

UNIVERSAL MAN: THE SEVEN LIVES OF JOHN MAYNARD KEYNES

Richard Davenport-Hines – Author

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John Maynard Keynes was one of the most influential personalities of the twentieth century. It is considered one of the creators of what today we call *Macroeconomics*. He played an important role during the *Bretton Woods Conference* in 1944, after which were put up substantial post-war financial institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. The economic policy measures he proposed prevailed in the first decades after World War II and saw a revival in recent years due to the financial crisis of 2008-2009. His works on economics have seen many editions and have been translated into most languages.

But Keynes was more than a great economist. In the biography dedicated to him, *Universal man*, instead of a chronological deployment, Davenport-Hines chose to present seven “lives” of Keynes. Each of these lives corresponds to a chapter in the book. Thus we have seven chapters: 1. “Altruistic”; 2. “Boy Prodigy”; 3. “Official”; 4. “Public Man”; 5. “Lover”; 6. “Connoisseur”; 7. “Envoy”.

The first chapter, which substitutes the introduction, puts Keynes forward as an exemplary figure throughout his whole life. The second presents his education at Eton and Cambridge. Here we also learn about the entrance to *Cambridge Society Conversazione* commonly known as the “Apostles”, a community that has overwhelmingly influenced him.

In the third chapter is followed Keynes’ rise as a government official and his activities especially during the First World War and immediately

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after it. The fourth chapter focuses on other Keynes' activities: economist, journalist, editor and teacher.

The next chapter deals with Keynes' love life. We are given many homosexual liaisons in the first part of his life, but also the surprising love and marriage with dancer Lydia Lopokova.

Chapter six presents a Keynes who believed that money is not an end in itself but a means to a good life. This meant collecting artistic works, setting up an impressive library which contained many rare books, creation of the *Cambridge Arts Theatre*, as well as participation in various committees of patronage of the arts.

Finally, the last part presents Keynes' role in the negotiations that founded the post-war economic order, exhausting negotiations that took part in his untimely death.

What can be accused of Davenport-Hines is too much emphasis put on his love affairs (Chapter 5 – "Lover" is the longest) and too little set on the economic ideas of the character. The reported minuses do not mean that this book shouldn't be read. *Universal man* attempts by the seven instants of Keynes' life to present the man, as well as the environment that led to the development of his revolutionary ideas. And it mostly succeeds.