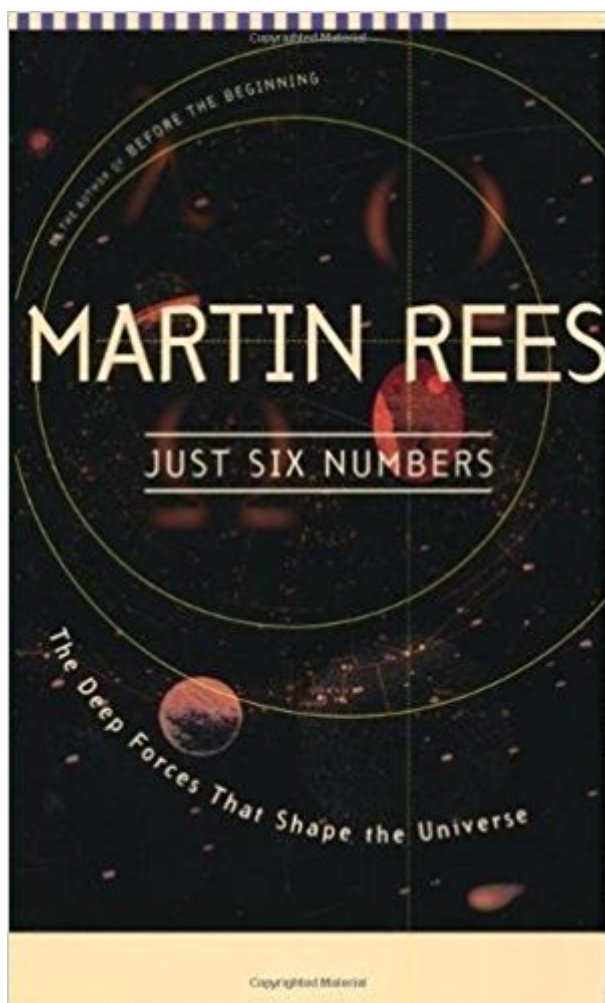


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Just Six Numbers: The Deep Forces That Shape The Universe



Synopsis

The genesis of the universe elegantly explained in a simple theory based on just six numbers by one of the world's most renowned astrophysicists

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Just six numbers govern the shape, size, and texture of our universe. If their values were only fractionally different, we would not exist: nor, in many cases, would matter have had a chance to form. If the numbers that govern our universe were elegant--1, say, or pi, or the Golden Mean--we would simply shrug and say that the universe was an elegant mathematical puzzle. But the numbers Martin Rees discusses are far from tidy. Was the universe "tweaked" or is it one of many universes, all run by slightly different, but equally messy, rules? This is familiar ground, though rarely so comprehensively explored. What makes Rees's book exceptional is his conviction that cosmology is as materialistic and as conceptually simple as any of the earth sciences. Indeed, cosmology is simpler in one important respect: once the starting point is specified, the outcome is in broad terms predictable. All large patches of the universe that start off the same way end up statistically similar. In contrast, if the Earth's history were re-run, it could end up with a quite different biosphere. Rees demonstrates how the cosmos is full of "fossils" from which we can deduce how our universe developed as surely as we infer the earth's past from the relics found in sedimentary rocks. Rees's theme is nothing less than the colossal richness of the universe. It is an ambitious book, but if anything, it deserves to be longer. --Simon Ings, .co.uk --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Science writer and astronomer Rees summarizes the history of the universe, pointing out that six numbers related to basic physical constants (for example, the relative strengths of the gravitational and electromagnetic attraction) determine how the universe developed. In addition, he shows how, if these numbers were only slightly different, stars and galaxies would not form, complex chemistry would not be possible, and life could not evolve. This raises the interesting philosophical question, Why? One could dismiss the question by saying that, if it were otherwise, we wouldn't be here to ask or that there is some underlying theory as yet unknown that would show that these values must be what they are. However, Rees suggests that these numbers were set shortly after the big bang and could well have been different. Indeed, there may be a multitude of other universes, forever inaccessible to us, in which they are different. Thus, with a huge choice of possible universes, one must exist that could support intelligent beings who can observe and question. Whether one agrees or not with Rees's ideas, his book is recommended for its cogent synopsis of modern cosmologic thought. [BOMC alternate selection.]--Harold D. Shane, Baruch Coll., CUNY.---Harold D. Shane, Baruch Coll., CUNY Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

