



A Beginner's Guide to Reality: Exploring Our Everyday Adventures in Wonderland

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Have you ever wondered if the world is really there when you're not looking? We tend to take the reality of our world very much for granted. This book will lead you down the rabbit hole in search of something we can point to, hang our hats on and say *this is real*. On the way, Jim Baggott examines some of the things that have been said about reality by a few of the world's greatest thinkers—from the philosophers of ancient Greece to modern scientists and social theorists.

Jim Baggott is the author of *The Meaning of Quantum Physics* and *Beyond Measure: Modern Physics, Philosophy, and Quantum Theory*, both published by Oxford University Press. He lives in England.

A Beginner's Guide to Reality: Exploring Our Everyday Adventures in Wonderland Details

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Tyler Dykema says

18 year old me would've thought this was the best book ever, but having been removed from constant challenging philosophical thought for so long I think I've lost the thrill it used to give me. Don't get me wrong, I still love philosophy but questioning the truth of every aspect of reality doesn't really seem productive to me anymore. This book is broken up into 3 parts and the first 2 are excellent. I love the ideas that were explored mainly the ones questioning why and how we perceive things. I enjoyed the realization that the information we receive using our senses is in a way false, but by the end of the book it feels like Baggott is just trying to stump the reader for the sake of... stumping the reader.

Baggott's writing style is witty and interesting and he's obviously incredibly well read and informed, however, the third chunk of his guide to reality fails to provoke a logical line of thinking that I really care to follow. Good read and I'd definitely recommend to philosophy buffs, but I got bored towards the conclusion.

Michael says

[illegible]

Suellen Rubira says

When I was almost leaving Lisbon, my advisor gave me a big list of further readings I was supposed to finish

along my career as a researcher. Like most of the books he told me to read, this one questions the idea of absolute and independent reality and which scientific theories are out there to help us - or to confuse us. Baggott, we must say, does a brilliant history of man and world relationship, but his flaw is to forget about the power and importance of myths and legends. He dedicates about two lines on this matter and we can't deny its importance. However, in the epilogue he kind of highlights all the possibilities to deal with reality and emphasizes (a little) the role of philosophy in science (Heisenberg also has done that too).

Troy Demers says

Liked the first two sections a lot, but couldn't finish it because the third part about quantum physics was too confusing

Jasen Tenney says

Haven't enjoyed a philosophy book this much in a long time. A thought provoking and highly accessible guide to metaphysics.

Jeremy says

Somewhat charming, if smugly so, and trite overview of the philosophical history of the concept of reality. Baggott relies on too many references to *The Matrix* and pop-culture, while never really establishing his own stance. It didn't quite do it for me.

Nicole says

Brilliant intro to what "reality" actually means.

The book is split into three main chapters discussing *Money* (social reality and the societal systems we have built for ourselves), *Colours* (reality as we perceive it via our senses) and *Light* (what is actually there in a particle physics sense regardless of what we can perceive).

It is all written simply enough for anyone to understand, but not condescendingly. I still have trouble with the physics part - I have never been a physics buff - and find myself reading without paying attention and then two pages in I realise I don't know what I'm reading any more. It's a difficult chapter for me personally and I'm rereading it (constantly) to try to *get it* and make it stick. I honestly believe he explains things well and I'm just not plugged in for that last chapter, but I love this book. It is also a great starting point for lots of different topics which is exactly what it's meant to be: an introduction, "A Beginner's Guide".

Marc Nash says

An accessible summary of the history of thought on just what the nature of reality might be. It uses every day examples of money & marriage to explain socially constructed consensus reality. It talks of Plato's cave of

shadow perception rather than direct sight as still being relevant today. The author uses films such as "The Matrix" and "Terminator" and Douglas Adams' Hitchhiker's Guide..." to entertaining effect. It's only in the penultimate 2 chapters that it gets a bit science heavy as it moved through quantum theory, to string and M theory. The writer is a physicist and it's these chapters where that shows and a couple of statistical tables always signals my eyes getting heavy. But that aside, this is a passable introduction, that is, it does what it says in the title. I didn't have my eyes opened to any new illuminations, but I did have the whole subject wrangled into one enclosure for my brain in a very acceptable way.

