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## REVIEWS

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*The Possibility of Practical Reason*, J. DAVID VELLEMAN. Oxford University Press, 2000, 302 pages

This is a collection of 10 papers, all except one previously published, plus a long introductory essay. The collection covers a wide range of topics: action theory and practical reason (six articles), including collective intention (one), free will (one), ethics (well-being) (one), epistemology (one) decision theory (one), and game theory (one). Together they show an impressive breadth of knowledge – much wider than the typical range of published work. What is more, the quality is generally very high, in many cases breaking new ground. Invariably, the arguments are cogent, the discussion thorough, and insights plentiful. And not surprisingly for people familiar with Velleman's work, these papers show much development from his first, rather unconvincing book, *Practical Reflection*, Princeton University Press, 1989.

As a collection of work over 10 years, however, it lacks the coherence and unity of a monograph. Nevertheless, there is one theme that comes through many of the articles. I begin with this, which should facilitate and shorten the discussion of the articles to which it applies. The distinctive theme is that action as such admits of a constitutive aim (hereafter "aim"), as belief does of truth-directedness. This notion is a necessary condition for action as such to be successful, as truth is for belief, in that once found to lack truth, the belief is supposed to be withdrawn. "The aim" is used to grapple with different problems in different essays: (1) to defend a new concept of action ("What Happens When Someone Acts?" and Introductory essay), (2) a view of practical reason with regard to rival principles for dealing with prisoners' dilemmas ("Deciding How to Decide"), (3) the internalism debate ("The Possibility of Practical Reason"), and (4) the correct take on decision theory ("The Story of Rational Action"). Finally "The Aim of Belief" develops how belief's truth-tracking differs from other "regarding-as-true" attitudes, like supposing and imagining (especially pp. 247–55).

Returning to action, one problem is that over the 10 years *the aim* (of action) proved to be as protean as it is elusive, for Velleman offers no fewer than *three* different, unreconcilable views of it: a response to reasons qua reasons as defining agency (“What Happens?”), autonomy (“Practical Reason” and “Deciding”) and “making sense” as enhancing self-understanding (Introduction and “The Story of Rational Action”). Even apart from distinct problems of each and its application, this variegated treatment of “the aim” gives one pause as to how much mileage it offers. Curiously, the last attempt, bolstering self-intelligibility, is the first Velleman book redux.

It might, however, be thought that changing his mind is no more damning here than, for example, Frankfurt’s changing efforts to characterize identification. Perhaps so, but while Frankfurt’s reason for elucidating identification remains fairly stable throughout his work (treated below), Velleman’s “aim of action” throughout the book sometimes seems like an all-purpose means. A foundation of shifting sands becomes worrisome the more weight that is put upon it.

That said, we begin with the introductory piece as setting the agenda and mostly as a springboard for discussing the action theory pieces in the volume. I shall then discuss some of the other pieces, but not all of them, owing to lack of space. The first issue, further developed in “What Happens ...?” are the inadequacies of Davidsonian causal theory of action, whereby action is an event (bodily movement) caused by the agent’s desires and beliefs (constituting the agent’s reasons for his action.) Faced not only with the perennial problem of deviant causal chains but also desires and beliefs that may lead to an “unconsidered” or unconscious(?) intention (pp. 8, 126–7), Velleman notes that the standard causal theory does not capture the agent’s doing something, where full-blooded action (autonomous activity) is contrasted with mere activity (e.g., drumming one’s fingers idly on a table (pp. 4, 8)).

In the Introduction, he goes on to say that the Frankfurtian hierarchical model is an improvement on the causal theory because it would have disqualified Freudian slips – an overlooked problem of desires and beliefs causing action bypassing consciousness. An agent cannot want to be motivated by a desire of which he is not aware (p. 11). But he writes that the Frankfurtian hierarchical model does not handle autonomous action either, because “higher-order desires are not a response to rational force” (p. 13). The necessity of being so responsive is defended by arguing that the agent, as opposed to the person, cannot be estranged from his reasons, as one can be estranged from at least Frankfurt’s early candidates for identification: higher-order desires and decisive commitments (pp. 134–6, 141–3).

In “What Happens?” Velleman offers a curious interpretation of Frankfurt’s master concept of identification as being committed to agent

causation, but not offering a satisfactory reduction of it (in event-causal terms), because identification has to be a *relation* between the agent and some psychological state (pp. 136–7). The latter is correct, of course, but it is hard to read Frankfurt as ever being concerned with *this* action-theoretic problem. Instead, he worries about related matters concerning what motives or psychological states speak for the person, which does implicate him in the active-passive distinction, and what constitutes a person's autonomous will. Velleman then offers his own reduction of agent-causality to events in the causal order that "play the functional role of the agent" (pp. 137–40), that mental event which casts its lot with one of the conflicting determinants of action, which event cannot ever come up for critical scrutiny because it is the event that is always directing such scrutiny (pp. 139–141). His solution, embracing hierarchy supposedly without regress, is the aim of action (here, something that drives practical thought *per se*, p. 140). The aim, accordingly, is a desire to act on the strongest reasons (p. 141). This interesting proposal, however, is problematic because it implies that "reasons" and "strongest reasons" are normative facts independent of the will.

The Introduction notes that reasons justify, but, in the counterexamples to the standard model of reasons as desires and belief, they do not (p. 9). At this point I discuss the related issues in "The Guise of the Good", in which Velleman discusses whether desires aim at the appearance of the good, are implicit value judgments, and therefore reasons. The answer therein, in brief is, "no" to each (pp. 103–11), for we make the distinction between what we desire and what is worth desiring (p. 104). What is more, building on Stocker, he claims, correctly, that for example, in a mood of despair, we can desire something bad or even worthless *under that guise*, that is, *because* it is worthless, so desires cannot be reasons because their objects do not justify, as normative reasons must (pp. 117–19). But then if the constitutive object of desire is not *sub specie boni*, what is it? His answer is "the attainable" (p. 117). But this has to strike one as implausible, owing in part to a conflation of desiring with intending.

In "Guise", he also points out (first noted by both Watson and Davidson in other contexts) the difference between motivation and rational guidance (pp. 100–2) (which, of course, also bears on the "internalism" debate, about which more is said below). And what, he says, fuels this conflation of desiring and evaluating is the contrast between desires and beliefs in terms of direction of fit: the latter a (cognitive) attitude-to-world fit, the former, world-to-(practical)-attitude (pp. 111–17). Now Velleman is correct insofar as he notes that a mismatch of desire and object does not imply that something is lacking in the object as if it were *supposed* to match, as it *does* imply the mistake in a belief that does not track truth. (Because of the direction of fit distinction,

any intransigence falls alternatively on the object or the attitude.) And I must confess that I myself have made this mistake in print, that is, thinking that any attitude that falls on one side or the other of the fit implies normativity. But it does not follow that *no* attitudes on either side are normative. For Velleman, as noted, assumes that belief is in “The Aim of Belief”, and its analogy to aims of practical attitudes. But why is not, say, intending, (not to say, promising), too, in the case of world-to-attitude fit?

