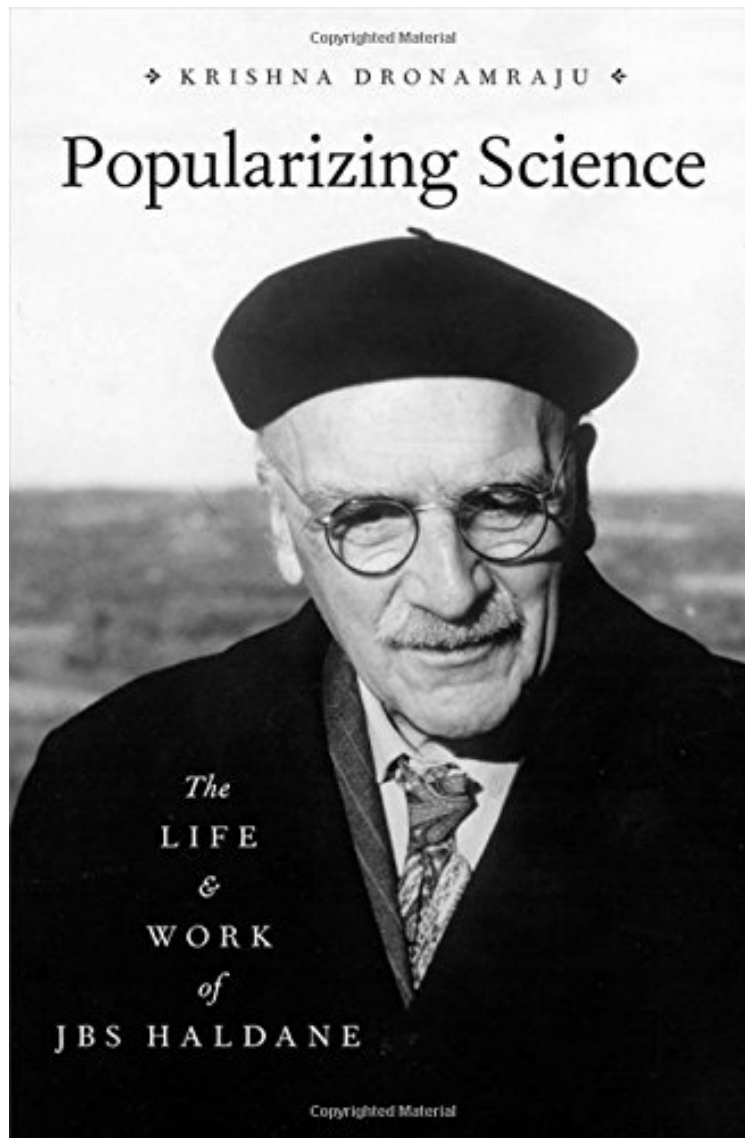


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Popularizing Science: The Life and Work of JBS Haldane

Krishna Dronamraju

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Krishna Dronamraju : Popularizing Science: The Life and Work of JBS Haldane before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Popularizing Science: The Life and Work of JBS Haldane:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Popularizing JBS By Art Shapiro J.B.S. Haldane was a brilliant, erratic and difficult man who is remembered for both his contributions to science--particularly mathematical population genetics--and his personality, including his politics. He was one of a group of important British scientists

who became members of the Communist Party and forcefully worked to advance its aims. This generated an extraordinary case of cognitive dissonance, because even as Haldane was editing and writing for the "Daily Worker" (in the process generating some of the most clearheaded, comprehensible science writing ever done for the laity), the Russian regime he loved so much was engaged in persecuting and effectively destroying his own science of genetics. The question of what Haldane knew and when he knew it inevitably comes to mind. By the time he took action the story had been thoroughly vetted by the American Conway Zirkle and JBS' fellow Briton Julian Huxley, and Haldane's silence had become an embarrassment. Having joined the Party with a great flourish, Haldane ultimately resigned quietly and moved to India, where he became a convert to Hinduism, a religion he found agreeably dialectical. The author of this book, Krishna Dronamraju, probably knew Haldane as well as any of his colleagues and is pretty much the only one left to write an intimate portrait of the man. But this is rather a peculiar biography, written in disjointed paragraphs, with considerable repetition and lack of transitions. It contains many anecdotes I had never encountered before but also has glaring omissions and really should be read as a companion to "JBS: The Life and Work of JBS Haldane" (R. Clark, 1968) and "Truth Will Out," the memoir of his first wife Charlotte (1950). Putting the three books together will give a fairly balanced view of the man and his work. The title "Popularizing Science" really refers only to a small part of Haldane's work; the book ranges much farther afield, but I don't recall such a choppy read since the last time I tried reading Nietzsche.

J.B.S. Haldane (1892-1964) is widely appreciated as one of the greatest and most influential British scientists of the 20th century, making significant contributions to genetics, physiology, biochemistry, biometry, cosmology, and other sciences. More remarkable, then, is the fact that Haldane had no formal qualification in science. He made frequent appearances in the media, making pronouncements on a variety of poignant topics including mining disasters, meteorites, politics, and the economy, and was a popular scientific essay writer. Haldane also was famed for conducting painful experiments on himself, including several instances in which he permanently injured himself. A staunch Marxist and convert to Hinduism, Haldane lived a diverse, lively and interesting life that is still revered by today's science community. A biography of Haldane has not been attempted since 1968, and that book provided an incomplete account of the man's scientific achievement. "The Life and Works of J.B.S. Haldane" serves to fix this glaring omission, providing a complete biographical sketch written by Krishna Dronamraju, one of the last living men to have worked personally with Haldane. A new genre of biographies of 20th-century scientists has come into being, and thus far works have been written about men like Einstein, Oppenheimer, Bernal, Galton, and many more; the inclusion of Haldane within this genre is an absolute necessity. Dronamraju evaluates Haldane's social and political background, as well as his scientific creativity and accomplishments. Haldane embodies a generation of intellectuals who believed and promoted knowledge for its own sake, and that spirit of scientific curiosity and passion is captured in this biography.

"He was an immensely successful populariser of science and proselytiser for it, while strongly emphasising that scientific advance may demand difficult ethical choices ... He is well served by Krishna Dronamraju in this largely chronological biography, the first for nearly 50 years." -- Richard Joyner, Times Higher Education "provide[s] solid information about the life of one of the most important and interesting scientists of the past century. It makes it clear why, like everyone I have known who was acquainted with Haldane, Dronamraju is overwhelmed with admiration for his abilities, despite his often difficult behaviour. Haldane's contributions to biology will be remembered long after his personal and political foibles are forgotten." -- Current Biology "I have just received your book on, Popularizing Science : The Life and Work of JBS Haldane. I am so happy that the remarkable contributions of JBS Haldane have been chronicled. He was a scientist who was committed to spreading the scientific temper and ethos. This book has captured the multifaceted achievements of JBS Haldane." Dr. M.S. Swaminathan, F.R.S., Chairman, M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation "In Dronamraju's 384-page, largely chronological biography of his beloved mentor, he captures the essence of a highly influential scientist who was a consummate polymath ... While Dronamraju's latest work took only a year to write, he says, the book reflects a long careers worth of research, thinking and synthesis. He says simply, I spent all my life on it." -- John Hopkins Medicine Magazine About the Author Krishna Dronamraju is an Indian-born geneticist and President of the Foundation for Genetic Research in Houston, Texas. Dr. Dronamraju completed his PhD from Indian Statistical Institute in Calcutta under the guidance of JBS Haldane. Dronamraju also completed advanced training at University College London and Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, as well as a postdoctoral fellowship in genetics at the University of Alberta.