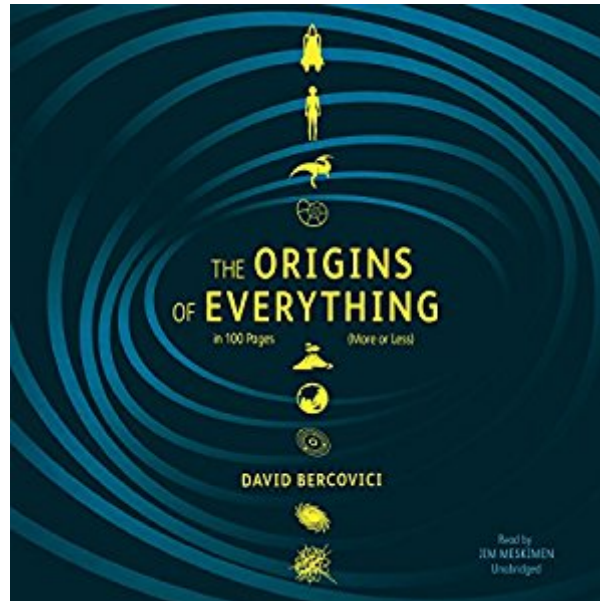




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The Origins Of Everything In 100 Pages (More Or Less)



Synopsis

Covering 13.8 billion years, a calculatedly concise, wryly intelligent history of everything, from the Big Bang to the advent of human civilization. With wonder, wit, and flair - and in record time and space - geophysicist David Bercovici explains how everything came to be everywhere, from the creation of stars and galaxies to the formation of Earth's atmosphere and oceans to the origin of life and human civilization. Bercovici marries humor and legitimate scientific intrigue, rocketing listeners across nearly 14 billion years and making connections between the essential theories that give us our current understanding of topics as varied as particle physics, plate tectonics, and photosynthesis. Bercovici's unique literary endeavor is a treasure trove of real, compelling science and fascinating history, providing both science lovers and complete neophytes with an unforgettable introduction to the fields of cosmology, geology, climate science, human evolution, and more.

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Customer Reviews

Not exactly a real page turner, but David does pack a lot of information (and theory) into a short book, and manages to sprinkle in just enough humor to keep the data from becoming overpowering. To be fair, it's a lot to ask a book of 100 pages (more or less) to cover billions of years of science. You don't need to be a scientist or a super geek to understand the book, but you should have a basic understanding of science and it would help if you have read other books/magazines/articles about, well, everything. That said, if you're someone who likes to read the lighter side of science (say, Popular Science, Smithsonian, etc.) you should be fine. I enjoyed the

book, although I have to admit there were more than a few times where I had to reread a paragraph or two while my brain tried to absorb the material. Of course there is nothing wrong with stretching your mind a bit, and there's always Google if you get stuck. Overall I'd recommend the book if you are curious about how we got from point zero (the big bang?) to today.

Dr. Bercovici covers great deal of information in a tight manuscript and does so in compelling fashion, with wit and aplomb. While there is a central focus on plate tectonics and other geophysical processes (the author's expertise), he does a "bang up" job with the origins of the universe, formation of our solar system and the origins early life on earth. The book also has a strong thread of the history of science, with appropriate credit generously given to those who have furthered our understanding of life, our planet and the universe. This one small aspect of the book is an education in itself. I had a hard time putting this book down. If you are a PBS Nova addict like me, you will likely love this little book.

The Origins of Everything in 100 Pages (More or Less) very quickly covers about 13.8 billion years of history. Sometimes it made my brain hurt, though usually the explanations were easy enough to understand. I highly recommend it to people interested in the origin and evolution of the universe and especially the earth.

This is a nitty gritty science book for those who require how this universe works. Half way through the book, you're only at how the earth was put together. Bercovici takes you on quite a journey towards understanding how everything evolved. Slow but fascinating reading.

Well written by educated writer. Lot of stuff has been around for awhile but a good review. Fast read. Doesn't really answer the question of the origin of the Universe. No real criticism but doesn't speculate or go out on a limb very much. Doesn't offer any guesses about fundamental processes or what caused them. Some parts funny and entertaining. Not as exciting as The Obexlanders and the Assassination of JFK. I would like the writer to try his hand with a science novel.

I loved it, I gave it to my Greandaughter's boy friend who is a fellow student at Centre Collage in Kentucky.

