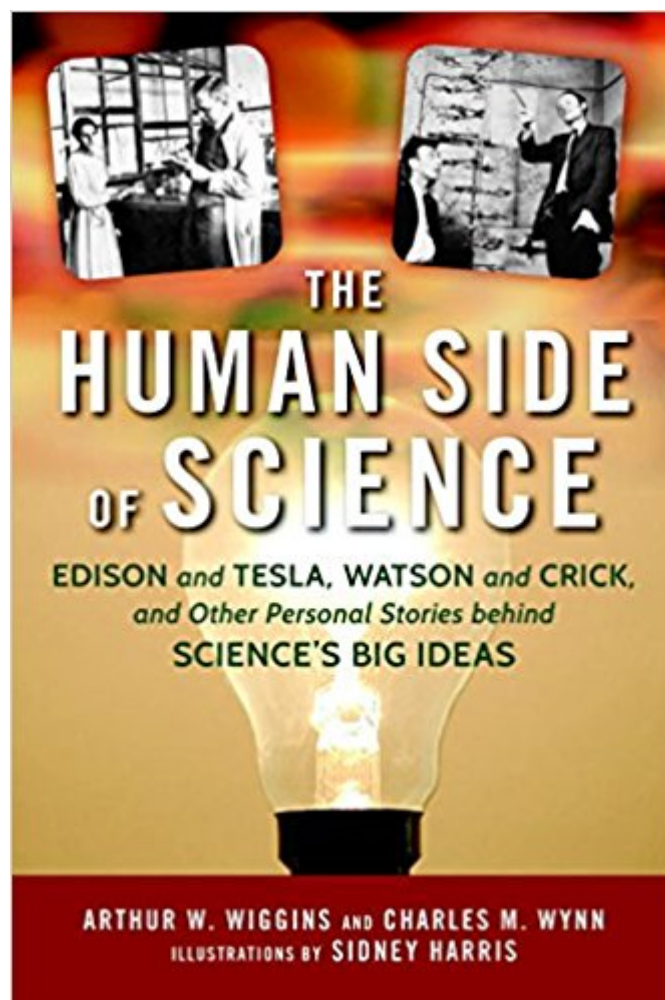




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The Human Side Of Science: Edison And Tesla, Watson And Crick, And Other Personal Stories Behind Science's Big Ideas



Synopsis

This lively and humorous book focuses attention on the fact that science is a human enterprise. The reader learns about the foibles and quirks as well as the admirable ingenuity and impressive accomplishments of famous scientists who made some of the greatest discoveries of the past and present. Examples abound: James Watson and Francis Crick formed a legendary partnership that led to the discovery of DNA, but they essentially ignored the contribution of female colleague Rosalind Franklin. Later, in the race to sequence the human genome, Watson criticized J. Craig Venter's technique as a process that "could be run by monkeys." • Nikola Tesla once worked for Thomas Edison, but then quit after a dispute about a bonus. Robert Hooke accused Isaac Newton of stealing his ideas about optics. Plato declared that the works of Democritus should be burned. With tongue-in-cheek illustrations by renowned science cartoonist Sidney Harris, this book takes the reader behind the scenes of scientific research to shine new light on the all-too-human people who do science.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Far from being a dry treatise, this book is thoroughly enjoyable reading and frequently eye opening. The ways some great scientific discoveries or inventions happened or almost didn't happen are wonderfully summed up on the human side--and it is amazing some of them occurred at all, because of squabbles, jealousies, angers, romances, affairs, competitions and even dirty tricks among experimenters, researchers, thinkers and other great minds that we hold in high esteem

today. In short, the eminent thinkers behaved pretty much like the rest of us when they weren't pondering big ideas, big mysteries or big breakthroughs. This text from the authors' introduction gives a good summation of what's in store inside this fine book: "...some people believe science operates in a cut-and-dried fashion, with rational logic always prevailing. Those people are mistaken. There are elephants in science's rooms. All the steps in the scientific method involve (italics)people(end italics). And you know what that means. The seemingly well-defined procedural steps of the scientific method are, when put into practice, actually fuzzy--and subject to the full range of human foibles." The authors don't just focus on the negative side of the human equation, fortunately. There also are looks at friendship-based collaborations among scientists and others that brought solid and beneficial results. And there are vignettes that help bring some of the great minds into sharper focus as connected, positive human beings. Albert Einstein, for example, was an outspoken opponent of racism against African-Americans and joined the NAACP in 1942. He also did not let fame and awards go to his head. He once insisted: "Whoever undertakes to set himself up as a judge of Truth and Knowledge is shipwrecked by the laughter of the gods." (My thanks to Prometheus Books for providing a review copy.)

Wiggins, and his colleagues Charles Wynn and Sydney Harris, have written and illustrated another winning popular science book for non-scientists; although I know that many scientists would thoroughly enjoy the book as well. There's not an equation in the book -- well almost none if you don't count $E=mc^2$ -- to distract the reader from the fast moving story lines. Reading about the human, every day foibles of scientists during their discovery process and in their personal lives (the good and bad interactions) I found fascinating. To realize that they are human beings (as the title implies) and not superheroes is also very nice to read about in a well-researched work and not just as anecdotal accounts. I was also fascinated by the connections from one scientist to another that I was never aware of until Wiggins put it all together. I highly recommend *The Human Side of Science* to science lovers of any age.

Over the centuries, in trying to push back the frontiers of scientific knowledge, some humans have taken giant leaps while others have badly stumbled, but most can be found somewhere in between. In this mesmerizing and authoritative book, the authors have recounted a great many stories from the archives of scientific accomplishments with a slant on, well, their human side. Consequently, these include quite a number of mini-biographies of key individuals, as well as brief descriptions or comments on their personalities and their interactions with their peers. Nevertheless, the scientific

principles/discoveries involved are very well described as well. The prose is very clear, highly accessible, lively, often humorous and immensely captivating. And, in my opinion, the Sidney Harris cartoons that are included throughout the book add a delightful touch. Anyone can enjoy this wonderful book, but science enthusiasts like me should be in for a special treat.

Familiar names and great achievements we all recognize, other facts perhaps forgotten, come to life in this extensive, terse account of the Western World's achievements propelling mankind into mastery and understanding of our universe. Drawings and sidelights embellish what is basically a story of individuals, their achievements their lives and times. Informative as well as a great read. Suitable as a reference for dates, places, and persons from ancient Greece to twenty first century. Extensive references for the curious reader looking beyond.

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