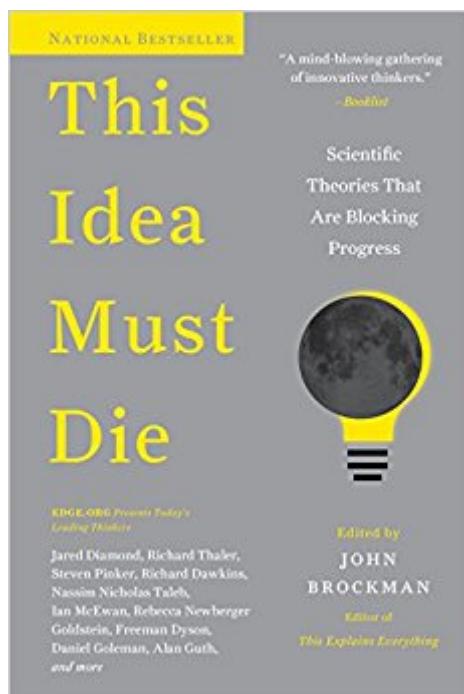


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# This Idea Must Die: Scientific Theories That Are Blocking Progress (Edge Question Series)



## Synopsis

The bestselling editor of *This Explains Everything* brings together 175 of the world's most brilliant minds to tackle Edge.org's 2014 question: What scientific idea has become a relic blocking human progress? Each year, John Brockman, publisher of Edge.org—the world's smartest website (The Guardian) challenges some of the world's greatest scientists, artists, and philosophers to answer a provocative question crucial to our time. In 2014 he asked 175 brilliant minds to ponder: What scientific idea needs to be put aside in order to make room for new ideas to advance? The answers are as surprising as they are illuminating. In :Steven Pinker dismantles the working theory of human behaviorRichard Dawkins renounces essentialismSherry Turkle reevaluates our expectations of artificial intelligenceGeoffrey West challenges the concept of a "Theory of Everything"•Andrei Linde suggests that our universe and its laws may not be as unique as we thinkMartin Rees explains why scientific understanding is a limitless goalNina Jablonski argues to rid ourselves of the concept of raceAlan Guth rethinks the origins of the universeHans Ulrich Obrist warns against glorifying unlimited economic growthand much more.Profound, engaging, thoughtful, and groundbreaking, *This Idea Must Die* will change your perceptions and understanding of our world today . . . and tomorrow.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Praise for *This Idea Must Die*: "Take a look. No matter who you are, you are bound to find

something that will drive you crazy. (New York Times) "Garrulous and argumentative. ... Brockman's formula is tried and tested. Better still, it shows no sign of getting old. (New Scientist) "This Idea Must Die is an excellent gathering of thoughts, rants and lamentations to add to your book list. (Forbes) "Discern[s] the zeitgeist of ideas with which some of our era's greatest minds are tussling. ... Profound. ... Provocative. ... Mind-stretching. (Brain Pickings) "Fascinating. ... Thought-provoking. (Science News) "A fascinating smorgasbord of 175 short essays about every field and facet of research. (Science News) "Brockman succeeds in presenting scientific work that will appeal to a variety of readers, no matter their background. (Publishers Weekly) Praise for Edge: "Physics, statistics, robotics, linguistics, medicine-all are zestfully scrutinized in this exuberant, mind-blowing gathering of innovative thinkers. (Booklist) "An epicenter of bleeding-edge insight across science, technology, and beyond. (Atlantic Monthly) "The brightest minds in the known universe. (Vanity Fair) "A forum for the world's most brilliant minds. (The Observer (UK)) "A provocative and informative compilation. (Library Journal)

Reporting from the cutting edge of scientific discovery, today's visionary thinkers target the greatest roadblocks to innovation. Few truly new ideas are developed without first abandoning old ones. In the past, discoveries often had to wait for the rise of the next generation to see questions in a new light and let go of old truisms. Today, in a world that is defined by a rapid rate of change, staying on the cutting edge has as much to do with shedding outdated notions as adopting new ones. In this spirit, John Brockman, publisher of the online salon Edge.org ("the world's smartest website" • The Guardian), asked 175 of the world's most influential scientists, economists, artists, and philosophers: What scientific idea is ready for retirement? Jared Diamond explores the diverse ways that new ideas emerge \* Nassim Nicholas Taleb takes down the standard deviation \* Richard Thaler and novelist Ian McEwan reveal the usefulness of "bad" ideas \* Steven Pinker dismantles the working theory of human behavior \* Richard Dawkins renounces essentialism \* Sherry Turkle reevaluates our expectations of artificial intelligence \* Physicist Andrei Linde suggests that our universe and its laws may not be as unique as we think \* Martin Rees explains why scientific understanding is a limitless goal \* Alan Guth rethinks the origins of the universe \* Sam Harris argues that our definition of science is too narrow \* Nobel Prize winner Frank Wilczek disputes the division between mind and matter \* Lawrence Krauss challenges the notion that the

laws of physics were preordained \* plus contributions from Daniel Goleman, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Nicholas Carr, Rebecca Newberger Goldstein, Matt Ridley, Stewart Brand, Sean Carroll, Daniel C. Dennett, Helen Fisher, Douglas Rushkoff, Lee Smolin, Kevin Kelly, Freeman Dyson, and others.

