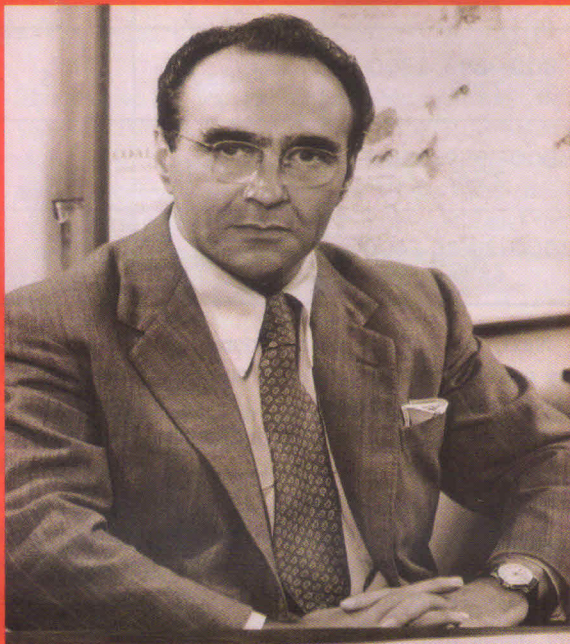


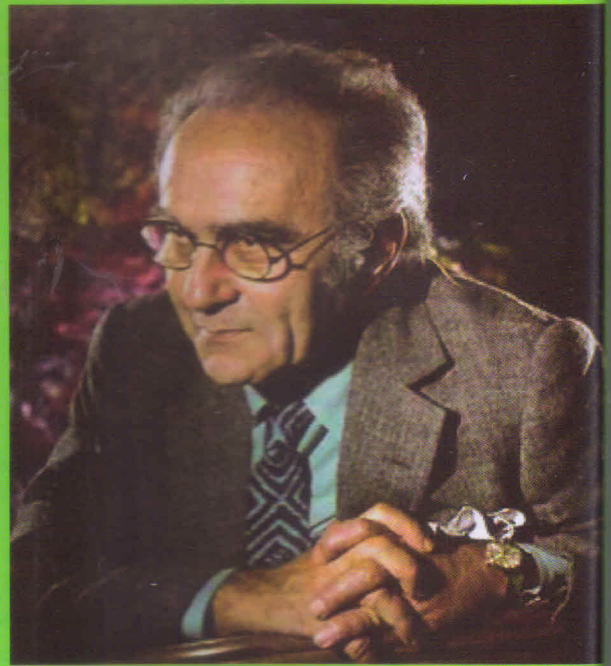
# THE ASCENT OF MAN HALF A CENTURY OF THE GLORIOUS LEGACY OF A POPULAR SCIENCE CLASSIC

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Jacob Bronowski  
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**2024** marks passage of fifty years after the passing of Dr Jacob Bronowski in 1974, one of the greatest figures in science popularisation in the world, whose life's work was manifested in the television series named '*The Ascent of Man*,' which was first broadcast on BBC in 1973. When I reviewed the vastly popular and groundbreaking book and television series, '*Cosmos*' made by Carl Sagan in 2020 in *Science Reporter*, I had occasion to study in depth how the book and television series got to be made. During the course of my study, I realised that Carl Sagan had been influenced deeply by the work of Dr Jacob Bronowski, a scientist and polymath, especially his book and television series named, '*The Ascent of Man*,' which was broadcast in 1973. Expressing admiration for the intellectual breadth of Jacob Bronowski, Carl Sagan went on to quote him several times in his Pulitzer



Jacob Bronowski  
Image credit: Wikipedia

Prize-winning book, '*The Dragons of Eden*,' published in 1977.

My interest was thus piqued. I located the programme, '*The Ascent of Man*,' and watched the thirteen-part BBC television series, which enchanted and mesmerised me. Commissioned by pioneering naturalist and television broadcaster Sir David Attenborough, in response to a criticism of BBC Head of Science, Aubrey Singer, that he had prioritised arts over science as Controller of BBC Two with the broadcast of '*Civilisation*' by Sir Kenneth Clark in 1969, '*The Ascent of Man*' first broadcast in 1973, has stood the test of time as one of the finest science documentaries of all time.

Jacob Bronowski had been a regular figure on the BBC radio programmes of the Brains Trust when Sir David Attenborough roped him in for the television series that made him a household name and a popular science icon. Born on 18 January 1908 in Poland, in the erstwhile Russian Empire, Jacob Bronowski went on to study mathematics at the University of Cambridge in Great Britain. He had wide-ranging interests, from biology to poetry and chess to history. He taught mathematics at University College Hull in England between 1934 and 1942. During World War II, he led the field of operations research and worked to increase the effectiveness of Allied bombing. This act is questionable because although the Second World War can be described as a righteous war, the deliberate targeting of civilians in Berlin, Hamburg, Dresden and Tokyo has come under increasing scrutiny in modern times. However, it is reasonable to say that Bronowski was human and acted in the best direction of his conscience to defend the Allies.

'*The Ascent of Man*' provides many moments of reflection and deliberation, and the slow, deliberate pace of