In any case, accounting for autonomous actions seems to require, as we have said, the capacity for higher-order motives responsive to first order motives perceived as reasons (p. 14). This is developed in the latest incarnation of the aim of action: self-knowledge, knowing what we are doing, which, as I said, is a throw-back to his first book, *Practical Reflection*, that argued the implausible thesis that an intention, the core of agency, was a self-fulfilling belief. Explaining why he gave up on autonomy, he notes here that every instance of action, as opposed to activity, would turn out to be a success (p. 30). Here he argues that as autonomous creatures, once we have the idea of what we are going to do, we have an additional inclination to do it, rather than something else, for, were we to do something else, it would result in our not knowing what we are doing. Well, this may be a necessary condition for action, but it could hardly be sufficient, or reason-giving. Nor is it correct to emphasize that making up our minds what we are going to do often makes it the case that we do do it. But the practical question is what considerations go into making up our minds in the first instance. In fact, here, as I said in my review of the first book, Velleman is paying the price for seriously scuttling the direction of fit distinction, for I do not see that knowing what we are going to do is reason-giving at all. In fact, as Korsgaard and Hill have said in various places in explicating normative, first person concepts, the practical question is not what we are going to do, but what we are to do, or ought to do. He bites the bullet on this by arguing, incredibly, that choice (and I suppose, intention) has the same direction of fit as belief, but a different direction of causality (p. 25). And how is this linked to autonomy? The answer is that when you govern yourself, you seek to grasp yourself as part of the intelligible world and therefore advance towards being intelligible (p. 30).

I now turn to a brief summary of “The Possibility of Practical Reason”, the title article. Velleman’s view is, on the one hand, a form of externalism, in the sense that reasons for action do not have to engage the contingent, existing motivations of agents, and so, in this sense, people can be indifferent to the reasons they have. But they cannot, insofar as they are agents, for the aim of practical reason is one’s conscious control of one’s action (autonomy, here). Reasons for action are internal in this sense because they are capable of influencing people

engaged in practical reasoning, but only in so far as they accept its aim. This supposedly friendly interpretation of Kantian autonomy, attempts to straddle the internal–external distinction, ironically relying on the unKantian idea that reasons influence only if the autonomous aim of practical reason is accepted. The main difficulty, however, is that not accepting practical reason's aim is not really optional, because giving it up would be to renounce one's own agency, which, I submit, cannot be done by persons.

There is another article about internalism, "Is Motivation Internal to Value?", which restricts internalism considerations to what is intrinsically good for a person.

I discuss next the two pieces on decision theory and game theory, respectively, although the first, "The Story of Rational Action," only very briefly. In many respects, this is one of the most impressive articles, for it makes technical material very accessible to the uninitiated. Secondly, the normative aspect of expected utility theory is developed, not in terms of gambling, and so on, but in supposed intuitions about rationality in general – meeting the aim of promoting self-understanding. After offering an interesting defense of *violating* some of the axioms, for example, transitivity of preferences, by means of "contextualization" of each option so as to block the intransitivity (p. 153), Velleman shows that conforming to the axioms by transcending the contexts meets the aim of action by making us more intelligible to ourselves (pp. 157–66). This intelligibility is cashed out in terms of fostering narrative unity of our lives. The one exception, however, is that the continuity axiom reportedly makes us *less* intelligible because it represents preferences as "an undifferentiated continuum of values", rather than as "satisficing" of values. This means that with respect to many priorities, the key is to know when we have "enough", such that more is not necessarily better, that is, as essentially discontinuous (p. 168).

The game theory paper, "Deciding to Decide", is a critique of Gauthier's argument for constrained maximization in prisoner's dilemmas and other strategic paradoxes. This, too, is a very interesting paper, but unfortunately, its mistakes are quite spectacular. The crux of the article is that Gauthier conceives of his dispute with direct utility-maximizers as a dispute, not whether the maximizer succeeds in his goal, but whether his conception of practical reason versus Gauthier's constrained view, evaluating the package of intending and acting on pragmatic grounds, is self-defeating or self-sustaining (p. 225). Velleman, however, thinks that evaluating theories of practical reasoning is a theoretical, not a practical question, because each would have to be decided on whether it meets the constitutive criterion of success, just as whether belief meets its constitutive aim, truth-directedness, is a theoretical question.

The nub of his critique of Gauthier is whether reflexive consideration of deliberative principle (unconstrained versus constrained maximization) is itself a practical question. To think it practical is to think that the principle (“keep your commitments versus maximize at each decision node”) “can itself promote the maximizing goal not only through the actions [it] recommend[s], but also through collateral *effects* [of following the principle] such as creating opportunities for action – for example making the agent eligible as a partner in cooperative agreements” (p. 228). Velleman writes, “a conception of practical reasoning cannot be self-defeating ... unless it is self-applicable – that is, unless its own evaluation is an inquiry of the sort to which the conception itself applies [practical inquiry for correctness of practical reason]” (p. 228). But this, he holds, cannot be the case.

Velleman is right that the correctness of a practical principle is a theoretical question, but he errs in not seeing that reflexive consideration of the consequences of adopting a consequential practical principle is a theoretical question, conducted at a meta-level. The confusion is whether the effects of adopting a practical principle is self-defeating on its own terms (Parfit’s observation of some principles (*Reasons and Persons*, OUP, 1983)) is a recursive question, analogous to whether it is true to believe that belief is truth-directed. Even the instrumentalist view of belief is likewise theoretical. What is more, Velleman’s critique of Gauthier would also undermine the reflexivity in Kant’s categorical imperative and its appeal to self-defeat of illicit maxims, or of reason critiquing itself – that the only test for correct principles of reasoning is whether they can apply to themselves without defeat (the principle of free debate must itself be debatable).

Be that as it may, Velleman’s own solution to strategic paradoxes is sketched in terms of the supposed aim of action (“autonomy” here). Applied to prisoners’ dilemmas, rational maximizers can reach cooperative agreements, *provided they can commit themselves* to future-directed actions. This is favored by autonomy, which derives from “the power of making future-directed decisions that are effective, so that we can determine today what will get done by us tomorrow” (p. 237). That sounds fine; I have said the same thing in print about commitment. But, then, what about other strategic paradoxes, like the toxin puzzle, and the paradox of deterrence? Relegating the toxin puzzle only to a footnote, he says there is no commitment to drink the toxin, although there is a mere intention (p. 237, n. 29) where the intention to drink it is *not* reason, so the rational agent will be unable to muster the intention [and thus lose one million for a short discomfort]!