I was really looking forward to this. I had imagined it was a half dozen or dozen essays from some of the renowned authors cited in the blurbs. Well, sure, it could hardly be a comprehensive essay from any of them, but it would be provocative light reading leading to more in-depth adventures, I hoped. Imagine my disappointment when it arrived and had nearly 200 essays! A few are one or two paragraphs, the most complete about two and a half pages! I've looked at about 20 mostly from people I know or subjects I follow. Based on that sample I can state what is perhaps obvious: no really informative content on subjects like the mind/matter controversy or the nature of science can be presented in such a format. In fact some of them, for instance Dennet on consciousness, are just gobblegook, so why did he bother? I'm giving it a 3 because if you're prepared for what it is, I can see reading it in an airplane or something. Otherwise, save your money. My mistake in not being up on pop intellectualism; it seems to be one of a series of such collections of "essays".

I knew it was micro-essays, but you'd think that they could at least have a bit more content to them. Most of them felt like they were written as a half-baked ramble that slipped out after a dinner party in which the author drank too much wine and received too much encouragement. The claim that STEM majors need more liberal arts background is all too apparent in this compilation, as many of the essays were almost incomprehensible or stale (even at 3 pages!). However, I did thoroughly enjoy Jared Diamond's pokes at the very question Edge.org posed, and Nowak's sore jab at "the cult" of inclusive fitness researchers (if you don't know about that whole fiasco with the petition against his work, it's a juicy piece of scientist poo-flinging). I still like the idea. It is a conflicting set of teasers of "well-supported" opinions from scientists in diverse disciplines, aka an Ivy League Scientist gossip mag. Or, rather, it's a snippet of 175 scientists' views, allowing one to decide whether or not to completely avoid that scientist or follow up on their work. Daniel Goleman still pisses me off, and it's nice to have that affirmed after 10 years, for example. Overall, 3 stars. Mostly because it entertained me for the evening and gave me a few scientists to look into. Yet what sounded like insightful criticisms of paradigms fell very flat most of the time, and nothing really knocked my socks off, so I didn't learn as much as I'd hoped I would. I recommend reading the following essays from the book (or at least, I thought they were more coherent, well thought or nice

contributions): "Indivi-Duality" Nigel Goldenfeld "The Universe Began in a State of Extraordinarily Low Entropy" Alan Guth (entropy is always fun) "Entropy" Bruce Parker (entropy is always fun pt. 2, but this guy doesn't get it) "The Uncertainty Principle" Kai Krause "Big Data" Gary Marcus (especially in conjunction with "The Scientific Method") "Bias Is Always Bad" Tom Griffiths "Unbridled Scientific and Technological Optimism" Stuart Pimm (though a bit weak at the end) "Inclusive Fitness" Martin Nowak (just for the giggles) "New Ideas Triumph by Replacing Old Ones" Jared Diamond (also for giggles)

This book has put me on to so many new trails. And relieved my anxiety about being skeptical about many accepted 'truths'. I first encountered the editor in his book 'By the Late John Brockman' back in the early 80's. It was a book carefully loaned and jealously owned. As I recall, the first lines were 'Man is dead.' He's been on the cutting edge of critical pop philosophy for a long time. Here he brings together many of the best thinkers of our day and invites them to put a spike in one idea they think has outlived its usefulness. In many cases the mea culpa is explicit, and in many others it is subtly betrayed.

This is a great series. Choose a question broad enough for many people from different disciplines to answer and see what happens. I have had the same thoughts and nice to see experts agree (or not) with me. I think some go down different paths than I thought. Certainly the idea of that just because ideas are old, does not mean we should continue. For example: Scientific Method. Still a staple in teaching, but not a real problem is tricky and while the paper is written showing an orderly path from idea, hypothesis, experiment to theory, the reality is a lot of messy lab work and discarding the original problem and finally publishing what one can do/say. Maybe some careful/tricky thoughts that do not seem "scientific". You will not like of this book, but it will make you think.

The most interesting book in my summer list! The format is simple: a long series of very short essays by renowned scientists and thinkers on what makes science advance. You can read them in order or flip through the pages randomly. There are a few - very few! - bland and disappointing entries; but there are many more gems. All in all a recommended reading.

This collection of essays challenged my understanding of what's what in science at the moment. I'm not quite finished yet, as I can't read more than one essay at a time. When one contributor challenges one notion and the next contributor challenges its opposite, it's too mind-bending for me

all at once. Maybe I'm too old. This is well worth reading for anyone interested in the current state of scientific understanding. I may update the rating when I'm finished.

This is a good book for anyone with a scientific mind, but is also written well enough for a lay person to read. It covers things some of us take for granted because we were taught the wrong thing back in the day.... I gave it as a gift and the person who received it is bad about reading books. But he did read and enjoy this one.

Good concept - uneven writing, but that's to be expected with this type of book. Some of the authors explained the favorite idea to kill and why it was bad. Some just assumed that everyone was familiar with the idea and why it should be killed. And some just thought that everyone who disagreed with them was an idiot. It was an interesting snapshot none-the-less.

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