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But What If We're Wrong?: Thinking About The Present As If It Were The Past



Synopsis

New York Times bestselling author Chuck Klosterman asks questions that are profound in their simplicity: How certain are we about our understanding of gravity? How certain are we about our understanding of time? What will be the defining memory of rock music, five hundred years from today? How seriously should we view the content of our dreams? How seriously should we view the content of television? Are all sports destined for extinction? Is it possible that the greatest artist of our era is currently unknown (or a "weirder still" widely known, but entirely disrespected)? Is it possible that we've overrated democracy? And perhaps most disturbing, is it possible that we've reached the end of knowledge? Klosterman visualizes the contemporary world as it will appear to those who'll perceive it as the distant past. Kinetically slingshotting through a broad spectrum of objective and subjective problems, *But What If We're Wrong?* is built on interviews with a variety of creative thinkers—George Saunders, David Byrne, Jonathan Lethem, Kathryn Schulz, Neil deGrasse Tyson, Brian Greene, Junot Díaz, Amanda Petrusich, Ryan Adams, Nick Bostrom, Dan Carlin, and Richard Linklater, among others—interwoven with the type of high-wire humor and nontraditional analysis only Klosterman would dare to attempt. It's a seemingly impossible achievement: a book about the things we cannot know, explained as if we did. It's about how we live now, once "now" has become "then."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"But What If We're Wrong?" is an excellent concept with some critical flaws. This seems to be the case with a lot of Klosterman books. Don't get me wrong: I am a Klosterman fan, and I admire his

ability to think critically about pop culture subjects. All of his writing is engaging. But this book falls short in its exposition, is often dry and plodding, and seems occasionally to miss obvious explanations for topics which he frames as undiscovered. His early thoughts on gravity, for example, make an interesting argument for science as a form of religion. In other words, that our understanding of science in five hundred years will likely be vastly different from now, and thus the things which we reflexively accept as unquestionable truths today will likely be understood differently far into the future. We believe most of science because we are told to believe it. But his argument for this -- with gravity as the example -- is wanting. Klosterman reasons that because our understanding of science has included beliefs held longer than we have understood gravity and have now been proven false or changed, that our understanding of gravity is thus destined to change as well. But this dismisses ancillary advances in our ability to understand the value of replication in science, and it also dismisses the changing value of time in understanding the pace of cultural evolution. In other words, technological and scientific advancement occurs now over a smaller time frame than it did a thousand years ago, and will in a thousand years occur more rapidly than now. It is not an A-to-B comparison. For example, it took nearly the entire history of human knowledge to build our first understandings of computers, but less than a century to advance computer technology beyond a human's innate ability.

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