Finally, the paper “How to Share an Intention”, is the only one on collective intention. The issue is whether a joint commitment, as in an agreement, can be derived from conditional offers to cooperate, and

acceptances. Gilbert and Tuomela, taking a holistic view, argue no; whereas Velleman, Bach, Gauthier and I say yes. It is agreed by all that joint commitments in the strong normative sense are both categorical and interdependent: categorical because neither party can unilaterally rescind the agreement; interdependent, because “the commitment of each cannot come into existence or exist apart ...” (Gilbert, “What is it for *Us* to Intend?” *Contemporary Action Theory*, Vol. II. Holstrom-Hintikka and Tuomela (eds.), Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997, pp. 79–80); “... [thus] the default of one party releases the other” (Gilbert, *Living Together*, Roman & Littlefield, 1996, p. 294). Tuomela, whom Velleman does not mention, takes a different means to the same end: that “I will if you will,” and “You will if I will” ramifies to a vicious regress, for which “deconditionalization” is impossible (“Joint intention and commitment”, forthcoming *Grazer Philosophische Studien: Special Issue: Social Facts & Collective Intentionality: Proceedings of the Workshop on Collective Intentionality II*, Georg Meggle (ed.)). Addressing only Gilbert, Velleman’s solution potentially answers both when he writes that both parties can share an intention in the way that two people can share the telling of a story: one can start a story that the other can finish. Thus, when you offer to cooperate by saying “I will if you will,” I finish the colloquy by accepting your offer, not by repeating “I will if you will,” but “Then I will.”

This is on the right track but needs more development to head off Tuomela’s objection that this is elliptical for “Then I will given that you will, given that I will, *ad infinitum*” (forthcoming). Building on Velleman’s incipient insight, however, I try to supply what is missing in my “Joint commitment and circularity”, forthcoming in *Grazer Philosophische Studien* (same proceedings as Tuomela above).

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*Human Nature and the Limits of Science*, JOHN DUPRÉ. Clarendon Press, 2001, 211 pages

This book is an extended attack on the pretensions of evolutionary psychology to delineate our human nature and to explain our behavior. It also contains a subsidiary attack on the similar pretensions of rational choice theory and classical economics; and in a final chapter it defends an account of free will. In this review I shall only comment directly on the chapters which relate to what I know best, namely, evolutionary psychology, and which occupy the main body of the book. Readers can draw their own inferences concerning the likely value of the remainder:

simple induction suggests that it is of equally poor quality. I shall, however, leave this for experts in the relevant fields to decide.

My view is that Dupré makes a fundamental mistake at the outset, concerning the difference between the sociobiology movement which flourished in the 1960s and 1970s, on the one hand, and the evolutionary psychology program pursued by a wide range of researchers over the last two decades, on the other. For he treats the difference as being one of mere name only (p. 2). In fact, however, the distinction between sociobiology and evolutionary psychology is as fundamental as that between behaviorist and cognitivist psychology, and for essentially the same reasons. I shall elaborate on this point in the paragraphs which follow.

(Admittedly, Dupré does later acknowledge that there is one distinctive fact about evolutionary psychologists – namely, that they are apt to couch their views in terms of *evolved modules* (p. 22). But he plainly thinks of these modules as systems which are there to guide specific types of behavior. In which case it would be true that we only have a notational variant on the sociobiologist's picture of evolved behaviors and behavioral tendencies – the only real difference would be that evolutionary psychology postulates specific brain-mechanisms for the behaviors in question.)

Sociobiology was grounded in the behaviorist assumptions which dominated both philosophy and psychology throughout the middle part of the twentieth century, following the work of Ryle (1949), Watson (1924) and Skinner (1957). The difference is just that, whereas behaviorism tended to place a heavy emphasis on *learning*, sociobiologists began to speculate that many behaviors and behavioral tendencies might be more directly biological in origin. Evolutionary psychologists, in contrast, have fully embraced the cognitive revolution in psychology and philosophy which began (legend has it) with Chomsky's (1959) review of Skinner's *Verbal Behavior*, and which then gathered increasing momentum through the later decades of the century.

Sociobiologists such as Wilson (1975) argued that evolution should have shaped the behaviors and behavioral tendencies of human beings, in just the same way that ethology was revealing how evolution had shaped the behaviors of other animals; and they then set out to provide evidence for such a contention. They recognized, of course, that any innate behavioral tendency would need to be realized in a brain mechanism of one sort or another. But their view was that such mechanisms would be selected for because of their role in mediating between input releasing-conditions, on the one hand, and behavior, on the other. For in the end, it is the behaviors of organisms which have an especially large impact on the chances of survival and reproductive success of those organisms, so it is behaviors and behavioral tendencies which would be selected for. Sociobiologists could go at least *some* way



towards explaining the distinctive flexibility of human behavior, however, since behavioral tendencies can have many and various releasing conditions. Nevertheless, numerous people have thought it to be a valid criticism of sociobiology that human behavior is just *too* flexible to admit of direct evolutionary explanation, except in rare cases. This point is reiterated by Dupré, often and at length.

Evolutionary psychology, in contrast – as heir to the cognitivist revolution – takes quite seriously a belief/desire (or an information/goal) organization of psychological systems. This is true even in the case of insects, where it turns out that the desert ant has states representing that a food source is 44.64 meters North-East of its nest on a bearing of 16.5 degrees, say, which it can deploy either in the service of the goal of carrying a piece of food in a straight line back to the nest or in returning directly to the source once again – or, in the case of bees, when the goal is to inform other bees of the location of the food source (Gallistel, 1990, 2000). What has been selected for in the first instance, on this view, are systems for generating beliefs and desires; the behaviors which result from those beliefs and desires can be many and various. Indeed, once modules for gathering information about social norms, and for generating desires for things which will enhance social status, say, are factored into the evolutionary psychology equation, then there seems no limit to the flexibility of behavior which an evolved modular psychology could issue in.

There might seem to be a paradox inherent in the evolutionary psychology position here, however. For if it is behavior which ultimately influences the survival and reproductive success of individuals – as everyone acknowledges – then how could it *not* be behaviors and behavioral tendencies which are selected for in evolution, just as sociobiologists suppose? Yet the apparent paradox is easily resolved within the framework of belief/desire psychology. For mechanisms which generate reliable information/true beliefs will make fitness-enhancing behaviors more likely, provided that the organism's goals are for things which would enhance fitness; and vice versa for the mechanisms which generate such desires, on the assumption of reliable information. The point is just that the same item of information (e.g., the compass bearing of a food source) can be deployed in the service of a number of different goals; in which case mutations that enhance the reliability of that information or the speed with which it is acquired, are likely to have a positive impact on a whole variety of fitness-enhancing behaviors. Similarly, a given goal can often be approached in a number of distinct ways, subserved by a variety of different beliefs about the means to realize that goal; so mutations which make beneficial adjustments in goals are likely to manifest themselves in a range fitness-promoting behaviors, too.

Largely because he does not really distinguish between evolutionary psychology and the earlier sociobiology movement, Dupré alleges that evolutionary psychologists will have difficulty in explaining the manifest diversity of human behaviors and human cultures (p. 16). And he himself is at pains to emphasize – in alleged contrast to evolutionary psychology – that human brains and human minds develop in interaction with culture, where cultures differ from one another in many significant ways (pp. 31, 37, 100). But no evolutionary psychologist would disagree with the latter point. On the contrary, they have seen part of their task from the outset to be that of explaining how evolved psychologies both constrain and are shaped by cultures (Barkow *et al.*, 1992). And as I pointed out above, once an evolved psychology with a belief/desire architecture has mechanisms for generating beliefs about norms, and mechanisms for generating social goals (such as desires for certain kinds of norm-compliance, social status and such like) then we shall begin to see patterns within cultural diversity, as well as to understand its underlying basis.

