

ARTS & LETTERS

quick French recovery after the war.

While Aron, who had lived and taught in Germany, could "never imagine genocide" at the time it was occurring, he accepts the shame of the Holocaust. "All the measures that the French might take against the Jews," Aron said, "touched me deeply precisely because I am French... before I am Jewish.... One of the easiest and most simplistic ways to parry Hitler's propaganda was to avoid proclaiming that the war was being fought to liberate the Jews.... [Instead] it was being fought against totalitarianism.... Churchill and Roosevelt failed to denounce the extermination of the Jews for the same reason."

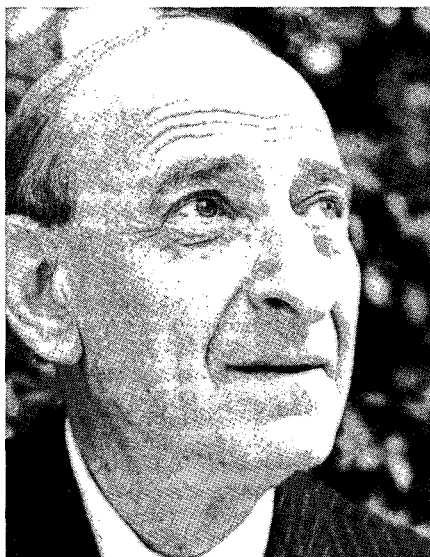
Aron rejects what he calls "the legend of Yalta." "It was not because of Yalta that Eastern Europe became Communist"; it was because the Russian army occupied the satellite countries, and the West could not eject them. During the great schism that followed the war, Aron believed that division was inevitable, but war was improbable, partly because—and here Aron is far more perceptive than most commentators—Stalin was and always had been a prudent man.

The events after World War II Aron treats practically: He favored decolonization, but with no sense of mission. The French attempt to hold Vietnam, though an error, was ineluctable because of the surge of French nationalism. The cost in blood and money of holding Algeria was unacceptable. Intervention by the United States in China against Mao Tse-tung would have tragically failed; President Harry Truman and Secretary of State Dean Acheson were correct not to make the attempt. American intervention in the Korean War, however, was necessary as a display of national will. And Aron strongly approved the North Atlantic Alliance and the rearmament of Germany. All these positions represent the politics of the possible. The worst fault of the intellectuals, Aron concludes, is criticism without answering, What would I do?

He follows this thesis on detente, cold war, and nuclear arsenals. Detente did not and does not prevent the Soviet Union from taking over any country it can, and a return to "cold war" would not increase the danger of real war. The flaws in the policy of "mutual assured destruction," he saw; he deplores Soviet nuclear superiority; but he contributes nothing original to the nuclear debate. Trade with the Soviet Union has not served detente but "has, rather, in-

creased the military potential of the USSR."

"Isn't there a contradiction," his questioners ask, between this position and his advocacy of helping China? "No," answers Aron. "Unfortunately, foreign policy is a game for thieves and gangsters. When one has a proximate enemy, one tends to help a distant future enemy against the proximate one." No honest student of international history can dispute the first sentence. That the conclusion of the second sentence is wise on



Raymond Aron: "I seek to determine the economic and social conditions that permit pluralism to survive."

the premise of the first is more doubtful.

Raymond Aron was a great friend of the United States. He had no use for those who damned both the superpowers.

The essence of his political thought emerges from the writers with whom he identified. Early on he explains to his questioners that although he learned from his stay in Germany "what political life can be when it manifests its horrible side," he tells them he could have reached the same conclusion by reading Aristotle and Machiavelli. "All that was necessary was to understand them well." Toward the end he said: "Montesquieu earlier explained liberalism through sociologic analysis, as did Alexis de Tocqueville and Max Weber. Since I claim kinship with all three—based on a study of modern economic societies—I see the dangers that result from the concentration of all power in a single party. So I seek to determine the economic and social conditions that permit pluralism to survive, that is, both political and intellectual liberalism."

