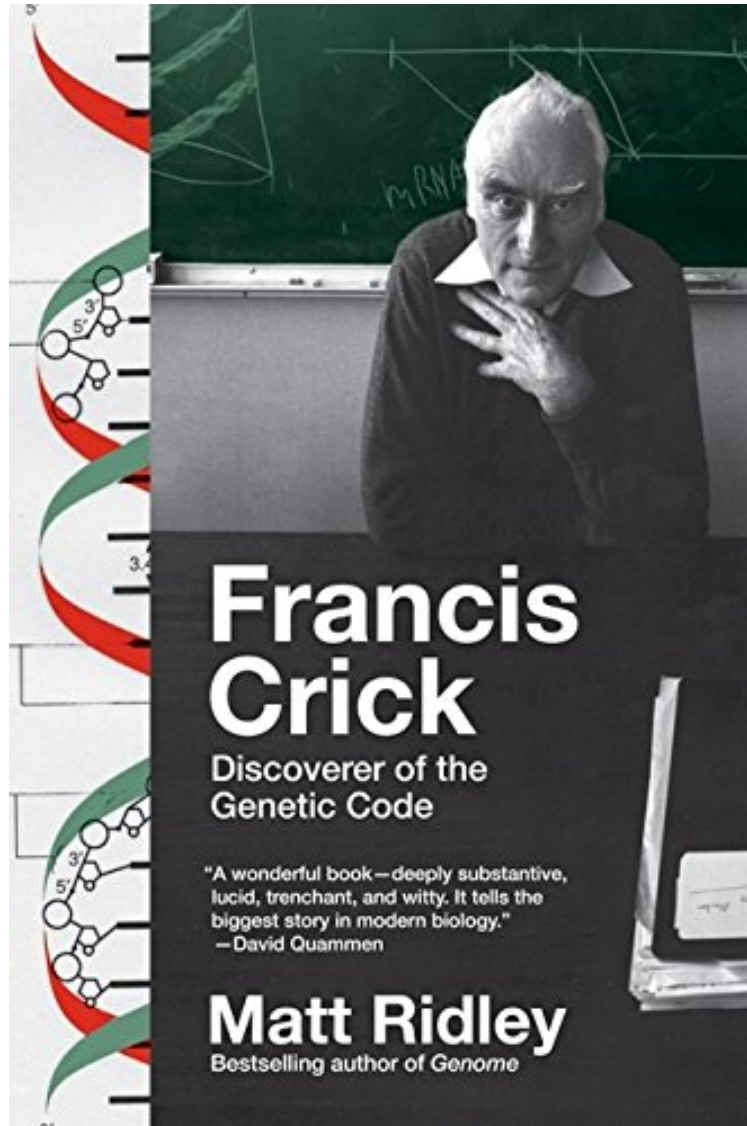


(Mobile library) Francis Crick: Discoverer of the Genetic Code (Eminent Lives)

Francis Crick: Discoverer of the Genetic Code (Eminent Lives)

Matt Ridley

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Matt Ridley : Francis Crick: Discoverer of the Genetic Code (Eminent Lives) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Francis Crick: Discoverer of the Genetic Code (Eminent Lives):

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. The great visualizer By Daniel Putman This book is an excellent contrast to The Double Helix. That book was written as if you were part of the ongoing process through the eyes of a young James Watson. It had all the strengths and weaknesses of a novelistic, real-time approach to both work and life by a young man in the early 1950s. On the other hand, though roughly the same length, this book is reflective,