According to Dupré, too, evolutionary psychologists are supposed to minimize the role of learning in development and in explaining our mature capacities and behaviors (p. 29). Nothing could be further from the truth. The various psychological modules postulated by evolutionary psychology are, almost all of them, *learning mechanisms* of one sort or another. Once the commitment of evolutionary psychologists to belief/desire cognitive architectures is fully appreciated, indeed, it becomes obvious that the modular systems in question are learning systems. (At least, this is so in connection with belief-generation; I shall return to the case of desires in a moment.) The system in the ant which uses dead reckoning to figure out the exact distance and direction of a food-source in relation to the nest (given the time of day and the position of the sun) is a system for *learning* that relationship or for acquiring a *belief* concerning that relationship. Similarly, the language system in humans is, in early childhood, designed for *learning* the syntax and vocabulary of the surrounding language; and in older children and adults it is used to *learn* what someone has just said on a given occasion, extracting this information from patterns in ambient sound.

Desires are not learned in any normal sense of the term “learning”, of course. Yet much of evolutionary psychology is concerned with the genesis of human motivational states. This is an area where we need to construct a new concept, in fact, the desiderative equivalent of learning. Learning (as normally understood) is a process which issues in true beliefs or beliefs which are close enough to the truth to support (or at least not to hinder) individual fitness. But desires, too, need to be formed in ways which will support (or not hinder) individual fitness. Some desires are instrumental ones, of course, being derived from ultimate

goals together with beliefs about the means which would be sufficient for realizing those goals. But it is hardly very plausible that all acquired desires are formed in this way.

Theorists such as Dupré are apt to talk vaguely about the influence of surrounding culture, at this point. Somehow desires such as the desire to approach a particular woman on a particular occasion, or an older man's desire to be seen in the company of a beautiful young girl, are supposed to be caused by cultural influences of one sort or another – prevailing attitudes to women, perceived power structures, media images, and so forth. But it is left entirely unclear what the mechanism of such influences is supposed to be. How do facts about culture generate new desires? We are not told.

In contrast, evolutionary psychology postulates a rich network of systems for generating new desires in the light of input from the environment and background beliefs. Many of these desires will be “ultimate”, in the sense that they have not been produced by reasoning backwards from the means sufficient to fulfill some other desire. But they will still have been produced by inferences taking place in systems dedicated to creating desires of that sort. A desire to have sex with a specific person in a particular context, for example, will not (of course) have been produced by reasoning that such an act is likely to fulfill some sort of evolutionary goal of producing many healthy descendants. Rather, it will have been generated by some system (a module) that has evolved for the purpose, which takes as input a variety of kinds of perceptual and non-perceptual information and then generates, when appropriate, a desire of some given strength. (Whether that desire is then acted upon will of course depend upon the other desires that the subject possesses at the time, and on their relevant beliefs.)

The issue is not, then, the extent to which learning is involved in the causation of human behaviors. Both evolutionary psychologists and their opponents can agree that learning is ubiquitous. Nor is the issue even whether the algorithms used in learning are domain-general (being suitable for extracting many different kinds of information) or are rather specific to a particular domain. (Though the domain-specificity of learning algorithms is certainly an interesting question.) It is rather whether the various mechanisms which engage in learning have been specifically designed by evolution to extract information, or to generate fitness enhancing goals, within one given domain rather than another.

The main overall theme of Dupré's book is to mount an attack upon *scientism*, in fact, defined as “an exaggerated and often distorted conception of what science can be expected to do or explain for us” (p. 1). Both evolutionary psychology and many applications of classical economics are said to fall into this general category. And scientism is supposed to go along with some sort of tacit commitment to physicalist

reductionism, together with an attempt to explain everything in terms of mechanistic models (pp. 6–7). Of course it is a truism that scientism, so explained, is a *bad thing*. The question is whether evolutionary psychology (and rational choice theory and classical economics – again I shall limit my discussion to what I know best) really does have the alleged vices.

Once the cognitivist character of evolutionary psychology is seen in clear focus, it should be plain that it is neither reductionist nor mechanistic in character. Explanation of human behavior in terms of beliefs and goals is neither reduced nor replaced. Rather, we have some proposed systems which are said to have been designed to generate reliable information and fitness-promoting goals, together with a research program which is geared towards finding further systems of these sorts. And we have the beginnings of attempts to understand the computational principles on which such systems might operate. This may be reductive *explanation*, for sure, in the benign sense of seeking to understand the operations of complex systems in terms of the nature and interactions of their parts. But it is not physicalist reduction in the sense Dupré understands; nor (since many of the systems in question are learning systems, as we have seen) is it inconsistent with giving due weight to the environment in explanations of human beliefs, motivations, and behaviors.

Throughout the book, Dupré writes with an annoying sort of sneering tone, jeering at the intelligence and motives of his opponents. Although intended to be witty (Dupré's cover blurb describes it as such), this will surely prove irritating to anyone not already as convinced as Dupré is of the utter hopelessness of evolutionary psychology and classical economics as viable scientific enterprises. And throughout the book, too, Dupré's use of sources is highly selective. To the extent that this book has been researched at all, the author seems to have trawled the literature for just long enough to find a study which he can then see some way of mocking. This is a great pity, since Dupré does have some interesting things to say, about the so-called "unity of science", for example. Would that his scholarship had been better, and that he had not been so enamored of his own rhetoric! In conclusion, I can only suggest that the Oxford editor should review his or her standards for refereeing monographs.

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*Invariances: The Structure of the Objective World*. ROBERT NOZICK, The Belknap Press, 2001, 416 pages

It is always worthwhile to read the very intelligent, and indeed that is the bottom line on Robert Nozick's new book *Invariances*.

Few readers of this journal are likely to come to a Nozick book without preconceptions. For over 30 years he has been one of America's leading philosophers. His works have proven consistently insightful, wide-ranging, charming, and, when he sought to be, rigorous. The good news is that *Invariances* offers all these qualities. I expect I will come back to it throughout the years, as will many readers. It is smart, original, and draws its own lines in a bold and daring manner. It does not get bogged down in dealing with every detail in the extant literature. The sad news is that Nozick passed away shortly after its publication.

*Invariances* is a difficult book to review for several reasons. Just about every Nozick book contains *so much stuff*, and this is no exception. Furthermore, many of the best bits come in asides and footnotes, rather than in the exposition of the main argument. At times a main argument is difficult to find. Nozick also offers a brief passage where he asserts that it is unjust to criticize the dead, who cannot defend themselves in the public arena.

The small set pieces of *Invariances* are its greatest strength. Scattered throughout the book are 20 or so two or three page passages of force and brilliance. Any one of these is worth the price of the book. The book is harder to assess as an overall argument. Both the title and the introduction suggest that *arguments for relativism* are the underlying thread that ties the book together. Nonetheless, Nozick has too many ideas, and too much intellectual energy, to stick so closely to his chosen brief.

