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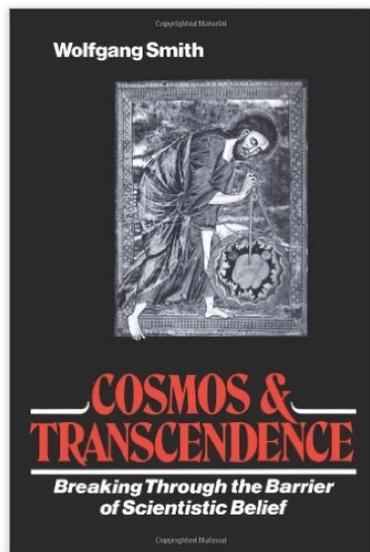
Cosmos & Transcendence: Breaking Through the Barrier of Scientific Belief

2nd Edition

by Wolfgang Smith (Author)

6 customer reviews

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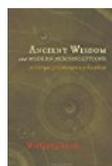
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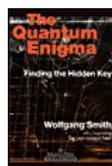
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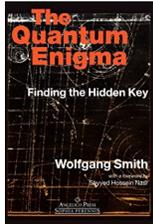
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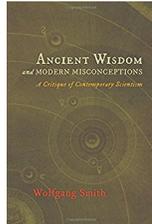


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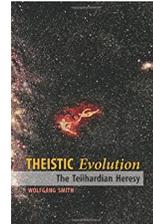


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"Cosmos and Transcendence is an excellent book, and would be an asset in any course dealing with science and philosophy, or the history of science. It is also most fascinating reading, and would be a welcome addition to any library." -- Harold Hughesdon, The Wanderer

"Wolfgang Smith is as important a thinker as our times boast." -- Huston Smith, author of *The World's Religions*

"Having traced the degeneration of the mechanistic outlook into subjectivism and pseudoscience, Dr. Smith concludes his book with a profound reflection on the fall of man and its implications for the pursuit of knowledge. . . . This is a serious work which will repay close attention." -- Robert P. Rooney, Homiletic & Pastoral Review

"We are astounded to see the revival of philosophical doctrines long thought dead in a scientific context. . . . This book will repay study, especially its brilliant third chapter, 'Lost Horizons.'" -- John C. Caiazza, Modern Age

"This is a very interesting book for the general reader as for the scientist." -- Fellowship of Catholic Scholars Newsletter

About the Author

Wolfgang Smith graduated from Cornell University at age eighteen with majors in physics, philosophy, and mathematics. After taking an M.S. in physics at Purdue, he pursued research in aerodynamics, where his papers on diffusion fields provided the theoretical key to the solution of the re-entry problem for space flight. After receiving a Ph.D. in mathematics from Columbia University, Dr. Smith held faculty positions at M.I.T., U.C.L.A., and Oregon State University, where he served as Professor of Mathematics until his retirement in 1992. In addition to numerous technical publications (relating to differential topology), Dr. Smith has published three previous books and many articles dealing with foundational and interdisciplinary problems. He has been especially concerned to unmask conceptions of a scientific kind widely accepted today as scientific truths.

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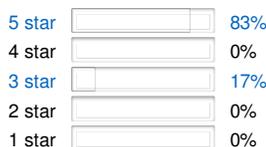


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Review of Wolfgang Smith, *Cosmos and Transcendence*

By [Kenneth L. Miner](#) on July 16, 2000

Format: Paperback

Review of Wolfgang Smith, *Cosmos and Transcendence*

This is a critique of scientism, which might be defined as the belief that only the investigational methods used in the natural sciences can lead to genuine knowledge. The author approaches the topic ultimately from the standpoint of classical Christianity, although it stands alone as a critique of contemporary metaphysical assumptions.

Only the first three chapters are about scientific metaphysics properly speaking and I will only discuss those. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 deal with the influences of Darwin, Freud and Jung respectively. The final Chapter 7 is a summing up and a critique of the secular concept of progress.

Chapter 1. Although there is only one universe, which we apprehend by means of our mental concepts or ideas, the modern world is in the grip of a Cartesian-Newtonian bifurcation (Whitehead's term) between primary qualities (susceptible to measurement and calculation - extension and number) and secondary qualities (all else). The bifurcation survived even Kant; eventually the primary qualities came to be seen as "the physical universe" - reality itself. (In order to understand Smith's claim that even after Kant the basis of the bifurcation remained, we have to say something like this: the basis of the bifurcation is the idea that we perceive our concepts, and that this perception is the starting point in examining the universe: epistemology precedes ontology.)

Chapter 2. This chapter traces in detail the development of the above-mentioned bifurcation. A revival of platonic scholarship in the 15th century (Marcello Ficino, Pico della Mirandola) led to a new interest in number and harmony. Copernicus (16th century) came under the influence of this school. Kepler (16th-17th centuries) was still looking for harmonies. Galileo developed a new non-platonic track: terrestrial mechanism. From the 14th century on there had been an obsession with clockwork. Mechanism was transferred from the earth to the heavens: the clockwork universe dovetailed nicely with mathematical calculation.

According to Smith, it was Galileo who first broached the bifurcation (p 28; no reference is given), but it was Descartes who articulated it by distinguishing between *res extensa* and *res cogitans*. What was tractable by calculation and measurement was deemed scientifically tractable and became the objective world. The method created its own subject matter, *res extensa*. This legacy was taken over by Newton and transmitted to the scientific world. British thinkers eventually rejected the reality of *res cogitans* as part of the universe of science.

The problems generated by the new way of thinking were seen already by Descartes, and taken up by a number of important philosophers including Husserl and Whitehead. Meanwhile the 19th-century concept of a mechanical universe has been replaced by relativity and quantum physics. There is an

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Traditionalism for Inklings?

