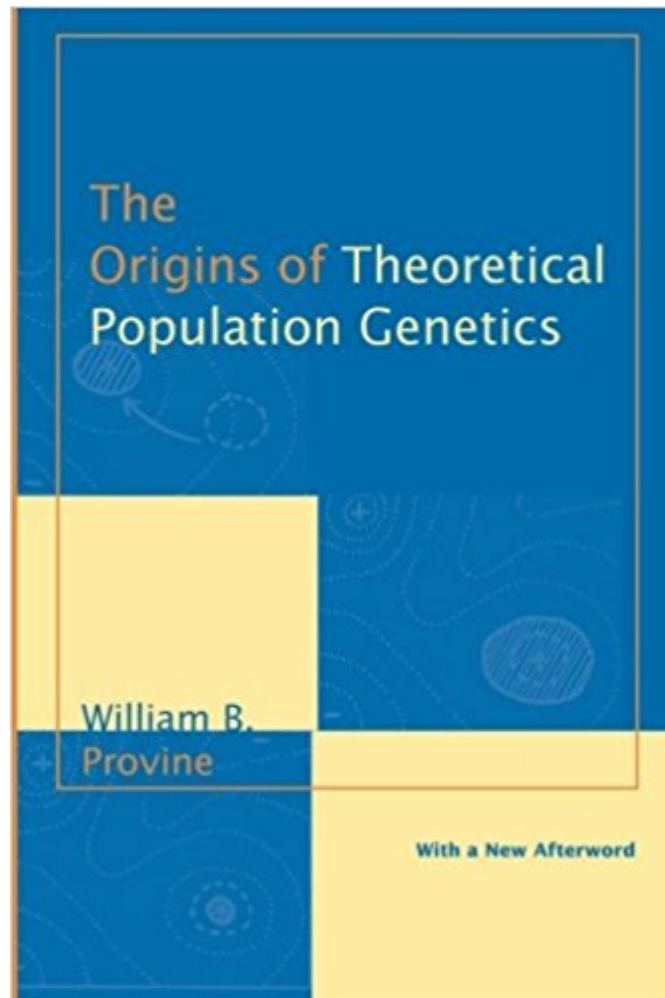




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The Origins Of Theoretical Population Genetics



Synopsis

Tracing the development of population genetics through the writings of such luminaries as Darwin, Galton, Pearson, Fisher, Haldane, and Wright, William B. Provine sheds light on this complex field as well as its bearing on other branches of biology.

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Customer Reviews

"This reprint . . . will be welcome to all those who have used the book to introduce ourselves (first) and many generations of students to aspects of the evolutionary synthesis. Provine's text was written in a clear, lucid style that made the mathematical concepts . . . as well as the evolutionary and genetic principles involved, understandable even to non-biology majors." (Garland E. Allen History of Philosophy and Life Science) --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Tracing the development of population genetics through the writings of such luminaries as Darwin, Galton, Pearson, Fisher, Haldane, and Wright, William B. Provine sheds light on this complex field as well as its bearing on other branches of biology. In a new afterword that is sure to stir discussion and controversy, Provine discusses how his beliefs about evolutionary biology have changed radically in the past 30 years. He examines the ten major assumptions in the field that were current when the book was first published and then, point- by -point, argues against them in light of more

recent research. The result is a work that is at once imbued with new life and yet remains the definitive short history of a major development in modern biology.

I read this book for leisure during my second semester of graduate school. Provine is a skilled writer; his words flow and the content is made all the more enjoyable because of it. I couldn't put this book down. The book is not terribly long (211 pages including references, etc.) and I had planned to read a little each day during my spare time. I ended up finishing it within a few hours due to how masterfully it delivered its content. If you're interested in how 20th century population genetics was engendered, read this book; it won't take more than a day or two and you'll set it down satisfied.

Excelent

'Evolution', in its biological sense, is simply any change in the frequencies of genes over time. There has never, so far as I know, been any real argument over whether such evolution occurs. The fuss, certainly ever since 1859, has always been mainly about two things: how it occurs (Does it happen solely by 'natural selection'? If so, by what mechanism(s)? Or does it happen at least partly by design?), and whether it's sufficient to provide a complete account of speciation (and sometimes the origin of life, though strictly speaking this point is not part of the theory of evolution itself). Not that you'd know this from most public debate on the subject. If there's one topic guaranteed to generate letters to the editor written at a grade-school level or below from people who ought to know better (on both sides), this is surely it. Well, if everything you (think you) know about this debate comes from listening to somebody denounce it from the pulpit -- or for that matter from watching 'Inherit the Wind' and/or reading The Selfish Gene -- then you really should educate yourself before sounding off about it. And one thing you'll want to learn is a little of the history of the subject. William Provine's scholarly history of the science of population genetics, originally written in 1971, is a fine place to start. It covers the development of the field from the time of Darwin through the early twentieth century, the period during which the synthesis of Darwinian natural selection and Mendelian genetics was taking place. You'll encounter some familiar names -- of course Darwin and Mendel, but also e.g. Thomas Henry Huxley, Sir Francis Galton, and J.B.S. Haldane. You'll also encounter a number of other names that probably won't be familiar to you unless you already know something about this field (or perhaps about statistics): William Bateson, Karl Pearson, Sir Ronald A. Fisher, and Sewall Wright, for example. And mainly, you'll get a grasp of the way Darwin's theory and the new science of genetics dovetailed and reinforced one another in the synthesis of modern

population genetics. If you don't believe in evolution-by-natural-selection yourself, you'll at least begin to see why other people do and what's so intellectually attractive about it. And if you do believe in it yourself, you'll get a healthy sense of the fact that it hasn't ever been a uniform, monolithic theory that left no room for any sort of argument. It would be nice if everybody who felt entitled to an opinion in the evolution debate would read this book. Of course there are also lots of readers who don't need this warning; to them I simply say that this is a readable, well-researched history of its title topic.

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