

frequencies, in association with moderate radiation doses, to the grand hypothesis that *all* types of cancer are induced, at the same rate of increase per rad dose, by low-dose irradiation, regardless of dose rate.

He ridicules the alternate model, claiming that "the absolute risk method has no theory at all." In fact, the absolute risk method is equivalent to a perfectly reasonable theory—that the number of radiation-induced cancers is independent of the spontaneous cancer rate but does depend on the dose. This theory has just as much evidence as the first and is gradually becoming more accepted. It gives results that are not too dissimilar to those of the relative risk model when calculations are done by more responsible hands than Gofman's.

The radiation-health community, including myself, has learned much from Dr. Gofman in the past. He showed us that the combination of regulatory and promotional functions of the Atomic Energy Commission in the early '70s represented conflict of interest, resulting in its being split into the Energy Research and Development Administration and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. He reinforced by endless repetition (and now exaggeration) the idea that fetuses and children are more susceptible to radiation effects than adults are. He helped turn our attention to the apparent violation of individual rights entailed in release of radioactive material (or any other pollutant) into the environment, where it can do potential harm to humans whose permission was not given.

Unfortunately, there is no easy solution to this last problem. For the problem is not one of nuclear power or even of *industrial* civilization: every time a farmer turns a furrow, more naturally occurring radon escapes from the earth to the atmosphere, increasing minutely the risk of lung cancer for everyone. Quite simply, "There ain't no such thing as a risk-free life."

Gofman's new book, however, is worse than worthless. It is potentially dangerous to the health of the public, disastrous to the nuclear defense of the United States, and could make world war more likely. If enough people were frightened by its (false) prophecy of damage due to medical x-rays, they would obtain needed tests less often, resulting in increased illness and death due to undiagnosed and untreated disease. If enough people were deluded into think-

ing, like Jonathan Schell, that *The Fate of the Earth* is the extinction of all life in case of nuclear war, they could be convinced (fooled) into advocating complete unilateral nuclear disarmament. If enough people around the world accepted its (false) message that nuclear power presents an unacceptable health risk, there would be more dependence on oil, with increased likelihood of war over Middle East petroleum supplies.

Luckily, the book itself will probably not have much impact. It is so grandiose and mock-encyclopedic that less than 10 percent of those who buy it will read it. It is so ill-conceived and badly written that less than 10 percent of those who read it will understand it. If reason prevails, less than 10 percent of those who understand it will believe it. If common sense prevails, the "magical malignancy multiplying machine," like any other pile of radioactive junk, will just decay away.

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Eternal Vigilance . . .

A Plea for Liberty.

Edited by Thomas Mackay.

Foreword by Jeffrey Paul.

Indianapolis: Liberty Classics.

1982. 528 pp. \$13.50/\$6.00.

Reviewed by John Chamberlain

In a half-century of reviewing, I have never encountered a more sobering book than *A Plea for Liberty*, a collection of essays first published in 1891 by a now-forgotten English organization called the Liberty and Property Defense League. Written to combat the interventionist propaganda of the Fabian Society, and assembled by a successful wine merchant, Thomas Mackay, who had been an incisive critic of the English Poor Law, it presented a baker's dozen of absolutely first-rate demolitions of the welfarist arguments that were, in the previous decade, already being hawked by George Bernard Shaw and Sidney Webb.

Yet, despite the book's excellence, it failed utterly to halt a trend. The authors chosen by Mackay have, with the single exception of Herbert Spencer, been gathering dust for decades. English history has been written by the Fabian victors, who lived to see their cradle-to-

grave socialist philosophy adopted by Tories no less than by Liberals and Labourites.

The mystery, today, is how such an intelligent band as Thomas Mackay's collaborators could have been so ineffective. They had a superior command of logic; they showed a deep understanding of the marketplace; and, with an intellectual ancestry going back to John Locke, Edmund Burke, and Adam Smith, they were in what everybody supposed was the mainstream of British tradition. Yet, for what is now close to a century, their names (Spencer's excluded) have meant nothing save to a few scholars such as Jeffrey Paul of Bowling Green State University, who provides the foreword for a new edition of a book that should never have been allowed to go out of print.

Following a general introduction by Herbert Spencer, which more or less recapitulates his *Man versus the State*, there is Edward Stanley Robinson's essay, "The Impracticability of Socialism." "The fallacy of Socialism," says Mr. Robinson... appears to lie in the assumption that labour has a value of its own, in and for itself. It has no such value. No material thing is valuable because of the labour expended in producing it... Material things are valuable because they satisfy wants... Commodities are exchanged for other commodities because some people have what other people want...."