Whereupon his questioners ask him why then he is not a Socialist, since

"socialism, particularly social democracy, defends pluralism." Aron answers: "Most Socialists... are not as firmly liberal as they should be.... A number of French socialists continue to be antagonistic to... market forces.... For economic reasons... I think it is important today to maintain free market forces."

Free minds and free markets at home, resistance to totalitarianism abroad, and the politics of the practical—these are the enduring legacies of Raymond Aron. Without tedious discussion, and through examples from the history of five decades, *The Committed Observer* sheds a shining light on these themes.

Laurence Beilenson, a lawyer, has for many years devoted himself to research and writing. His books include *Survival and Peace in the Nuclear Age* and *The Treaty Trap*.

The Genesis of the Invisible Hand

The Soul of Modern Economic Man

By Milton L. Meyers

Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

131 pp. \$17.50.

Reviewed by Ellen Frankel Paul

In *The Soul of Modern Economic Man*, Milton L. Meyers explores an arena usually much ignored in the history of economic ideas, namely, the intellectual environment out of which Adam Smith's notions about self-interest and the division of labor arose. The notion that individuals' pursuit of their self-interest leads to the welfare of society played a central role in the development of Smith's economic thought in *The Wealth of Nations*; but as Meyers lucidly argues, this connection was not one posed uniquely or originally by Smith. Rather, Smith was responding to a debate that had been ongoing in the philosophical and intellectual community throughout the 18th century, a debate triggered in large part by the writings of Thomas Hobbes—most particularly, his *Leviathan*.

Hobbes portrayed a human nature almost devoid of redemptive qualities, a nature driven by self-interest to create a socially unfit being compelled by his rapacious self-seeking to war against his fellows. Given such a gloomy vision of human nature, Hobbes's sole hope for social life lay in man's willingness to ac-

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quiesce to certain articles of peace that would allow him to escape the brutal, unstable, and precarious state of nature. But the price for this peace was a steep one; for according to Hobbes, only by agreeing to surrender practically all of his rights to an omnipotent ruler could man escape his perfidious condition.

On Myers's account, Hobbes served to inspire his successors, who took his bleak prescription as a challenge. Could man's propensity to concern himself above all with his own welfare lead to positive implications for society as a whole? In other words, if self-interest were not an impulse with such deleterious attributes, perhaps, then, individuals could achieve an accommodation with one another that would not necessitate establishing an absolute autocrat.

By the time we arrive at the writings of Adam Smith, Hobbes's dismal view of man's self-interest has been utterly transformed. Intending only his own gain, man is "led by an invisible hand," wrote Smith, to promote the public interest. Myers strives to discover how this transformation came about, tracing the idea of self-interest through the writings of men not customarily examined by historians of economic thought: poets, writers, and most importantly, moral philosophers. As he pursues his novel quest, Myers discerns four major categories of responses to the problem of how self-interest relates to the public welfare.

In the first, represented principally by Richard Cumberland, a Protestant cleric and author of *De Legibus Naturae*, self-interest is an important motive embedded in human nature but not as yet the most important. Cumberland's explanation for man's sociability relies heavily on the principle of design, whereby nature is perceived as orderly, with mankind constructed to fit comfortably within this patterned universe. Relying on the transcendent laws of nature to ward off the Hobbesian nightmarish war of all against all, Cumberland's man limited his self-interest by another powerful motive: benevolence.

Cumberland's emphasis on the principle of design would greatly influence the next group of thinkers, primarily Anthony Shaftesbury and Joseph Butler. Once again, man was perceived to inhabit a harmonious and orderly universe, but the analysis of man's innate motives was more richly developed. For these thinkers, self-interest is implanted in man's psyche but also serves as a motive inducing man to care for the public

welfare and leading men to a life of virtue. In fact, for Butler a proper self-love is indivisible from an interest in the welfare of society; our innate mental composition produces a harmony of motives, and thus self-interest and the public welfare are entirely compatible.