carefully written, well-documented and is a third party view of the discovery process. It is also much wider in scope covering all of Francis Crick's life. As one reviewer noted, the subtitle is somewhat misleading in that, unlike the double helix, Crick (who admitted as much) was more of a synthesizer of data on the genetic code than he was a discoverer. That does not at all downplay his role in figuring out and then spelling out for the first time on paper the table for the code. But other people did most of the basic work, especially Nirenberg, Khorana and Holley who were recognized for breaking the genetic code by the Nobel Prize in 1968. As the author notes, Crick's incredible genius was to be able to visualize structures in his mind. This comes out several times in the book but most especially in the discovery of the DNA helix and in laying out the table for the code. Ridley takes the reader through Crick's thought processes as he struggles, stumbles, succeeds and lives with some of the most important work in the history of science. I found the first half of the book as interesting as *The Double Helix*. Ridley does a fine job of spelling out Crick's earlier life, his incredibly outgoing personality, his personal mannerisms that often irritated his colleagues, and his ability to do his best work through dialogue with deep intellectual partners such as Watson and Sydney Brenner. I had never known about Crick's war work and it is possible to see already his ability to visualize and get to the heart of a problem. He helped save thousands of lives of Allied soldiers and naval personnel with his work on magnetic mines. Ridley also does a nice job of showing how Crick entered biology and how he ended up at Cambridge. His relationships with Watson, Maurice Wilkins, and Rosalind Franklin are spelled out in a way that does justice to all of them. (For Franklin, it is a good counter to the Rosy of *The Double Helix*.) And the lead-up to the discovery of the helix is exceptionally well laid out for the reader. The story is so well-known that it is hard to make it fresh but Ridley does as fine a job as can be done of giving the reader through the experiences of Crick a story that makes the discovery as grand and powerful as it deserves. As another reviewer noted, the book lags in the last third or so. I do not fault the biographer for that. Crick's now famous life, though always energetic and purpose-oriented, became more a series of separate events (sailing, traveling, speeches, lab work on various projects, etc.). Crick never gave up trying and he continued reading scientific papers until his death in 2004. But his discovery opened a door that so many other scientists went through that Crick himself was never in the same intellectual situation that he was in earlier. He continued interesting work in science, especially in the area of consciousness, but it was in many ways a different ballgame. The technological and conceptual changes, as well as the number of people working in the field (whether molecular biology or neuroscience), were a different scientific environment than the situation in the early 1950s. Ridley telescopes a lot of material in the last few chapters. While this might be viewed as a weakness, it also represents an attempt to present the huge variety of interests that Crick had later in life in a way that does not require a much longer book. For a 213 page biography and as part of the Harper Perennial Eminent Lives series, this is an excellent book. The only real defect is that it needs an index. Otherwise, I highly recommend it as an enjoyable and intellectually stimulating read.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Francis Crick: a race for the secret of life By Saak V. Ovsepian Discovery of the secret of the gene (and 'life' according to Crick) is undoubtedly one of the most fascinating episodes of the history of science! Within less than a decade the efforts of a handful of young scientists reduces one of the greatest and most ambiguous paradigms of life-sciences - GENE - into a simple, elegant and intuitive scheme called the Double Helix (James Watson)! In his book 'Francis Crick: Discoverer of the genetic code' Matt Ridley did an excellent job in making accessible and comprehensible the race for the double helix and code of the life in one! A tremendous amount of home work has been done by the author in getting into the heart of the vortex, to its very eye - the genius of Francis Crick. With Crick's astonishing ant's instinct for the world of tiny and an ability for seeing order in the small, the story culminates in one of the greatest discovery in life-sciences of all times - the structure of the DNA. No long and boring pages in the book! No insignificant episodes! No strangers! All is important and everyone has its critical mass and saying. Even the 'useless scientific papers' contain hints towards the big discovery (according to Crick and good news for the most of scientists). The book is earthy, interesting and realistic (one of the main strength of this story as well as James Watson's 'Double Helix') with real players guided by emotions, intuitions and by cold reason of calculation. A vivid and insightful life account of the twentieth century most important biologist.

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. A Life Devoted to the Intellect By Werner Cohn I was heartened to read in this book that Francis Crick steadfastly refused to accept honorary degrees and other such dubious signs of distinction that academics like to bestow on one another. Of course Crick received the Nobel prize, so it was easy for him to snub his nose at the honor-grubbing of his lesser colleagues. Still, his behavior in this area is exemplary, and reassuring. While I got this glimpse of Crick's personality, I did not learn as much as I had hoped about DNA. That is due to my faulty background in science at least as much as to any fault in Ridley's prose. But Ridley did inspire me to get back to Watson's "Double Helix," and eventually, I hope, I will arrive at more of an insight into the intellectual revolution that was brought about by Crick and Watson. As others have noted, the book - so full of names and places - cries out for photographs. There are none. And it cries out for an index, of which there is none. Please, Atlas Books, relax your purse strings a bit and provide such things for the second edition.