M. Patrick says

In last five or so years that I have been listening to audio books, I have chosen to listen to several nonfiction books on philosophy and even more on science, learning from all and enjoying most. Today I finished **A Beginner's Guide to Reality** by **Jim Baggott** and have decided that it is the best of those listens in which the author tried to reconcile science and philosophy as methods of determining what is *real* and what is *not*. Baggott develops his discussion chronologically by beginning with Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle's explanations of reality. He further follows the philosophical discussions of this topic through the recent contributors. He makes these discussions interesting by illustrating using pop icons like the movie, "The Matrix." As building a continuum between philosophy and science, he discusses scientists' earliest efforts to define what is real and follows their changing positions on the subject through the most recent arguments for modified string theory and that elusive "Theory of Everything." I highly recommend this listen to anyone for whom reality is still a mystery worth solving.

TheIron Paw says

What a great book, combining philosophy and science to explore the reality of "reality". Baggott ranges from Plato's caves, to Descartes and Kant, to Schrodinger's Cat. He discusses reality from 3 perspectives: socially constructed reality (so you thought money was real?), physical reality (all this time I thought my "red" was the same as yours), and finally how science deals with, or fails to deal with reality (to think that the universe may only be a collapsed wave function in a conscious mind). This book is written in a lighthearted manner making it enjoyable reading. Baggott draws heavily on movies, especially Matrix, and "far-out" literature such as the Hitch Hikers Guide to the Galaxy, to help us understand the complex concepts presented.

Matt says

Since my local Borders store is having a going out of business sale, I decided to see if I could get any good deals on books. I browsed the under stocked philosophy section, and I found Jim Baggott's book titled **A Beginner's Guide to Reality**. I read the first chapter in the store; it seemed to be a very promising read. The first eight chapters of the book are interesting, and it really demonstrates a lot about our perception of reality. Starting with chapter 9 until the end of the book is like reading a totally different book compared with the first eight chapters. The last four chapters of this book deal mostly with explanations about physics and quantum mechanics. The author very vaguely ties these concepts into the theme of his book (reality), but does so on very rare and poor occasions. Baggott has written about quantum physics before, and his writing shows that this is his area of expertise. His effort to tie physics into a philosophical understanding fails on every level. I could only give this book two stars because even though the first eight chapters are fairly

good, the resulting four chapters utterly ruin this book.

Todd says

A very good overview. I wish he had spent more time examining social reality rather than physical though. While the "rabbit hole" of physical reality is of great interest to academics and science geeks, it is the social reality that has the greatest effect on our daily, lived experiences, and it is the social reality that is ultimately what humanity is actually capable of changing. He did manage to point out a number of myths and fallacies about our perceived social reality but it felt like the end of that section was wrapped up in a rhetorical flourish of "Ah, well, whaddaya gonna do? Moving on...". The last section dealing with specifics of quantum theory got a little bit convoluted for me. I didn't care for his examples using ordinal directions to explain quantum entanglement as I felt they actually added a layer of confusion. I do plan to read some of his other books that are more focused on that topic though.

Nick says

What started out as an extremely interesting philosophical read with a pop culture twist devolved into a highly repetitive lesson straight out of a textbook. Probably should have given it 2 stars, but I did really appreciate the initial approach

La pointe de la sauce says

Does colour exist in the dark?

A couple of weeks ago I started discussion with Greg about our perception of reality. At the end of the discussion I had the distinct impression that I wasn't putting my point across effectively due to, I don't know, let's say pure ignorance on the subject, whereas Greg effectively used a number of arguments to show that my view of the intrinsic nature of colour is problematic.

Hmmm, after reading this book I still disagree. Below I have made up a jumbled up summary of why:

'There is simply nothing we can point to, hang our hats on and say this is real. '

In the Republic, what Plato is saying is that we can never hope to truly understand the nature of reality, because we are locked in the prison of our mortal senses. We are prisoners in the cave.

Without your mind, or consciousness what do you have? Photons of different energies and wavelengths, chemicals containing distinctive groups of atoms, physical objects with certain surface properties and compressions and rarefactions in the air. In none of this physics and chemistry can we find colour, taste, scent, softness or melody. They are all qualities produced in our minds all producing different patterns of electrical stimulation in the brain.

