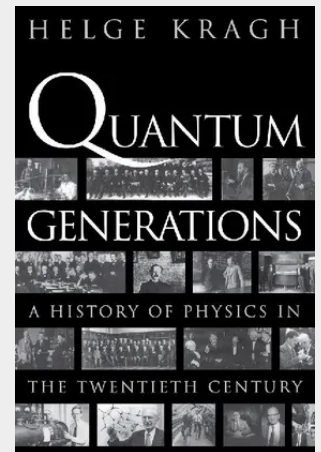


Quantum Generations

A History of Physics in the Twentieth Century

At the end of the nineteenth century, some physicists believed that the basic principles underlying their subject were already known, and that physics in the future would only consist of filling in the details. They could hardly have been more wrong. The past century has seen the rise of quantum mechanics, relativity, cosmology, particle physics, and solid-state physics, among other fields. These subjects have fundamentally changed our understanding of space, time, and matter. They have also transformed daily life, inspiring a technological revolution that has included the development of radio, television, lasers, nuclear power, and computers. In *Quantum Generations*, Helge Kragh, one of the world's leading historians of physics, presents a sweeping account of these extraordinary achievements of the past one hundred years. The first comprehensive one-volume history of twentieth-century physics, the book takes us from the discovery of X rays in the mid-1890s to superstring theory in the 1990s. Unlike most previous histories of physics, written either from a scientific perspective or from a social and institutional perspective, *Quantum Generations* combines both approaches. Kragh writes about pure science with the expertise of a trained physicist, while keeping the content accessible to nonspecialists and paying careful attention to practical uses of science, ranging from compact disks to bombs. As a historian, Kragh skillfully outlines the social and economic contexts that have shaped the field in the twentieth century. He writes, for example, about the impact of the two world wars, the fate of physics under Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin, the role of military research, the emerging leadership of the United States, and the backlash against science that began in the 1960s. He also shows how the revolutionary discoveries of scientists ranging from Einstein, Planck, and Bohr to Stephen Hawking have been built on the great traditions of earlier centuries. Combining a mastery of detail with a sure sense of the broad contours of historical change, Kragh has written a fitting tribute to the scientists who have played such a decisive role in the making of the modern world.

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