The strongest arguments for relativism, for this reader, come in the early parts of the book. Nozick defines relativism carefully. He does not endorse the sillier forms of relativism. Serbs and Croats do not have different kinds of truth. Wishing something does not make it so. And so

on. Nonetheless one coherent form of relativism comes out as a strong contender. To use Nozick's language, many truth claims are not invariant to transformations.

What does this mean? Can a truth claim be relative in a meaningful way? Let us start with a simple example. Statements about probability are commonly relativistic. They are relative to the knowledge an observer holds. So flipping an evenly balanced coin, from the perspective of one observer, yields a 0.5 probability of heads. But this number is not "out there" in the world, but rather reflects the ignorance of the observer. Another observer with different information might see the coin flipping, and heading towards tails, and assign a probability of 0.2 for heads. And so on. Probability claims are meaningful, yet true only in the relative sense, relative to information.

So far so good. But can truth be relative more generally? Here Nozick offers two arguments. The first is from quantum mechanics. Quantum mechanics violates just about every common sense intuition we have about the world. Arguably a particle can be in two places at once, action at a distance is possible, causality is thrown out the window, observation affects the properties of a system, and the future may influence the past, to name just a few properties of modern physics. Nozick makes a convincing case that quantum mechanics implies relativism. Truth now depends on the time and place of the observer, to put the point in a simple sentence. And even if we believe that the physical world is "ultimately classical" in some sense (e.g., "hidden variables" theories), two points remain. First, quantum mechanics still reflects how things really work with some non-trivial positive probability. Second, the "world we know" would have relativistic properties, even if some more sophisticated description-space for the world did not. Note also that hidden variables theories have not swept the world of physics.

Nozick's second argument for relative truth, which I find less convincing, injects the pragmatic notion of usefulness into the truth concept. Then it is obvious that truth can be relative in the social sphere, since different things will be useful for different people. This is true (pardon the reliance on this concept, and do not ask which version of "true" I mean!), but trivial and well-known.

Chapter 2 takes up whether truth is "objective," and Chapter 3 considers whether there are necessary truths. Nozick punches holes in both ideas. Along the way, we receive some real treats. Nozick (pp. 103–4) argues that Popperian falsificationism does not solve the induction problem any more than verificationism does. Pages 111–14 offer a brilliant discussion of the underdetermination of theory, given some body of evidence. Kripke's theory of naming and necessity takes some lumps on pages 128–32.

The set pieces aside, what are we to make of all this? Some will say that this is simply old wine in new bottles. Is Nozick not taking philosophic skepticism, à la Sextus Empiricus, and giving it the more acceptable name of relativism? We will return to whether this charge sticks.

Chapter 4 moves to the realm of consciousness. We receive more brilliance and insight, but many readers will be wondering what happened to relativism. The reader gets the feeling that Nozick had 20 years of insights into consciousness that he could not resist putting down on paper. Why are people conscious at all? Why cannot they just compute, as Deep Blue did to beat Kasparov at chess? What is consciousness? Nozick (p. 191) writes: "I conjecture that it is such merging of data that underlies consciousness. Consciousness involves the meshing of different streams of data into a unified synthesis or representation." I find more puzzling the claim that "... consciousness is the brain's common knowledge" (p. 197). Self-deception often displaces internal common knowledge, yet we remain conscious.

The highlight of this chapter comes when Nozick takes on the questions of whether physical and mental qualities are identical, if the mental somehow reduces to the physical, or if a kind of supervenience holds. Years of bitter experience have taught us a skepticism about discussions of these topics. But here Nozick has much to say that is relevant, clearly argued, and persuasive. He holds the "identity position" to be the correct default, but also believes that some mental states are likely supervenient while others are dualistically nonsupervenient. He provides a useful way of seeing the entire discussion as an empirical question rather than a metaphysical one.

The fifth and final chapter offers the Nietzschean title "The Genealogy of Ethics". Many readers will look forward most to this part of the book, but it disappoints. It offers nothing new. Nozick insists, correctly, that our moral intuitions are biologically evolved and therefore unreliable. Philosophical intuitionism fails. But we never get a good sense of how to go further from this point. Nor is Nozick willing to discard his own intuitions. Nozick provides a lengthy and intelligent discussion of how ethics and evolutionary biology connect, but with no bottom line. He (pp. 259–60) hints at a general principle of cooperation that might give some bite to libertarianism (Nozick originally had wanted his *Philosophical Explanations* to end with a proof of libertarian rights, but he could not pull it off). On page 263 he calls "voluntary cooperation" the "core principle of ethics", though without having a strong argument for this conclusion.

The main text of the book closes with a classic Nozick cadence: "Philosophy begins in wonder. It never ends."

What are we to make of all this? *Invariances* holds a curious place in

the Nozick canon. Consider the stereotypical picture of a philosophic thinker who starts off as an absolutist, becomes more moderate, and ends up in relativism, perhaps later turning to the arts and the humanities. For a while Nozick appeared to fit this pattern but he has confounded us.

The Nozick of *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, his playfulness aside, can be read as an absolutist, offering a set of single, correct answers. Nozick then recognized the weaknesses in his original position and became wider-ranging, more synthetic, and, one way or another, more relativistic. His first reaction was to solve the deeper philosophic problems through brute force, which led to his *Philosophical Explanations*. Whatever his insistence on “non-coercive” modes of argumentation (persuasion, rather than a “forcing” argument), he tried to crack open the tough problems of philosophy, using a mix of charm and brilliance.

Nozick then moved to more continental approaches, favoring the essay and the humanities. Montaigne provided the paradigm for his *The Examined Life*, which has proved his least popular work (though this reviewer is a fan of it). In the stereotypical philosophic career, this work would have followed his embrace of relativism, not preceded it. Given relativism, the essay would have been the next place to go.

I view Nozick’s career, despite his rhetoric to the contrary, as a search for newer and more effective methods of philosophic coercion. His earliest works in decision theory, such as his Newcomb’s Paradox essay, are highly philosophically coercive, and presumably represent his innate temperament and personality. He is always looking for the argument that “wows” others, and succeeds more often than just about anyone else. We return to his books, and admire him as we do, because fundamentally we like being wowed, and we like being coerced, whether we always agree or not. When Nozick writes of his “non-coercive” method, I think he is trying to lower our expectations, so that the wow will be all the bigger when it comes.

Since *The Examined Life*, Nozick’s career has moved progressively back towards rigor and a new absolutism. The *Nature of Rationality* returned Nozick to decision theory, the arena of his original triumphs as a young man. *Invariances* insists on using science, be it physics or biology, to judge philosophy. Of course nothing is more coercive in its reasoning and evidence than science. So under my reading, the relativism of this work is illusory. Nozick has introduced a new kind of absolutism. He arrives at relativistic conclusions, within the language of philosophy, but the real truths that stand are absolute truths of science. What Nozick really teaches us is that when we bring science and philosophy together, and view the mix through the prism of philosophy, we must talk like relativists on philosophic issues. But the final boss is absolutist science.



