



The Art and Politics of Science

Harold Varmus

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Jeffrey Sachs has called Harold Varmus a “global scientist-statesman who bridges science and society to solve the weightiest global challenges.” But as readers will learn in this engaging memoir chronicling one man’s series of remarkable careers, as well as some of the central health-policy issues of our time, Varmus didn’t decide that he was drawn to medicine until he was one year into a PhD in English literature! Changing course in characteristically adventurous fashion, Varmus dove headfirst into medical school, shifted shortly after graduating from practice to research, and soon found himself at the forefront of cancer research at the University of California, San Francisco, on his way toward a Nobel Prize in Medicine.

In 1993, Varmus transformed from an academic scientist to a political one when President Clinton asked him to direct the National Institutes of Health. After six years at the NIH, he took the reins as president of the world-renowned Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, a position he still holds. Along the way, Varmus has continued his own laboratory work, remains committed to collaborative science, and still finds time to ride his bike to work.

Beyond the elegant combination of science and biography, this is a book about health issues of truly global importance. Varmus’s work on cancer-causing genes foreshadowed the development of the recent targeted therapies for cancer. At the NIH, he not only persuaded Congress to commit record funds to national health programs but also turned attention to international concerns like the worldwide malaria crisis. And, as he discusses in these pages, he has long been an enthusiastic yet nuanced supporter of stem cell research. *The Art and Politics of Science* is a glimpse into the world of high-stakes, big-budget science narrated by a man intimately acquainted with its everyday applications—an education for people in all walks of life from a scientist whose own research and professional commitments helped to shape our scientific age.

The Art and Politics of Science Details

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From Reader Review The Art and Politics of Science for online ebook

Terry says

I feel like I'm punishing the author for having a rather dull interesting life. There are no epic successes or failures but a narrative of competence and ability. I kept reading hoping for some stunning revelation and there was quite little. The time on Sloan Kettering was short and there was little insider information that gave one the feeling of having seen great secrets.

Meh.

Mindy says

Recommended by Jeff Tamblyn (lunch at Cafe Tempo Aug/2012)

Jun Yang says

Interesting read for a scientist

Davie says

Very intrigued by people who go from the arts to the sciences (or vice versa). Also curious how he got the US govt to double the NIH budget and whether he might do something similarly science-friendly now that he's part of Obama's administration...

Vaguely pertinent to my current NRSA attempt, and therefore a valid form of procrastination during typing breaks :)

To do: finish the cancer lab and future policy sections...

Ken Roebuck says

As an NIH scientific administrator I found this book quite revealing and would recommend it to anyone interested in a scientific career in academia or government to give you a behind-the-scenes look at NIH science policy. The section on the controversial naming of the AIDS virus was particularly fascinating for me since I worked on HIV in the '90s.

A. says

Loved the first 2/3 of the book. The last half was about Harold Varmus' career and was not as interesting. It is a good read because it shows how someone interested in writing can end up in a completely different career - research scientist. There is quite a bit of science in it but he explains it plainly. He is an excellent writer. The gist of it is how scientists solve questions. The back story is a man and his wife and children who are following their dreams.

Nancy says

Another book I could not get traction on. It is due back at the library and I won't be going to the effort to take it out again. I only got to page 46 so don't feel it is fair to rate it at all. I'd hoped someone with both a science and literary background would write something that grabbed the reader more. Maybe that happens sometime after page 46....

Jack Lu says

Quite interesting for me, especially the discovery of oncogenes, well written, no wonder he was trained on literature before, a versatile man with broad talent: science, literature, medicine, politics, which are coined in the title "the art and politics of science" Many people try to bring science and art together, this is not a bad one.

Michael says

A great memoir from one of the outstanding scientists of our day (a Nobel prize winner, the former NIH Director, and the current Director of the National Cancer Institute). What I liked is that it's not only a biography of Dr. Varmus and his Nobel prize-winning discovery of proto-oncogenes. But the book also covers his experience in running the NIH, and the important work he's done to foster open source publishing in science and improved global health.

Jahan says

Lets see what he does now at the NCI... I didn't know that he was a force behind pubmed central and PLOS.