Wolfgang Smith is a Catholic philosopher with a Traditionalist perspective, i.e. Traditionalist as in Guenon, Coomaraswamy and Schuon (not "traditionalist" in the sense of Mel... [Read more](#)
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excellent quote from Whitehead on how we now have (as least in the popular mind) a Newtonian metaphysics combined with 20th-century physics - "a complete muddle." (p. 36)

What we have more recently is a more humble use of "models" and a certain pragmatism. But, says Smith, "science" still makes "vast claims." E.g., cosmology. And these still rest on the old Newtonian foundations. Why? Because we still have the old "physical universe" (at least in the popular lay mind and in the popular scientific mind).

Chapter 3. This chapter deals with important positive aspects of the Medieval European worldview that have been lost. Somehow, Christians like Descartes and Newton arrived at a totally transcendent God, cutting themselves off from theology. Since a totally transcendent God could have little to do with the world of men at all, let alone their scientific researches, even that concept of deity eventually gave way. This was nothing new; see p. 45 for great quote from Plotinus - 3rd century.

Modern materialists have lost the concept of unity in multiplicity, which, ironically, it is the goal of science to discover.

The material universe, or cosmos, is, like anything else, defined in part by what it excludes. This boundedness involves three fundamental ideas: (i) a principle of determination, or that which imposes bounds - God; (ii) a potential recipient of bounds, or that which is subject to limitations - materia prima; and (iii) the bound itself, that which is imposed and received - form. This scheme is based on the analogy of geometry, and is found in the major metaphysical traditions of mankind.

Existing geometric constructions presuppose ideal geometric constructions. All metaphysical traditions have "affirmed a transcendent metaphysical reality that reflects itself in created forms." (p. 57) It is important to see that this doctrine "is necessarily analogical." One does not seek the ideal forms; one seeks the realities behind them. This is represented in Christianity by the Divine Word.

"The temporal moment constitutes a universal cosmic bound." (p. 61) In the Newtonian worldview time consists of moments and space consists of points. Relativity theory provides a partial antidote to these mistaken metaphysical views. (Smith has a separate book on QM, *The Quantum Enigma*.)

Eternity is the "now" that stands still, not "endless duration." "The world moves, while the 'now' stands still." (p. 64) It can be found at the center of our being. Christianity, with its central abstract theme that the smallest is the greatest, reflects this reality in manifold ways.

I like the book very much. After reading it one might well start on Edwin Arthur Burt's classic, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Physical Science* (rev. ed., 1952).

Ken Miner

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A Powerful Indictment of Post-Modernist Thinking

A Kid's Review on January 12, 2006

Format: Paperback

First he analyzes what happened that caused the quagmire of post-modernist thinking. Rene Descartes took some time away from the noise of his life and spent some time on retreat to figure out the "mystery" of existence. After many hours of hard thinking, and much wasted ink, he came to what he considered the only verifiably true idea about the experience of existence: the only true thing is that Rene Descartes uses his mind to think; nothing outside Descartes' mind can be proved to exist. This is known academically as the "bifurcation postulate." This is the great Cartesian Division of perception, a complete departure from the glorious wisdom of the Great Philosopher Aristotle who's first assumption about existence was that the physical sense faculties of the human being (sight, hearing, taste, touch, smell) receive ACCURATE data about the world outside the mind. And the human ability to reason about the relationships of what he senses is certain.

Wolfgang Smith, with awesome clarity, shows how the departure from classical philosophical reasoning, begun by Rene Descartes, has resulted in a general disastrous collapse of valid reasoning itself! With delightfully cool intellectual accuracy, he knocks down such false notions that evolutionary theory is based upon valid scientific reasoning, that Freud's psychoanalytical theory is a valid way of explaining the true composition of the human being, and that science itself, as a way of completely understanding physical reality, has utterly failed to come up with anything that actually explains EVERYTHING we experience.

I cannot be denied that the popular thinking of our contemporary culture is founded upon ideas purported to be scientific, and thus, we are told to believe, "unquestionably true." In this pivotal work, Wolfgang Smith exposes post-modern scientific thought for what it really is: a tyrannical metaphysical assumption about reality that has enabled men to finally, if they wish, completely disregard the primordial religious tendency of their ancestors, and compel those who still hang on to such "immature" tendencies to either conform, or suffer being labeled "children" among "enlightened adults." Ah but remember the words of a man named Jesus Christ, "God has revealed to little children what he

has kept hidden from the learned."

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Read this first

By [James Bell](#) on September 30, 2014

Format: Paperback

This is the first book by Wolfgang Smith, written in 1984 when he was a tenured Professor of Mathematics at Oregon State University.

It is brilliant.

He uses sacred doctrines and Aristotelian philosophy to demolish Descartes, Newton, Freud, and Jung. His chapter on Karl Jung is especially insightful.

This book is a quick read and it is deferential to aspects of the scientific consensus that Smith would later become suspicious of. I recommend reading Smith's first four books in order, starting with this one.

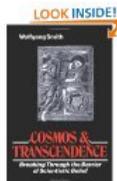
Thanks to Sophia Perennis, which republished this book after the original publisher, Sherwood Sugden, went under.

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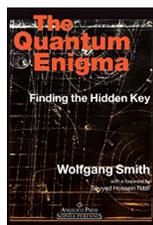


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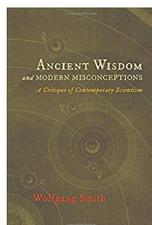


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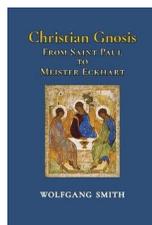


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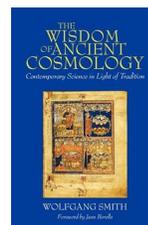


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