Oddly enough, Nozick ends up in the same boat as Quine, his Harvard colleague whom he has long admired. Quine would not embrace the term “relativist”, but he has been labeled as such often, especially by his more polemic critics. His fundamental thesis of the indeterminacy of translation suggests that a sentence, or indeed a thought, does not have a uniquely correct meaning in another language. Whether we use the R word (relativism) or not, his work has made absolutists run for cover. At the same time, Quine reveres science. It is his ultimate court of appeal. Furthermore his indeterminacy argument was formulated through a naive physicalist interpretation of speech acts; he sticks with behaviorism and is not willing to refer to the “intent” of the speaker in any unambiguous way. At no point, however, do we learn why a potentially relativistic philosophy should assign such priority to the scientific viewpoint. Nozick now sits in the same boat, though he arrived there through a different path. Quine started with an analysis of language and meaning. Nozick worked through quantum mechanics and evolutionary biology.

Nozick’s position is almost ideally suited to win debates. When confronted with philosophic arguments, he can introduce science and coerce the opponent into accepting his position. His relativism is hard to prove wrong. Indeed the position as stated is virtually invulnerable. He only needs to show how many truth claims are not invariant to various transformations, as discussed above, which he has done. Plus, he is only claiming to make relativism possible and coherent, he is not claiming to have a knock-down argument for it, even when it seems that he does.

That all being said, Nozick would have a harder time fighting what Derek Parfit has called “a war on two fronts”, or defending his position from criticism from both sides. Nozick’s science can trump philosophy, and his relativism is invulnerable to attack from absolutism. Nozick is less concerned, however, with beating off the more radical relativist position, as we might find in Rorty (in his more extreme moments) or in a writer like Sextus Empiricus. Given the initial moves he is willing to make, he cannot so easily defeat or even shoo away the extreme relativists. Nozick’s position appears impregnable because he considers opposition from one direction only.

When all is said and done, I return to the first few words of this review. It is always worthwhile to read the very intelligent. And we will all miss Robert Nozick.

**Tyler Cowen**

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*If You're an Egalitarian, How Come You're So Rich?* G. A. COHEN. Harvard University Press, 2000, xi + 233 pages

Cohen never satisfactorily answers the important question posed in the title of this fascinating book. Perhaps this is because there is no satisfactory reply. That is, perhaps self-professed and relatively rich egalitarians like Cohen (and myself) cannot justify keeping for ourselves a share of resources that significantly exceeds the share to which we would be entitled if there was a just distribution of resources. If that is so, then our egalitarian conception of justice offers an indictment of our personal behavior. Cohen stops short of drawing this conclusion but his aim is to demonstrate the direct relevance of justice to personal behavior.

Cohen's approach to his topic is itself highly personal. He weaves elements of his own biography through the arguments of the book. Cohen's youthful confidence about the essential soundness of Marxism has given way to a mellower, less self-assured posture marked by a rejection of key tenets of Marxism and a surprising openness to Christian ideals. Cohen has retained an unwavering commitment to equality and he still views capitalism as deeply oppressive. But he now rejects the idea that the collapse of capitalism is historically inevitable and he recognizes that Marxism's traditional antipathy to normative theorizing about justice was fatally mistaken. The book's theme concerning the interplay between the personal and the political is developed in main three movements. It figures first in Cohen's account of his intensely political upbringing. It then appears in his reappraisal of the idea that history will deliver equality and, finally, in a detailed critique of Rawls's conception of justice.

The sources of Cohen's life-long engagement with Marxism lie deep in his childhood. He grew up in a working-class Jewish community in post-war Montreal. His parents were deeply committed Marxists and fervently anti-religious. They inculcated the young Cohen with Marxist convictions. They were less successful in instilling their anti-religious zeal but Cohen, who describes himself as an agnostic, adopted a mainly ambivalent stance towards religious elements of Jewish culture. Inspired by the communist activists he encountered, Cohen sought to acquire a deep understanding of the historical forces that would inexorably give rise to socialism.

Cohen's reflections on his highly political upbringing allow him to pose a tricky puzzle about the etiology of deeply held personal convictions. He observes that one important reason why he continues to embrace an "uncompromising form of egalitarianism" (p. 8) is that he was raised in a communist home. Had he been raised in a less radical household, his convictions might have been less egalitarian. An honest

appraisal of the source of some of our most profound convictions will reveal that the rational grounds that we have for holding those convictions are not demonstrably superior to the grounds that others have for holding contrary convictions. To the degree that this is so, the rationality of continuing to maintain such convictions is threatened. Some “nurtured beliefs” will fail to pass an epistemic standard that Cohen calls the “Principle” – “you lack good reason to believe *p* rather than a rival proposition *q* when you cannot justifiably believe that your grounds for believing *p* are better than another’s are for believing *q*” (p. 11). It might seem that rationality requires us to abandon any conviction that lacks a justification that is superior to the justification available for a rival conviction. But Cohen points out that such a “credal cleansing proposal” (p. 14) seems too radical. It would jeopardize the rationality of too many convictions. There thus appears to be something paradoxical about many of our nurtured beliefs. They stand condemned as irrational, yet they are often beliefs whose rationality we affirm. Cohen would not be moved to abandon his radical egalitarianism even in the face of his acknowledgement that the grounds he can adduce for his egalitarianism are, ultimately, no better than the grounds others, given their different upbringing, can provide for their contrary liberal convictions.

Cohen’s puzzle is interesting but I suspect the challenge it poses is less ominous than he supposes. Awareness of the genesis of our convictions is relevant to assessing their rational status. In cases where informed and reflective people disagree, we have reason to temper our claims to truth with suitable intellectual humility. We should be open to considerations that tell against our convictions and we should critically interrogate the source of our own convictions. But it is important to remember that different inquirers with radically different intellectual biographies often gravitate towards the adoption of similar convictions. So we have some reason to suppose that we can, in practice, avoid Cohen’s epistemic conundrum. The fact that Cohen’s egalitarian convictions have remained largely intact in spite of the challenges to which they have been put, along with the fact that many people who were not raised on equality have come to embrace egalitarianism, suggest that Cohen need not be too worried about the rational credentials of his egalitarian convictions.

The intertwined themes of religion and culture figure prominently in many of Cohen’s arguments. Being Jewish is a central facet of Cohen’s identity, yet there are respects in which he seems alienated from the culture that sustains his sense of identity. Cohen was raised to believe that Jewish identity did not depend on Judaism as a religion. A socialist school he attended proclaimed the (supposed) virtues of the Soviet Union and linked Jewish identity to political commitment and a shared

history of oppression but not to religion. Cohen still values many elements of his politically intense education, but he now views the lessons about Jewish identity as deeply mistaken.

Cohen does not offer a close analysis of why Jewish identity must be tied to religion. One issue that arises in this context concerns the relation between valuing one's identity and one's personal behavior. To what degree should a person who professes to value a particular identity be prepared to behave in ways that contribute to sustaining that identity? Consider how this issue might apply to Cohen. On his view, Jewish identity cannot persist unless there remains a core of religiously active Jews. Cohen sincerely values his Jewish identity, yet he does not practice the religion. Elsewhere in the book, Cohen urges us to adopt the view that the ideals of justice that we espouse should be expressed in our personal behavior. Perhaps a similar point applies to the values that ground one's identity. In the spirit of Cohen's inquiry we might ask: If you care about being Jewish and you believe that being Jewish depends on the practice of a Jewish religion, how come you do not go to synagogue? It is not a necessary condition of the preservation of Cohen's Jewish identity that he engage in religious practice. All Cohen's view about the relation between identity and religion requires is that *some* choose to practice the religion. But there seems to be a tension in the outlook of a person who is not willing to engage in religious practice himself but who hopes that others will do so.