The next group of thinkers, which included Francis Hutcheson, Henry Saint John Bolingbroke, and Soame Jenyns, was less impressed with innate psychological motivations and more enamored of quasi-scientific explanations. Impressed by the new discoveries in the physical sciences that served to buttress the principle of design, these men sought to apply the new tools of analysis to man as well as nature. They were particularly intrigued by the possibility of applying the principle of gravitational attraction to an analysis of self-interest; they hoped to demonstrate how self-interest, like gravity, could produce order in the behavior of men.

Finally, Smith's immediate intellectual progenitors replaced analogies between gravitation and self-interest with a more concrete notion: that of the division of labor. For Joseph Priestley and his intellectual compatriots, the division of labor served as the connecting link between man's self-interest and the good of society. By pursuing his own self-interest, his own pleasure, man labors; and the products of that labor serve the needs of other people and hence of society. What separated these thinkers from Smith, however, was their unbridled optimism, faith in the perfectibility of man, and lack of an empirical bent.

Thanks to Myers's careful examination of the work of these often-neglected figures, Smith's seminal work on self-interest and the division of labor can be viewed with a much greater understanding of both his debt to his predecessors and the uniqueness of his argument. While Smith embraced an empirical method and eschewed abstract speculation whenever possible, he did build on the thought of these individuals. To a certain extent, Myers views Smith as a great synthesizer but also as an original thinker who brought economic analysis to bear on the problem of self-interest and the public welfare.

The Soul of Modern Economic Man is a valuable addition to the literature. It does suffer from a few noticeable omissions, however. It is curious, indeed, that if the entire debate on self-interest throughout the 18th century is viewed as a response to Hobbes, one thinker of indisputable

importance is left out of the discussion. That theorist is, of course, John Locke. One of the strengths of Myers's work is that he does explore the contributions of frequently neglected figures; yet it seems a shame to ignore Locke, especially since his *Second Treatise of Government* is largely devised as a response to Hobbes. Would it not be useful to hear what Locke had to say about self-interest and the public welfare?

Though Myers has written an interesting, slim volume, that points to a second weakness in the book: Except for a very brief epilogue on David Ricardo, the tale ends with Smith. Yet in his introduction Myers claims that he will trace the soul of modern economic man (his self-interest) through the classical political economists. Perhaps he ended his study too soon, because in the epilogue he contends that Ricardo effectively put an end to the 18th century's fascination with the problem of self-interest and the general welfare. But this is simply not the case. Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, and Henry Sidgwick, to name but a few of the luminaries, would expend considerable effort on the attempt to differentiate those cases where self-interest does lead to the general welfare from instances in which it does not. For the sake of completeness, it would have been useful for Myers at least to have discussed super-

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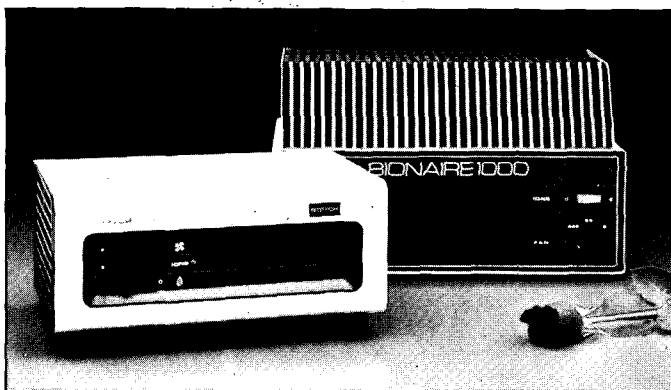


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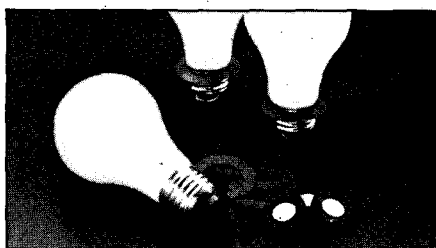


