

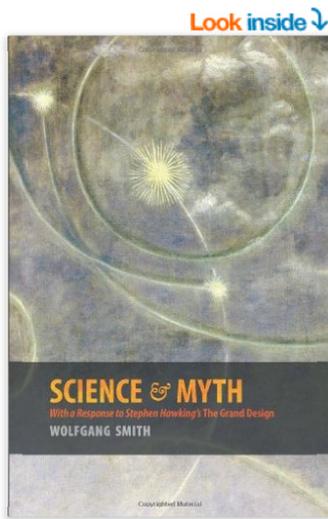
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by Wolfgang Smith (Author)

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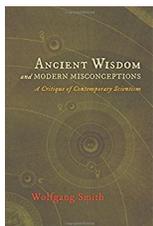
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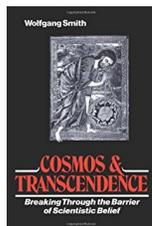
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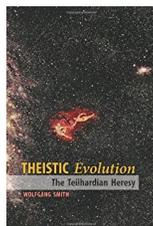
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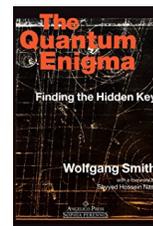
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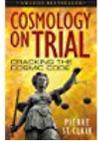
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About the Author

After graduating from Cornell University at age eighteen with majors in physics, mathematics and philosophy, Wolfgang Smith took an M.S. from Purdue, following which he spent three years at Bell Aircraft Corporation as an aerodynamicist. During this period he gained recognition for his pioneering papers on the effect of diffusion fields, which provided a theoretical solution to the re-entry problem for space flight. After receiving a Ph.D. in mathematics from Columbia University, Dr. Smith pursued a professorial career in that field. Soon however his center of interest shifted from the pursuit of science to the critique of scientism and the rediscovery of metaphysics as a theological discipline. He has authored six books and numerous articles, and is today widely recognized as a leading authority in these twin fields.

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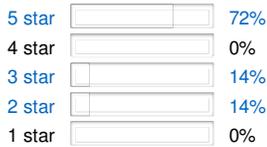
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What is your Theory of Everything?

By [Gerry B](#) on November 13, 2012

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Wolfgang Smith is a first-rate practitioner of theoretical physics, mathematics, and, unlike many modern scientists and philosophers operating with Cartesian principles, perennial ontology. He is the author of many masterful studies of modern science in the light of perennial philosophy including *Transcendence and Cosmos: Breaking Through the Barrier of Scientistic Belief*, *The Quantum Enigma: Finding the Hidden Key*, *The Wisdom of Ancient Cosmology: Contemporary Science in Light of Tradition*, and now the revised edition of *Science and Myth: With a Response to Stephen Hawking's The Grand Design*.

In his work over three decades Smith has sought to liberate the valuable insights of modern science from their current stranglehold in Newtonian, Darwinian and Copernican paradigms, and to integrate these valuable insights into a perennial ontology using in different contexts the metaphysical visions of ancient Greece, Scholasticism, and Vedanta.

The second edition of *Science and Myth* includes a new chapter titled "From Physics to Science Fiction: A Response to Stephen Hawking", which is a revised version of his article "Response to Stephen Hawking's *Physics-as-Philosophy*" published in *Sophia: The Journal of Traditional Studies*. Putting aside the many valuable paradigm-shattering insights available in other chapters, I will focus on this particular chapter.

In *The Grand Design*, Stephen Hawking with his co-author Leonard Mlodinow claim to have established the mathematical grounds for "why there is something rather than nothing", that explains the existence of the physical universe. Given Hawking's prestigious standing in modern science, in all likelihood, this reading of the physical universe will be henceforth very influential in scientific and philosophical affairs.

Smith, however, has a better reading of modern physics. He finds Hawking's 'theory of everything' (toe) problematic on both scientific and philosophical grounds. In consideration of presiding paradigms, Smith observes that Hawking operates with Cartesian principles despite the significant criticisms of these principles that have been given in different contexts by Edmund Husserl (phenomenology), Alfred North Whitehead (process philosophy), Seyyed Hossein Nasr (sophia perennis), Rene Guenon (traditional metaphysics), Henri Bortoft (Goethean science), and many other philosophers. The metaphysical limitations of Cartesian blinkers are telling, as Smith contends, in Hawking's failure to give the creation myths found in humanity's sacred traditions (from Vedanta and Sufism in the East to Kabbalah and Eckhartian sapience in the West) a symbolic exegesis adequate to their full metaphysical significance.

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Moving onto other important scientific and philosophical issues, Smith's response to Hawking's 'toe' in "From Physics to Science Fiction" has three sections. At the outset Smith takes the opportunity to provide a comprehensive overview of Hawking's 'toe'. Then Smith offers a clinical refutation on certain philosophical and scientific grounds detailing five significant issues in Hawking's 'toe': 1) his conflation of science and philosophy; 2) an inadequacy in his model-dependent realism; 3) his ontology, which reduces "all things--all "being"--to quantum particles"; 4) an inadequacy in his conception of causality; and 5) his limited understanding of creation. Having exposed these problems in Hawking's 'toe', Smith concludes with a searching examination of the modern scientific enterprise itself, which can produce fantastic technological outcomes despite environments of totalitarian scientism that tend to distort the true significance, as measured by a perennial scale of values, of scientific discoveries.