Part of the acclaimed Eminent Lives series, Francis Crick is the first biography of the eminent scientist, co-discoverer of the double helix structure of DNA. Written by Matt Ridley, the award-winning author of the national bestseller

Genome, Francis Crick traces his life from middle class mediocrity in the English Midlands through a lackluster education and six years designing magnetic mines for the Royal Navy to his leap into biology at the age of 31 and his enormous success, providing a considerably more complete and colorful portrait of Crick than has existed before. (New York Times)

.com Francis Crick, who died at the age of eighty-eight in 2004, will be bracketed with Galileo, Darwin, and Einstein as one of the great scientists of all time. Between 1953 and 1966 he made and led a revolution in biology by discovering, quite literally, the secret of life: the digital cipher at the heart of heredity that distinguishes living from non-living things--the genetic code. His own discoveries--though he always worked with one other partner and did much of his thinking in conversation--include not only the double helix but the whole mechanism of protein synthesis, the three-letter nature of the code, and much of the code itself. Matt Ridley's biography traces Crick's life from middle-class mediocrity in the English Midlands, through a lackluster education and six years designing magnetic mines for the Royal Navy, to his leap into biology at the age of thirty-one. While at Cambridge, he suddenly began to display the unique visual imagination and intense tenacity of thought that would allow him to see the solutions to several great scientific conundrums--and to see them long before most biologists had even conceived of the problems. Having set out to determine what makes living creatures alive and having succeeded, he immigrated at age sixty to California and turned his attention to the second question that had fascinated him since his youth: What makes conscious creatures conscious? Time ran out before he could find the answer. Discover More Eminent Lives Freud: Inventor of the Modern Mind by Peter Kramer Muhammad: A Prophet for Our Time by Karen Armstrong Machiavelli: Philosopher of Power by Ross King George Washington: The Founding Father by Paul Johnson Thomas Jefferson: Author of America by Christopher Hitchens Alexis de Tocqueville: Democracy's Guide by Joseph Epstein From Publishers Weekly Francis Crick (1916-2004) is a natural addition to the Eminent Lives series. Best known for his codiscovery of the structure of DNA alongside James Watson, Crick is a canonical figure in modern science; award-winning British science writer Ridley (*The Agile Gene*) is an expert and distinguished author of popular books on biological science. But one wishes the strictures of this series gave Ridley more space in which to work; the prose is crisp and forthright, but he barely has enough room to recount the basic contours of Crick's voracious scientific career, leaving the reader with but a few fleeting glimpses of the man's deeper character. Readers of Watson's *The Double Helix* who pick up this book looking for a similarly idiosyncratic portrait of a scientific life will be disappointed, but one might argue that this spare, straightforward volume is a more fitting tribute to a scientist who lived a relatively modest public life while striving to understand the basic workings of life and consciousness. (June 1) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From *Scientific American* "Because of the momentous nature of his discovery Francis Crick must eventually be bracketed with Galileo, Darwin, and Einstein as one of the great scientists of all times," Ridley writes in this first biography of the codiscoverer of the structure of DNA. "He trained his mind to be exquisitely good at solving nature's puzzles using logic, had the courage to take on the biggest problems, and threw himself exuberantly into the task, never letting prejudice stand in the way of reason. Throughout, he stayed true to himself: ebullient, loquacious, charming, sceptical, tenacious." Ridley, a well-known British science writer, unfolds Crick's life from its modest beginnings on "a middle-class street in a middle-size town in the . . . English Midlands" through his uninspired physics career (six years designing magnetic mines for the Royal Navy) to his sudden switch into biology at the age of 31, when "with the bravado of a bankrupt gambler," he tried to decide what he would solve first, "the secret of the brain or the secret of life." In a stunning combination of visual and intellectual imagination, he and James Watson figured out the double helix of DNA, the secret of life. At age 60 he immigrated to California and focused his logic and energy on the nature of consciousness. He died in 2004, at 88, still working on this second quest. Editors of *Scientific American*