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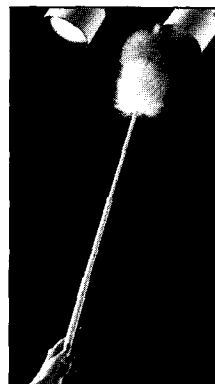
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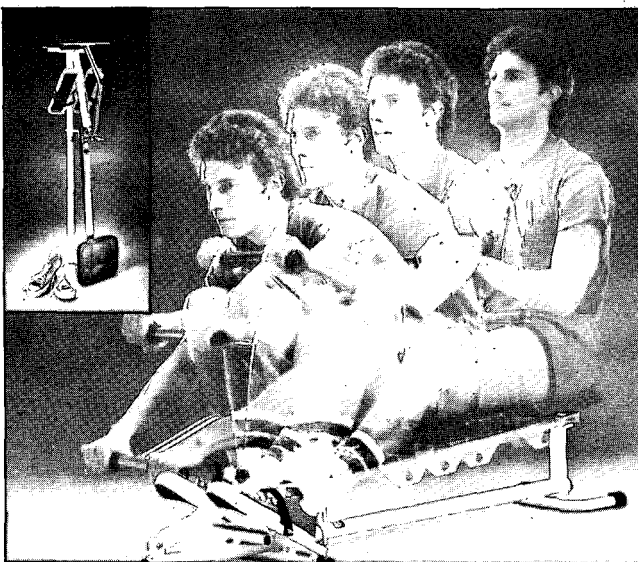
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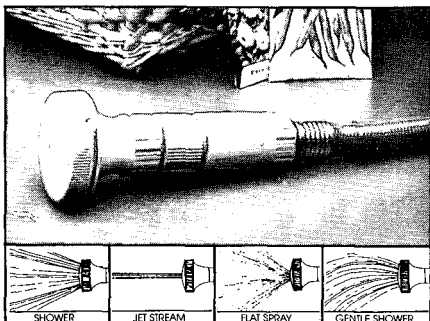
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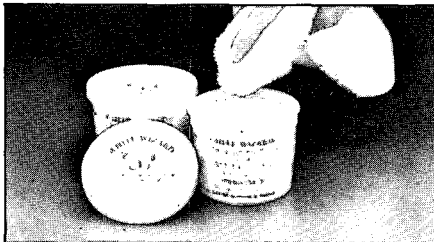
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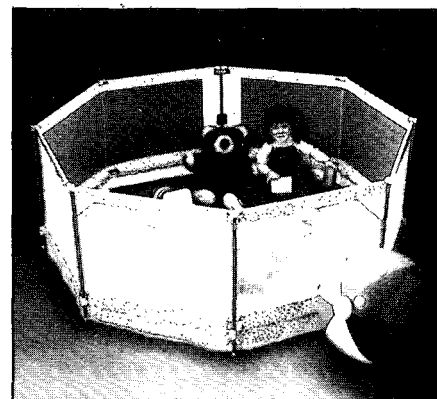
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ficially the way 19th-century figures dealt with his problem. Despite these reservations, the book remains an eminently readable volume.

Ellen Frankel Paul is research director of the Social Philosophy and Policy Center at Bowling Green State University, where she teaches political science.

Mischievous Counsel

The Whys of a Philosophical Scrivener

By Martin Gardner

New York: Quill. 452 pp. \$22.50.

Reviewed by Joy Dee Anthony

Seventy-one-year-old Martin Gardner, having retired from his post as columnist-celebre at *Scientific American*, thought it a good idea to put down his beliefs and opinions in a book. At times, *The Whys of a Philosophical Scrivener* reads like the midterm exam of an "A" student. Gardner quotes sources so dutifully that the reader begins to feel exhausted before chapter one is over.

To fill out explanations of his 20 "Whys," including why he is not an anarchist, an atheist, or a Marxist, Gardner culled from his file a lifetime of snippets from the famous. A select public, ready for anything from Gardner's pen (out of respect for his work on mathematical puzzles and paradoxes), may be patient enough for this long credo.