A familiar objection to religion that extends to at least some aspects of Judaism is that many religious traditions are implicated in the maintenance of sexual inequality. Cohen is surely aware of the importance of this issue. Yet his discussion of the religious aspects of his identity is curiously isolated from the egalitarian convictions that are so important to him. In particular, he is disappointingly silent about tensions between the maintenance of identity-sustaining religious traditions and egalitarian values.

A troubling feature of Marxism was its hostility to considerations of political morality. The regimes that officially embraced Marxism were notoriously willing to violate basic norms of justice. Of course, these violations of basic principles can be seen as betrayals of communist ideals. Yet, to an important degree, Marxist theory encouraged ambivalence to considerations of political morality. Cohen offers a compelling diagnosis and critique of the failure of classical Marxists to engage with problems of distributive justice. The failure is rooted in the fact that Marx's theory of history encouraged the adoption of an "obstetric conception of political practice" (p. 43). Marxism taught that history was a matter of class struggle. Moreover, the ultimate trajectory of the struggle could be plotted. Capitalism would generate huge advances in material productivity that would be accompanied by ever-greater

inequality. The working class would grow in size and power until it would organize politically and through revolutionary activity abolish capitalism. Equality would reign in communism, but history, not normative ideals, would determine its appropriate character. The obstetric motif that accompanies this view of history supposes that the primary task of political activity is to facilitate the birth of socialism. Capitalism is pregnant with socialism. When the economic and political conditions are right, socialism will be born. The proper aim of political activity is thus parallel to the proper activity of a midwife. Moreover, since the solutions to the problems that beset capitalism will be furnished automatically by its socialist offspring, there is no reason to address normative problems about how the benefits and burdens of social cooperation should be distributed. Insofar as Marxists anticipated a solution to problems of distributive justice, it was supplied by the expectation that the material superabundance accompanying socialism would simply facilitate equality.

Cohen argues convincingly that the obstetric conception of political practice is “patently false” (p. 75). The key claims concerning inevitable historical trends on which it depends are simply not credible. The working class has not become a dominant political force with a clear interest in overthrowing capitalism, and material superabundance of the sort traditionally envisioned by Marxists is not ecologically sustainable. But the obstetric conception is so obviously wrongheaded that it is rather mysterious how reflective Marxists could ever have embraced it seriously. Cohen provides a concise and masterly reconstruction of the intellectual roots of the obstetric conception in Marx’s synthesis of elements of German philosophy, French utopian socialism and British political economy. The account of Hegel’s influence on Marx is not strikingly novel but it helps us understand how Marx’s dangerous complacency about normative theory could seem plausible to so many Marxists.

The misplaced contempt for normative political philosophy evinced by classical Marxists is certainly not a feature of Rawls’s trailblazing work on distributive justice. But Cohen argues that Rawls’s conception of equality as an ideal that can be realized through the design of political institutions alone is dangerously myopic. The details of Cohen’s critique are complex and subtle, but the main defect he locates in Rawls’s theory is a failure to acknowledge the way in which justice depends on personal motives. Rawls’s difference principle holds that economic inequalities are just provided they make the worst off better off than they otherwise would be. Rawls allows that justified inequality might arise through the operation of economic incentives that stimulate beneficial productivity gains. Cohen holds that the main way incentives can generate increased productivity is by harnessing the selfish acquisitive motives of talented

individuals. Cohen charges that such acquisitive motives should be condemned as anti-egalitarian.

Cohen presents his objection as a dilemma. Either the talented who are in a position to press for high wages affirm the difference principle or they do not. If they do not then society is not just because Rawls claims that members of a just society must affirm the principles of justice. If they affirm the difference principle then they must apply it in their daily life. But talented individuals who affirm the difference principle will not be justified in demanding higher wages than the untalented. This is because the talented have a choice about whether to demand higher wages, and a person who embraces egalitarian justice should not choose to make such demands. The selfish personal ethos of the sort presupposed by incentive arguments is inconsistent with the personal ethos that the difference principle requires.

Cohen thinks the main reply to this argument is located in Rawls's insistence that the subject of justice is the basic structure of society. According to this position, justice does not apply in the first instance to the choices of individuals or their dispositions. Rather, justice is primarily a matter of determining how the basic social and political institutions that determine the distribution of benefits and burdens in a society are to be structured. But Cohen argues that the basic structure objection fails because there is a fatal ambiguity in Rawls's characterization of the basic structure. Rawls sometimes characterizes the basic structure as consisting only of legally coercive institutions. But elsewhere Rawls has a more expansive conception of the basic structure that includes non-coercive but important social institutions such as the family. Rawls's rationale for focusing on the basic structure is that the character of the basic structure is the major determinant of the life prospects of individuals. According to Cohen, a second dilemma now faces Rawls. Either Rawls accepts the expansive interpretation of the basic structure or he adopts the narrow interpretation. But Rawls cannot accept the narrow interpretation because a narrow construal of the basic structure is at odds with the official rationale for focusing on the basic structure in the first place. Adopting the expansive interpretation means that Rawls cannot use the basic structure reply as a way of blocking Cohen's initial critique because the expansive interpretation permits justice-based scrutiny of "patterns of personal choice that are not legally prescribed" (p. 139).

Cohen's critique displays his commitment to a "Christian social nostrum" that says "for inequality to be overcome, there needs to be a revolution in feeling or motivation, as opposed to (just) economic structure" (p. 120). Rawls's theory ultimately fails because it does not sufficiently acknowledge that a just distribution of resources depends upon the adoption by ordinary people of a motivationally efficacious

ethos of justice. Equality cannot prevail if individuals behave as “acquisitive maximizers in daily life” (p. 140).

Cohen’s arguments are important and compelling. However, in my judgement they do not provide a decisive case against Rawls. One difficulty is that Cohen’s critique seems to depend on an unduly restrictive understanding of how one can embrace an egalitarian ethos. He assumes that maximizing behavior in market settings must reflect an ethos of selfishness. But the fact that one is moved to respond to market signals need not be interpreted in this way. Consequentialists have pointed out that a person’s decision procedure need not be equivalent to the criterion of rightness that they affirm. Similarly, the egalitarian ethos one affirms need not be used as a decision procedure in daily life. A person can affirm the difference principle and yet be disposed to maximizing behavior in market settings without betraying egalitarian commitments. Insofar as egalitarians accept a role for markets in the production and distribution of a wide variety of goods, there may be justice-based reasons for hoping that individuals will be responsive to market signals. In the absence of such responsiveness, markets will not function well. The point I am sketching is related to the idea of imperfect procedural justice. A defense lawyer can sincerely affirm the ideal that the guilty should be punished and the innocent set free. But given an adversarial system of criminal law, this ideal might be best served in the courtroom by diligent efforts on her part to secure the acquittal of her client. Similarly, if markets can serve egalitarian objectives (and Cohen does not deny that they can) then egalitarianism might be best served in market settings by maximizing behavior.

