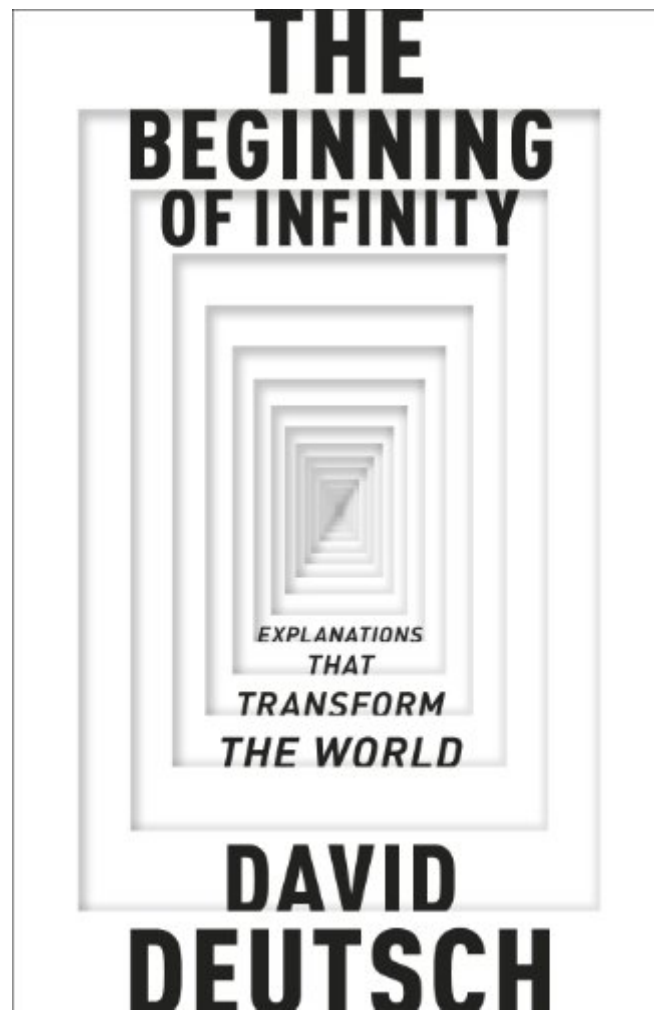


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The Beginning Of Infinity: Explanations That Transform The World (Penguin Press Science)



Synopsis

A bold and all-embracing exploration of the nature and progress of knowledge from one of today's great thinkers. Throughout history, mankind has struggled to understand life's mysteries, from the mundane to the seemingly miraculous. In this important new book, David Deutsch, an award-winning pioneer in the field of quantum computation, argues that explanations have a fundamental place in the universe. They have unlimited scope and power to cause change, and the quest to improve them is the basic regulating principle not only of science but of all successful human endeavor. This stream of ever improving explanations has infinite reach, according to Deutsch: we are subject only to the laws of physics, and they impose no upper boundary to what we can eventually understand, control, and achieve. In his previous book, *The Fabric of Reality*, Deutsch describe the four deepest strands of existing knowledge-the theories of evolution, quantum physics, knowledge, and computation-arguing jointly they reveal a unified fabric of reality. In this new book, he applies that worldview to a wide range of issues and unsolved problems, from creativity and free will to the origin and future of the human species. Filled with startling new conclusions about human choice, optimism, scientific explanation, and the evolution of culture, *The Beginning of Infinity* is a groundbreaking book that will become a classic of its kind.

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Customer Reviews

It takes disparate topics and unites them in one powerful worldview. Topics range from physics and philosophy to voting systems and alphabets to optimism and objective aesthetics to evolution and creationism, and even morality. Each topic has enlightening individual analysis, but even better than that is the worldview behind the analysis, which comes out as one reads the entire book. The Beginning of Infinity is about a way of thinking. It is the most rational way of thinking ever to be explained. You might think that David Deutsch is a genius (and he is) and that therefore his way of thinking won't work for you. That is not the case. His worldview can help anyone with any topic. It's not equally useful for all fields -- it fares better with important topics -- but it always has a surprisingly large amount of relevance and use. And unlike many philosophers who want to sound impressive, Deutsch has made a concerted effort to write clearly and accessibly. This isn't a book written only for the initiated. I've identified three main themes which I think best describe the most important message of the book. The first theme is the titular one. Like Deutsch's previous book, chapters conclude with short summaries and terminology sections. But he's got a new section too: the meanings of the beginning of infinity encountered in the previous chapter. So what kind of infinity is Deutsch concerned with? Primarily progress. Humans are capable of an infinite amount of progress. We can improve things without limit, and learn without limit. This covers not just material improvement but also moral improvement.

If this book were as difficult to understand as some of the comments on it are, it would not be one I'd want to read! I'm no scientist but I wanted to give it a try because I'd heard David Deutsch speaking and found him very easy to follow and absolutely fascinating, and I wanted more. Having read the book three times (and the bit about the Infinity Hotel four times to figure out what happened to the puppy!) and finding that I am getting more out of it with each reading, I can understand that it may be controversial in some respects, but I don't understand why it is attracting such intense and bizarre hostility. What am I missing? For me, the writing is crystal clear, charming and riveting, like the author himself when you hear him speak -- it's a sheer delight to read. It made me laugh out loud several times -- I LOVE that the author's sense of humor comes through even in what is a very deep, important book. And it even moved me to tears. The subject matter is super wide-ranging, including stuff about physics and mathematics (no formulas, thankfully), beauty (yes, really!), voting systems (why proportional voting systems are fundamentally unfair despite the best intentions of

those proposing them), environmentalism (why we have it all wrong!), intriguing stuff about culture, history, philosophy, etc., etc. David Deutsch is truly a polymath. But what I personally find so enthralling is the way reading this book is challenging me and changing the way I think. I love the way all the apparently disparate issues are united in a single, coherent worldview having implications far beyond just what David Deutsch discusses in this book.

Books that combine an excellent review of quantum physics with a provocative world view should probably merit a baseline three stars, and this one does. That said, *The Beginning of Infinity* does not seem to have the makings of a classic in the genre. As numerous reviews have pointed out, this book is a David Deutsch "Theory of Everything", not in terms of uniting all four of the basic forces of physics (though in a sense he does that), but in the sense of expanding quantum physics into a theory that encompasses everything that we humans tend to hold meaningful. Thus the book includes attempts to show that an absolute standard of beauty, a system of ethics, and even systems of politics and (loosely interpreted) parenting and education can be derived from Deutsch's unique point of view. In *The Beginning of Infinity*, Deutsch goes to great creative lengths in an attempt to make quantum physics less mysterious and more comprehensible. In this he succeeds better than many other authors. As an educated person that has made an effort to keep up over the last five decades with advances in science, but still regularly gets pushed into "I'm FAIRLY sure I understand what is being said" territory, I found Deutsch's explanations illuminating and very helpful. Deutsch's explorations of the implications of the well-known single photon studies (leading many, but not Deutsch, to say that photons are "both particles and waves") are striking and deeply exciting. Deutsch is an acknowledged leader in quantum theory and quantum computing, and when he discusses topics that he knows best, he seems to be on the most solid ground (as solid as anything can be in this quantum world!).

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