Not I. I found myself counting pages to the end of a chapter, reawakening, and then wondering why the section that piqued my interest had to be so short.

The free will versus determinism issue is a case in point. Gardner states that unfortunately he has not enough space to do justice to the subject. One wishes, then, that he had cut out much of the speculation on topics like paranormalism, whether there is sex in heaven, or whether God intervenes on the micro-level when he answers a prayer by changing the paths of photons and electrons.

Of course these digressions can be entertaining, especially when anecdotal. At his best, Gardner is a superb journalist and raconteur, sifting through memories and philosophies for gold.

Take William F. Buckley's first encounter with philosopher Ayn Rand. Gardner tells us, "Her opening ice-breaker was: 'you ahrr too intelligent to

believe in a Gott.'" Then we hear of George Gilder's dog, Laffer. Gilder calls the dog's tail "Laffer's curve."

To commence his book, Gardner explains why he is not a solipsist, one who believes that he or she alone exists. Even that reality may be shaky for some. Gardner relates an incident in which philosopher Morris Cohen was asked by a student: "How do I know I exist?" "Who's asking?" returned Cohen.

Though few would agree with solipsists, Gardner says that the recent interest in quantum mechanics gives even the arguments of a few eminent physi-

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cists a solipsistic tinge. To some, these arguments convey the feeling that the external world is an illusion, that solid substances are really only subjective space-time events, imperfectly observed.

To counter such idealism, Gardner gives three reasons for calling oneself a realist, that is, a believer in a world separate from one's will and perceptions. First, there are pragmatic reasons. To facilitate communication, it is more practical to assume that a world exists separate from one's will and perceptions.

Then there is the empirical argument. Realism is the simplest and most verifiable hypothesis for explaining regularities in nature.

Yet Gardner gives a more important reason for calling himself a realist, and in so doing sets the stage for the remainder of the book. He believes that where the mind fails to decide truth, the heart rushes in, justifiably. Gardner is a pragmatic realist, not just because it's useful, but because he finds it emotionally satisfying.

Commenting on a number of other philosophical conundrums, Gardner often concludes that many such controversies have been primarily semantic. Though this explanation is sometimes reasonable, the repeated appeal to language differences seems overworked. It is almost as if Gardner is saying we all really agree.

Except the economists. Gardner is too much a man of common sense to pretend otherwise in this sticky field. He sees the distinctions, has read Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich Hayek, Milton Friedman, and John Kenneth Galbraith, among others.

As a democratic socialist, Gardner would like to see our economy head towards further governmental intervention. The reasons he gives are scanty. First and foremost, he thinks a technological society means ever larger corporations, with ever greater need for restraint. Gardner would like wage and price controls imposed on big farming, big labor, and big corporations. It's hard to believe he's really read Mises if he fails to see the problems resulting from manipulation of economic signals, and it's hard to imagine that he's read Friedman either. A Nobel laureate with *The Monetary History of the United States* and other serious endeavors under his belt should hardly be likened to a radical mystic. Yet Gardner, certainly no economist himself, not only does so but also criticizes Friedman as if economics were just another field in the realm of personal experience in which he is as competent to judge as any.

He likens Friedman to a chiropractor: someone with a prescription for each of the patient's ills. In the meantime, he notes, "real" doctors advise that the signs are too obscure for diagnosis. Funny, but this is why Friedman advocates a monetary rule. It's too hard to predict the bends and dips in the monetary road, Friedman says—better instead, curtail the manipulative power of the Federal Reserve to throw the economy off course.

The overall theme in Gardner's philosophy is summed up by an ode to the color gray in the book's last paragraph. If in doubt, he counsels, choose a course of action that is not extreme. For Gardner, this implies belief in a socialistic state, in reason influenced by emotions, and in petitionary prayer.

Lord help those who follow his economic advice.

Joy Dee Anthony is a free-lance writer and a correspondent for the Daily Pilot in Newport Beach, California.