It does not detract from the value of Ludwig von Mises's classic *Socialism* and Friedrich Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom*, to say nothing of the contributions of the Austrian school of economics in general, to realize that Robinson had mastered all the arguments long, long ago about the inability of socialism to establish a workable exchange system. His criticism of the socialist idea that production can be planned in a system that does not permit private ownership, which is the necessary antecedent to individual choice in trading, is as devastating as anything written by von Mises 30 years later.

Robinson questioned the efficiency of the monopolistic post office, which the socialists of his day offered as an example of successful state trading. In a separate essay in Mackay's volume, Frederick Millar wondered why millions of samples of English merchandise were sent from London to be posted in Belgium back to every town in England at half the rates charged in England itself. The Millar article could easily be rewritten to apply to modern American postal service conditions.

Other essays in the book could as easily be updated to run in our modern magazines supporting individual freedom. The inanities—and insanities—of OSHA are foreseen in George Howell's essay, "Liberty for Labour." Though pitched to English realities of the 19th century, B. H. Alford's "Free Education" might easily have been adapted for an essay in a recent American symposium, *The Public School Monopoly*, published by the Pacific Institute for Public Policy Research. And the grand concluding article in the Mackay volume, "The True Line of Deliverance," by Auberon Herbert, with its justification for the claims of voluntary association, might, with changes in idiom, be passed off as an article by Robert Poole or Tibor Machan.

In reading a book written 90 years ago about individual freedom and the free market, it is sobering to realize that truths which should be obvious can be sidetracked for a century, leaving the jobs of exposition and explanation to be done all over again. *A Plea for Liberty* should have routed the British Fabians and forestalled cradle-to-grave Beveridge plans. But it didn't. Beginning with the revival of libertarian thought and Austrian marginal economics in the 1940s, we have picked up where Mackay's forgotten collaborators left off when Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells shouted them down in the 1890s. But our own Fabians are devilishly persistent. It will be a terrible thing for the Western world if history repeats.

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Imaginative Philosophy

Thought Probes.

Edited by Fred D. Miller, Jr. and
Nicholas D. Smith.
Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.
1981. 362 pp. \$11.95.

Reviewed by F. Paul Wilson

Whoever heard of discussing time travel paradoxes in philosophy class? I mean, really! Philosophy courses as I remember them seemed more interested in the philosophers themselves and in the schools of thought with which they were identified than with actually analyzing their ideas. Just one more course full of dull facts and names to be memorized and regurgitated on command.

Fortunately, that is not the case with *Thought Probes*. This text focuses on ideas. Through deft questioning, it encourages its readers to use their analytical abilities and put concepts to work, testing limits, finding strengths and weaknesses—in short: *to think*.

I freely admit that much of my enthusiasm is due to the text's use of science fiction stories to illustrate philo-

**Science
fiction and
philosophy
are made for
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sophical points. This is a legitimate academic use of science fiction, unlike the literary approach that tends to pull the stories apart and examine them with respect to plot devices, means of character development, narrative techniques, and so on; the result is the equivalent of a dissected frog—all its workings are exposed, but the damned thing doesn't jump anymore.

The editors of *Thought Probes* have found a better use. They give a brief overview of an area of philosophy, followed by a story ("conceptual experiment," as they like to call it) concerned with that area, followed by a philosophical essay ("analysis") in the same area, winding up with questions ("probes") geared to stretch the mind. They make you analyze the content of the story.

What was it about? What was the author trying to say? Do his concepts hold up under close scrutiny? Fitting treatment for a body of writing called "the literature of ideas." For that's what draws people to science fiction. Not cutesy writing styles and literary tricks—*ideas*. Ideas are also what draw minds to philosophy. And because so much science fiction begins with "What if..." and goes on from there, it is ideally equipped to probing matters of morals, ethics, metaphysics, and epistemology. The two are made for each other.

Fred Miller and Nicholas Smith appear to be no strangers to the two fields they bring together in their text. The depth and breadth of their knowledge of science fiction is impressive. They are familiar not only with the Big Name masters but with the Lesser Lights as well, giving numerous examples in the recommended reading sections at the close of each section. Many of the stories included in the text as "conceptual experiments" are among the most provocative ever written in a highly provocative field: Clarke's "The Star," Heinlein's "All You Zombies—," Godwin's "The Cold Equations," Niven's "Cloak of Anarchy," plus a couple of stories that are seeing print for the first time.

The editors appear to recognize no taboos. In discussing the question of God and the problem of evil, they give considerable time to atheism. On the subject of politics, they give full measure to the anarchist viewpoint, questioning the necessity of any government at all.

Of special interest to REASON readers will be the respect—almost deference, I might say—accorded the libertarian point of view, not merely in the political

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