



Genomes and What to Make of Them

Barry Barnes, John Dupré

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The announcement in 2003 that the Human Genome Project had completed its map of the entire human genome was heralded as a stunning scientific breakthrough: our first full picture of the basic building blocks of human life. Since then, boasts about the benefits—and warnings of the dangers—of genomics have remained front-page news, with everyone agreeing that genomics has the potential to radically alter life as we know it.

For the nonscientist, the claims and counterclaims are dizzying—what does it really mean to understand the genome? Barry Barnes and John Dupré offer an answer to that question and much more in *Genomes and What to Make of Them*, a clear and lively account of the genomic revolution and its promise. The book opens with a brief history of the science of genetics and genomics, from Mendel to Watson and Crick and all the way up to Craig Venter; from there the authors delve into the use of genomics in determining evolutionary paths—and what it can tell us, for example, about how far we really have come from our ape ancestors. Barnes and Dupré then consider both the power and risks of genetics, from the economic potential of plant genomes to overblown claims that certain human genes can be directly tied to such traits as intelligence or homosexuality. Ultimately, the authors argue, we are now living with a new knowledge as powerful in its way as nuclear physics, and the stark choices that face us—between biological warfare and gene therapy, a new eugenics or a new agricultural revolution—will demand the full engagement of both scientists and citizens.

Written in straightforward language but without denying the complexity of the issues, *Genomes and What to Make of Them* is both an up-to-date primer and a blueprint for the future.

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