This does not mean that our perception is the only form of representations of reality. We have to accept that other realities exist which are as legitimate as our perception of the representation of reality.

What becomes obvious is that our entire world is based on perception. It is our perceptions that is the reality. It is impossible for us to ever have knowledge of a reality that we can't perceive and so it is therefore seems meaningless to speculate about the existence of such an independent reality.

If we were to believe in a reality independent of perception then We can only hold on to the idea of an independently existing primary material substance, but at the cost of having to accept that we can ascribe no independently real properties to it, and can never hope to explain how this substance might give rise to the perceptions we have of it.

The argument that Berkeley makes is that the primary qualities of a material object cannot exist without it's secondary qualities of shape/colour etc. We cannot conceive of objects possessing shape but not colour, for example. 'Perception is reality'.

So, we can have no knowledge of what objects are 'really like', NEITHER can we have knowledge of the connections between them - cause and effect exists only in our mind, and so does time for that matter. - Kant's view.

Now, that sums up where philosophers stand at the moment from Plato to Aristotle to Descartes to Berkeley to Kant to Hume and on and on...

Is there a defense against Descartes' demon or Kant's intuition?

What do the Physicists think, surely they will give some credence to the reality which they deal with everyday in measurements and calculations. Just a few questions should clear this up, we don't need the answer to 'life the universe and everything', Just what is matter?

Copenhagen Interpretation categorically denies that there is anything to be gained from thinking that we can ever discover the true nature of physical objects 'as they really are'.

It insists that properties of fundamental objects like photons or electrons do not exist until they are exposed to something with which they can interact, such as a measuring device.

The first area of conflict is quickly summarized. If quantum states are not determined until the quantum objects have undergone some kind of interaction, such as a measurement, then how is the quantum state of the universe determined? Quantum theory demands something 'outside' with which it can interact, but if everything there is is in the universe then there is nothing outside the universe with which it can interact. There is nothing outside the universe to collapse the wave function. Unless we want to get theological, there is no 'observer' outside the universe to make it real. Is there?

Fuck fuck fuck fuck...

Blindsight-

"You're blind," he said without turning. "Did you know that?"

"I didn't."

"You. Me. Everyone." He interlocked his fingers and clenched as if in prayer, hard enough to whiten the knuckles. Only then did I notice: no cigarette.

"Vision's mostly a lie anyway," he continued. "We don't really see anything except a few hi-res degrees where the eye focuses. Everything else is just peripheral blur, just— light and motion. Motion draws the

focus. And your eyes jiggle all the time, did you know that, Keeton? Saccades, they're called. Blurs the image, the movement's way too fast for the brain to integrate so your eye just—shuts down between pauses. It only grabs these isolated freeze-frames, but your brain edits out the blanks and stitches an — an illusion of continuity into your head."

He turned to face me. "And you know what's really amazing? If something only moves during the gaps, your brain just—ignores it. It's invisible."

Brains are survival engines, not truth detectors. If self-deception promotes fitness, the brain lies. Stops noticing— irrelevant things. Truth never matters. Only fitness. By now you don't experience the world as it exists at all. You experience a simulation built from assumptions. Shortcuts. Lies. Whole species is agnosiac by default

Perhaps we are really living in Descartes' dream world.

Amanda says

I made a mistake with this one and listened to the audio book. There was just way too much information to take in while attempting to commute to and from work. Read the book.

The book is basically an attempt to take a look at what we perceive our reality to be. The Matrix is actually referenced quite a bit. The first section, Money, really focuses on the reality that society has set up and the reality that everyone buys in to. That rectangle with Andrew Jackson on it that you exchange for goods? That only means \$20 because society has deemed it as such, ergo that is our reality. This was an interesting section mainly because we really do take a lot for granted because we just accept that this reality and the social norms are what we must accept.

Colours is the next section and it's about what we perceive with our senses (Does color exist in the dark?). The we get into Light and some physics that I will admit lost me for a while. Here is where an actual book would have made a lot of difference.

While Baggott does reference the Matrix, this book uses the movie as a jumping off point. The philosophy and physics discussed could lead to some very interesting thoughts and conversations. Again, the audio book was well narrated but not how I should have read this book.
