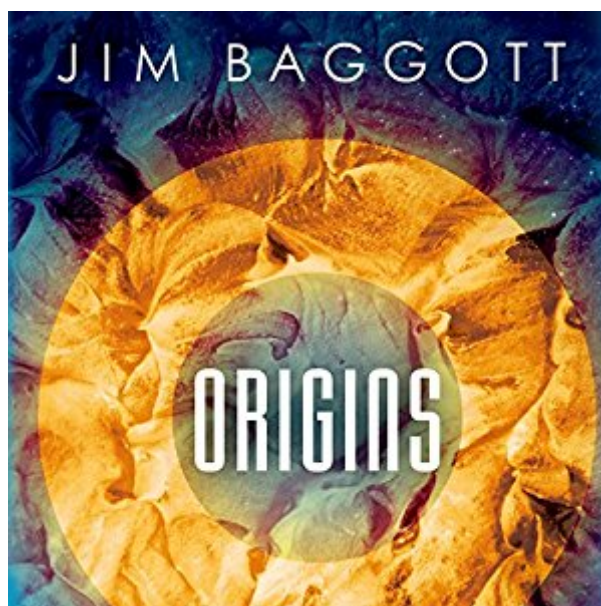


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# Origins: The Scientific Story Of Creation



## Synopsis

What is the nature of the material world? How does it work? What is the universe and how was it formed? What is life? Where do we come from and how did we evolve? How and why do we think? What does it mean to be human? How do we know? There are many different versions of our creation story. This book tells the version according to modern science. It is a unique account, starting at the Big Bang and travelling right up to the emergence of humans as conscious intelligent beings, 13.8 billion years later. Chapter by chapter, it sets out the current state of scientific knowledge: the origins of space and time; energy, mass, and light; galaxies, stars, and our sun; the habitable earth, and complex life itself. Drawing together the physical and biological sciences, Baggott recounts what we currently know of our history, highlighting the questions science has yet to answer.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In the preface and in the book, Dr. Baggott emphasizes that his intent is to write a rigorous scientific account of human origins (a goal that I find very appealing). For the first seven chapters, which cover the origin and evolution of the universe and the solar system, he does an excellent job towards meeting his goal. The writing is clear and interesting, and the content is detailed and authoritative. His accounts of the interstellar molecular material and the evolution of the solar system are the best that I have read; indeed, it is rare to find any coverage of interstellar molecules in other books. These seven chapters are of five star quality. Unfortunately the remaining five chapters on the evolution of life are of a lower standard. They are, in general, much less detailed, patchy, and give the impression that the author is in a hurry. More troubling, Dr. Baggott sometimes

indulges in speculative stories that fall short of scientific rigor. An early example is his notion of how the first living cells might have arisen in alkaline hydrothermal vents. The book ends with a lengthy chapter on human consciousness which is part philosophical and part speculative. Dr. Baggott believes that human consciousness, language, and artistic sensibility evolved 40,000 to 50,000 years ago, some 150,000 years after the appearance of our species, Homo sapiens. He does not explain how this happened. Although this hypothesis has not been shown to be incorrect, recent evidence from multiple sources has generally favored a much earlier development of consciousness and language.

It is only in the last hundred years that we have been able to discuss the origins of the universe with any kind of evidence. All previous discussion came out of myth, philosophy and religion. Even though our understanding is still piecemeal, Jim Baggott has assembled what is fairly certain, into an extraordinary story. There is still a lot of "We just don't know", but Baggott's earned reputation is that he disallows the baseless (See my review of his Farewell to Reality). This is a great relief for those of us who are not astrophysicists and microbiologists. There's a lot of physics and chemistry to understand as he tackles the universe. Most of it is subatomic, which is a bit ironic, considering the massive clouds and galaxies we can barely perceive. Nearly halfway through the book, he gets to our solar system. His explanation of the formation of the solar system is too complicated and unsatisfying, a patchwork of kludges. There is a far simpler, more elegant explanation from astrophysicist Marvin Herndon, who is not referenced at all (though his mentor, Harold Urey, is referenced numerous times). Herndon says that all planets form, not from "accretion" (which Baggott also has trouble with), but from the gas cloud that Baggott calls Neith, which rained-in its elements by force of gravity. This why we keep finding that planets, comets and moons are made of the same materials. The sun, being 99% of the mass of the solar system, had critical mass, and didn't just shine, it ignited. The planets, all of which were gas giants like Jupiter, reacted according to their distance from the sun.

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