From time to time we read a book in which every praise --in the front or the back cover-- is deserved. This is the case of Martin Rees' "Just six numbers." After reading it you discover with joy that the price you payed was in correspondence with what you expected to get. In my case I expected to learn something about these six numbers "that shape the Universe" and make it unique and suitable for us, and that's what I got plus several insights and knowledge. The book is divided into 11 chapters of which 6 are dedicated to the numbers themselves. Of those six numbers, in the author words: "Two of them relate to the basic forces; two fix the size and 'overall' texture of our universe and determine whether it will continue for ever; and two more fix the properties of space itself." With respect to the other chapters they work as links between the numbers so you as a reader never get lost in the details and can keep the general view over the big picture. Although the themes are hard to the common reader (which is my case) the author provides good examples in order to be understood: "We cannot distinguish two events [...] when the time interval between them is less than the Planck time. These scales are smaller than atoms by just as much as atoms are smaller than stars." No matter how hard the theme is, M. Rees manages himself somehow for being comprehended. Now, and given that the topics touch different sensibilities, the author provides his own vision about the fine tuning problem without being disqualifying. That's why instead of closed

statements he opts for new and open questions. In a word, he is polite. Very polite indeed. You have to take into account that Rees is telling us that the universe is a perfectly tuning machine so the answer appears almost spontaneously: Who did tune it? No matter what you think or believe, the numbers and the harmony among them is astonishing. So we as humans need somebody there in the origin just pressing the right buttons. Mr. Rees knows that the discussion is not going to stop before the last human being breathes for the very last second here on Earth. That's why he prefers to live without abandoning the search for the ultimate answers. He needs to know how does the universe work and how it became the site we live in. So that "...even if we know the basic laws, exploring how their consequences have unfolded over cosmic history is an unending quest." As I have hinted, this book is for believers and not believers. Everyone can drink from the waters of this (cosmic) river. It is full of knowledge and savvy. You can read it in two days maybe one. Is cheap and it works very well as a link with more recent titles as "The elegant universe" by Brian Greene, "A universe from nothing" by Lawrence Krauss, and "Many worlds in one" by Alex Vilenkin. There are others, of course, but don't miss the fact that "Just six..." is from year 2000 and several things have happened since then. Highly recommended.

This book makes learning about the cosmos accessible to someone like me who struggles with higher math. It doesn't dumb anything down, however, and organizes things so well. It honestly is the kind of book that makes you reflect on the grandness of things, but also how lucky we are to be here with all the right circumstances. I recommend it to anyone I know who is interested in space.

For the layman, like myself, who is unfamiliar with the complexities of modern Astrophysics but recognizes that there are important and revealing discoveries being made, this book is a great introduction into those complexities. Easily readable and laid out in a format that builds one discovery and the science behind those conclusions upon the next, Mr. Rees knows how to explain them in terms designed for readers without advanced degrees in Astrophysics. He gives the reader incentive to go on to further study to expand their understanding, to which he gives a jump start here. Recommended for all who need to have their perspective concerning the reality of the Universe we inhabit, and the wonders of it, lifted and expanded so that our grasp of reality might escape the mundane and trivial, give wings to our imagination, and give incentive to questions of a higher nature concerning life itself.

Astonishing. This is a very well-written book which dissects the razor's edge of precise conditions

necessary for life. Edward Harrison once stated that the more you learn, the more you will realize the vastness of what you do not know. I think you will truly feel this after reading this book. I personally think the answer still comes down to either multiple universes or a higher power or collective consciousness. At any rate, Mr. Rees has done a remarkable job. I would recommend reading it, then re-reading some weeks or months later. This really helped me in catching all the details. Highly recommended.

Really good analysis on quantification of our universe from a micro to macro perspective. It's based on an equation of six factors (hence the title) and develops how each of the factors must fit within a certain range. Definitely scientific in nature and focuses more on evolution from the big bang than creationism.

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