I really like this book, but it fills a narrow niche. If you don't know much physics and chemistry, a lot

of the narrative won't make much sense. It's not complicated and doesn't use jargon, but it doesn't explain the basic concepts behind the story. For a more or less random example, the author writes, "Although the mantle is a solid, not a liquid, it acts like a fluid over a very long time, much like how glaciers flow slowly, unless they're melting or falling apart and calving." If the idea of solids flowing is new to you, you probably won't get much additional insight from the comparison with glaciers; and the qualification about two other ways glaciers change won't help. There's nothing in there that's hard to understand, but there is a concept outside everyday experience explained by another concept outside of everyday experience. Moreover, I personally don't think it's a useful comparison, those are two examples of solids flowing, but they result from different physics and have different mathematical descriptions. Similarly, the author's explanation of stellar redshift with an ambulance siren assumes readers remember the Doppler Effect from junior high school physics, and understand why both sound and light are waves (and since light is a different kind of wave, and has a dual nature, the analogy is weak). Again, nothing difficult, but better for readers who paid attention in high school science and have kept up with science news since. On the other hand, if you're looking for deep treatment of these ideas, you'd need a book an order of magnitude longer and denser. The great virtue of this book is it pulls together a lot of up-to-date accounts that most people learned piecemeal, and that even people interested in science may well retain out-of-date accounts. By going through the history of the universe from Big Bang to the present, covering quantum physics, astrophysics, chemistry, planetary science, geology, biology and human history (in that order); the author shows you how it all fits together, and what the current state of knowledge is in each field. It's written in a breezy, cheerful style that is a pleasure to read. I do have one minor quibble and one larger one, neither of which affected my rating. The author describes "1 milligram" as, "about the mass of a very small pill," and "60 milligrams" as, "a very small bottle of tiny pills." There are pills containing 1 milligram or less of active ingredient, but the smallest practical pill is about 80 milligrams (like an 81 milligram baby aspirin that is pure active ingredient), and 200 to 500 milligrams total mass is a standard pill. A 1 milligram pill would be the size of a grain of coarse salt, too small to be practical. The more serious objection is a middle section on global warming that is written in an entirely different style than the rest of the book. On every other issue the author uses only naturalist arguments, but suddenly he shifts to mysticism. Global warming is "catastrophic," not because he's weighed the many specific effects, but because we were "never meant to inhabit" a warmer Earth, and it is "unnatural" (why are human actions any less natural than anything else in nature?). The author writes that global warming due to anthropogenic carbon dioxide emissions was, "reasonably well predicted more than 100 years ago by. . . Svante Arrhenius." But Arrhenius was

wrong about the reason, magnitude and historic effects. Why is an old prediction preferred over an accurate one? Nowhere else in the book does it use old errors in place of modern science. If Arrhenius were correct then warming would be highest where CO₂ levels are highest, and would increase daytime highs by trapping more heat, and would be greater in the tropics than the poles because there is more heat to trap. In fact the effect is at the top of the atmosphere where CO₂ slows the radiation of heat into space, not at the bottom by trapping more heat. Warming is unrelated to local CO₂ levels, causes increases in nighttime lows much more than daytime highs, and is a larger effect at the poles. This might not matter for a newspaper article for the general public, much larger scientific distortions are common. But this is a book claiming to explain the science, and it does thorough jobs about everything else, but repeats silly propaganda for only this topic. He ridicules the skeptical case as, "like asking whether playing Russian Roulette during a gun battle will affect your chances of survival." This is more than misleading, it's dishonest. Skeptics think we cannot predict the effect of strong legislation to reduce carbon emissions (we know alcohol and drug prohibitions were insanely costly and didn't work), if carbon emissions are reduced we cannot predict the emission portfolio from the new technological and economic path, if we knew the emissions portfolio we could not predict the effect on climate, and if we knew the effect on climate, we could not predict the net addition or subtraction to human welfare. That doesn't mean we should do nothing, it means we should focus on general actions that do not require specific predictions. For example, I think the best general measure of human environmental footprint is energy consumption, so I would much rather see a tax on energy use than a specific tax on carbon emissions used to subsidize "green" energy that we currently think is good. An energy tax is much easier to enforce, and helps with a lot of things, including carbon emissions. I'd also like to see strong action against deforestation and encouragement of increased human density (a million people living in a well-designed city have a much smaller environmental footprint than if they all live on dispersed farms). Obviously everyone has their own opinions on these things, but I can't see any honest reason to call my position Russian Roulette while cap-and-trade is a safe choice. Of course it's true that we are in a gun battle, that is there is plausible chance of disaster beyond our control due to anthropogenic effects or "natural" ones (I don't see any difference myself, but then I'm just a child of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars, I have a right to be here). We could get runaway global warming, or a new ice age, or something worse. We could get that if we act wisely or foolishly. But taking strong specific action against carbon emissions and subsidizing other forms of energy is not a no-risk policy, it's a choice, and there are other reasonable choices. The one thing we should all agree on is that more science and more science education is our best hope for

identifying problems and mitigating effects. Distorting the science for political points is a terrible idea, even if it fools people into adopting the right policy in the short run. I didn't reduce the rating for this intrusion into what is otherwise a first-rate book. I suspect the large majority of readers will approve of the propaganda, and will know enough science not to be fooled by it. Maybe the world will be a better place if some of the other readers are fooled. As a skeptic, I can't claim to be able to predict one way or the other. But I know I don't like it.

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