

A Skeptical History of Numbers

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Abstract: Quantum theory, virtual particles, curved space, and dark energy all emerged from a critical assessment of the foundations of physics in the 20th century. In the same period, a foundational crisis threatened the edifice of mathematics itself. Focusing on the concept of numbers, this talk will recap some of the great leaps of imagination in the history of mathematical thought, describe the foundational crisis, critique the attempts to rescue certainty, and assess the current state of affairs.