At this point someone may ask: are there any problems to be found in Smith's 'toe'? Here are three issues to consider. Research in adult development (Robert Kegan, Susanne Cook-Greuter, Terri O'Fallon, Bill Torbert, et al.) explores the ways humans grow and change during their adult lives. Kegan's model, for example, identifies five distinct stages of meaning-making through which adults may develop given appropriate bio-psycho-socio-spiritual living conditions in their personal selves, interpersonal cultures, and bio-psycho-socio-spiritual natures. I note that Smith's 'toe' does not give any attention to such adult developmental insights.

Second, there are some important paradoxical tensions highlighted in Smith's 'toe': on one hand, modern science is continuing to evolve in its understanding of the quantitative or measurable domains of existence usually in the context of not philosophical wholeness but scientific reductionism, yet on the other hand, modern cultures are continuing to decline in their understanding of the qualitative or valuable domains of existence as seen in their destruction of virgin nature, their reduction in standards of truth, goodness and beauty, and their loss of sacred ways of living. Given such losses, Smith declares, "In the final count ... once "God has been slain" ... in Nietzschean terms ... a false god ... must be installed in place of the true. Scientism proves in the end to be the idolatry of a post-Christian civilization" (p. 41).

Third, in agreement with humanity's wisdom traditions and in disagreement with new evolutionary spiritualities (e.g. Teilhard de Chardin, Andrew Cohen, Marc Gafni, et al.) and with Ken Wilber's reading of human evolution since Up From Eden, Smith's 'toe' contends that humanity is currently living in a materialist Reign of Quantity, articulated by Rene Guenon in the 1920s, which has occurred after a series of falls down from primordial Eden, the original paradise or golden age, through lesser degrees of qualitative existence to the cultural hegemony of Spirit-centred contemplatives or yogis in sacred sanctuaries (e.g. in medieval Europe, Meister Eckhart, Dante, Catherine of Siena, et al.) to the cultural hegemony of soul-centred rationalists in schools of arts and sciences (e.g. in Europe's age of reason, Descartes, Hegel, Rembrandt, et al.) to the cultural hegemony of body-centred sensationalists in all sorts of public displays (e.g. in the West's consumerist society, the various idols of consumers prevalent in modern media).

No matter what the reader may think about the aforementioned issues, in my view, Wolfgang Smith's Science and Myth is a book of utmost importance dealing with profound scientific and philosophical issues concerning humanity's sustainability that deserves to be read with full and most careful attention.

I conclude with a brief aside for those readers not already familiar with perennial ontology. Here is one simple version of a perennial ontology: it refers to five degrees of Reality sourcing from Beyond-Being in diverse radii and concentric circles, to Being, to Spiritus/Animus/Intellectus (in Greek: Pneuma/Nous), to psyche/anima/soul (contents of soul: reason, imagination, sentiment, will and memory), to corporeal body with its five senses (the corporeal body includes the subcorporeal domain of the physical body and material world quantified by modern scientists). If you want to know more about perennial ontology, besides Smith's valuable body of work, I recommend Rene Guenon's Man and his Becoming According to the Vedanta, Seyyed Hossein Nasr's 1981 Gifford Lectures published as Knowledge and the Sacred, and the work of many other scholars available at the website of World Wisdom Books.

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4.5 Stars for Brilliant Ontology and Methodologically Flawed Mystical Theology

By [James Bell](#) on October 27, 2014

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This book is not as seminal as *The Quantum Enigma* and *The Wisdom of Ancient Cosmology*. And it is not as flawed as *Christian Gnosis*. It extends Mr. Smith's worldview into such places as sense perception. As usual, he relies on scientists (in this case Dr. Gibson) who he deems to be largely correct but lacking in the metaphysical tools to properly interpret their own scientific theories and integrate them into a metaphysics. His demolition of Stephen Hawking is superb.

Once again, however, he relies somewhat upon his theological distinction between esoteric doctrine and exoteric doctrine. Meister Eckhart remains the most flawed of the authorities he relies on, in my opinion. The Dominican mystic clearly had some legitimate theological insights pertaining to the integration of the animus and the divine. But he formulates most of them positively, which leads into error. Semantic insights are limited in this rarified air. Although Meister Eckhart and Wolfgang Smith rely somewhat upon apophatic theology, they do not rely exclusively upon it, which they should. Meister Eckhart positively commends the theological practices of the monks of Mount Athos in Greece.

But those monks would be the first to say that mystical theological insights should be couched solely in apophatic terms. As a result of this theological mistake, I award the book 4.5 stars.

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For deep thinkers....

By [Lon Solomon](#) on July 18, 2016

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Brilliant author, undoubtedly, but constrained to fit philosophy into the Procrustean Bed of Catholic dogma. That Christ's resurrected body was physical is the particular concept obliging Smith to obsess with what he dubs the "bifurcation" of Cartesianism. Descartes' basic idea was fine, there are two fundamentally distinct ontological categories (spirit and matter), but his (Descartes') regrettable error was to conflate mind with spirit. This caused confusion ever since Descartes' time and even up to the present, to wit, Wolfgang Smith. Nonetheless, I admire his great case for the relevance of metaphysical deliberation and his deep and comprehensive critique of scientism.

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A brilliant book; an original thinker; and shows up most published scientists in the objective thinking presented.

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