

Genetics in Minutes
Tom Jackson

A simple survey – adequate for most purposes. Totally politically correct

This is a book of single page chapters. The idea is that if you can't explain it in one page, your reader will give up.

Attempting to summarize complex concepts in a few paragraphs is a very valuable exercise. It requires that the author understand the material quite well himself. It appears that Tom Jackson has a good mastery of the material.

The core concepts in genetics have been explained so often that every school child is somewhat familiar with them. The double helix, cell division, and the inheritance of half the genome from each parent.

These single-page essays do a masterful job of explaining the mechanics. What is the structure of DNA? RNA? How do cells reproduce? What happens when a sperm fertilizes an egg? What are the first stages of development of the embryo? I expect that most readers will have some recollection of their past learning on these subjects. What Jackson does is to pull it together in a brief, cogent description.

Genetic concepts lie at the heart of the theory of evolution. Evolution in turn explains the nature of all of the lifeforms we see around us. How did they grow to be different from one another? How deep are there commonalities? How do species adapt themselves to their environments? Jackson does a good job of explaining all of this.

When it comes to people, Jackson faces a dilemma. Science would lead him in one direction, politics in another. He generally chooses to go with the latter, simply overlooking the fact that evolution, working through the genetic mechanisms that he describes, has made people and populations of people quite different over the course of evolutionary time. This is not a fatal flaw in the book. The interested reader with a desire to know can dig deeper than the single page essays. I would modestly propose perusing my other Amazon reviews as a starting point. In the meantime, Jackson's book is certainly a worthwhile reference for the educated layman.