Having established that personal behavior can be appropriately scrutinized directly from the point of view of justice, Cohen concludes the book by pressing the awkward question posed in its title. He canvasses a variety of ways in which rich egalitarians, concerned with equality as a matter of justice, might try to *justify* the decision to keep a greater than equal share of resources. Among the interesting suggestions he rejects are Dworkin’s claim that the achievement of egalitarian justice is a duty of the state and not an individual duty *per se* and Nagel’s claim that expecting rich egalitarians to forsake their wealth voluntarily is unreasonably burdensome. The only justification that Cohen finds promising is one that permits rich egalitarians to keep their unjust shares as part of a political strategy aimed at advancing the cause of equality. “Since I am rich, my position in society affords me access to influential people whose decisions affect the lot of the badly off. . . . I must retain lavish resources if I am to entertain, in appropriate fashion, people who might help the cause” (p. 179). This justification might seem credible if it resonated more closely with the actual practices of rich egalitarians. Unfortunately, it does not match the profile of the rich egalitarians I

know. Most of our wealth is devoted to living well and it is only to a very modest degree that our political activism actually depends on our wealth. Rich egalitarians need better justifications than Cohen's if they are to keep their wealth in good conscience.

Cohen's excellent book forces egalitarians to confront the implications of their convictions for their personal conduct. There is an important respect, however, in which the challenge of leading one's life with integrity is deeper and more extensive than Cohen supposes. Most of Cohen's discussion implicitly adopts a problematic view of the scope of norms of distributive justice. Cohen, much like Rawls, assumes that justice applies primarily to the distribution of resources and opportunities within societies. Yet from an impartial point of view, it is difficult to defend a principled limitation on the scope of justice. But once we recognize that considerations of justice apply to the distribution of resources globally, the challenge faced by rich western egalitarians is much greater than Cohen supposes. After all, every moderately wealthy westerner is vastly richer than any one of the deprived children in the "developing" world. But the challenge is not one egalitarians face alone, even if they face it in a particularly acute form. From a global perspective we can ask: if you are a welfare liberal, or a utilitarian, or even a Nozickian libertarian, how come you're so rich?

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*Karl Popper: The Formative Years, 1902–1945*, MALACHI HAIM HACOEN.  
Cambridge University Press, 2000, xiii + 610 pages

Malachi Haim Hacoen's *Karl Popper: The Formative Years 1902–1945* is an impressive biography of one of the twentieth century's most important philosophers. Hacoen, a professor of history at Duke University, tries to situate Popper in the context of the interwar Jewish, or assimilated Jewish, Viennese intelligentsia. Hacoen's Popper is thus a progressive young socialist reformer who now needs to be "rescued" from his own postwar reputation as a "conservative" critic of communism. Hacoen thus focuses upon the development of Popper's philosophy in the 1920s and 1930s, tracing his life in detail only through the publication of *The Open Society and Its Enemies* in 1945, and covering its last 48 years in the space of an epilogue. His book, however, is rich in information regarding Viennese Jewry, anti-Semitism, and the politics of Jewish assimilation in Vienna from the nineteenth century through the 1940s. Indeed, Hacoen devotes so much space to these themes – discoursing at length on Jewish



liberalism, progressivism, cosmopolitanism, and socialism – that is is easy at times to forget that he has written an intellectual biography of Popper, as opposed to an intellectual history of Viennese Jewish thought during the interwar period. But Hacoheh has also marshaled a great deal of information about Popper, including material from the Karl Popper archives, and his book is likely, for this reason alone, to be regarded as an authoritative source about Popper's life and philosophy for years to come. This, in a way, is unfortunate. For as impressive as his biography is, I must say, from the outset, that Hacoheh's Popper is not my own.

Hacoheh's work is motivated partly by his belief that Popper's philosophy has something to say to the "academic left", and partly by his belief that Popper's "concealed" and "distorted" (pp. 13–15) – or, at the very least, misrepresented – his own intellectual development in his autobiography, *Unended Quest*. Hacoheh is right that "Popper saw more clearly than they [the academic left] have through the philosophical and political problems preoccupying them" (p. 2). But his argument that Popper, "concealed" and "distorted" his own intellectual development is very weak.

Consider one example. Popper says that he solved the problem of demarcation in his own mind in 1919 and linked it to the problem of induction only 10 years later, in 1929. Hacoheh, on the other hand, says that Popper "discovered the problem of demarcating science from metaphysics, and recognized that falsifiability was an alternative demarcation criterion to induction" only in the spring of 1932 – and not until he had nearly completed his first (but long unpublished) book *Die beiden Grundprobleme der Erkenntnistheorie*. But his argument, so far as I can see, consists only in his observation that "there is no significant discussion of demarcation" in the early section of *Die beiden Grundprobleme der Erkenntnistheorie*, together with his speculation – introduced to dismiss evidence brought to his attention by Troels Eggers Hansen, the editor of *Die beiden Grundprobleme der Erkenntnistheorie*, that would apparently falsify his theory – that Popper's references in the early sections of the book to later sections in which there is significant discussion of demarcation were added only at the end.

Hacoheh, in dismissing this evidence, writes:

Popper had had a vague sense of the demarcation problem since 1919. Is it possible that he formulated it as a philosophical problem, even in a preliminary fashion, in 1929–30 and contemplated tackling it in his project but, as he was writing on induction, found it impossible to address issues relating to demarcation? I find it unlikely, but, of course, it is not impossible. (p. 198)

Hacoheh shows an impressive command of information in his book. So one might easily miss the fact that his evidence for saying that Popper

“distorted” or “concealed” his intellectual development amounts, in this case at least, to his view that Popper’s own account is “unlikely”.

I agree that a person may “reconstruct” his own life story by omitting what he regards as unnecessary, or uninteresting, or even embarrassing, details. I also agree that a person may forget the details of his own intellectual development. But I fail to see how any of this amounts to historical evidence that Popper was not aware of the problem of demarcation until 1932; or why we should think that he was not, given the fact that Hacoheh acknowledges that Popper’s own account is possibly true; or exactly what would actually turn on it if it were true. The terms “distort” and “conceal” suggest deliberate intention, and I do not think they should be used so lightly.

Earlier I said that Hacoheh’s Popper is not my own. This has partly to do with how Hacoheh understands Popper’s philosophy, and partly to do with how he understands Popper himself. I do not have enough space in this review to go into the matter in the detail that it deserves. But let me cite three examples.

Hacoheh describes open society as “Popper’s utopia” and “Popper’s liberal utopia” (p. 7). But anyone who has read *The Poverty of Historicism* or *The Open Society and Its Enemies* should know both that Popper was a critic of utopian thinking, and that the open society that he described was not his “liberal utopia”.

Popper thought that the recognition that we are free to choose the normative laws under which we live, together with the recognition that we alone are responsible for the normative laws that we choose, marks the transition from a closed to an open society. But, he also thought that an awareness of these things, when coupled with an understanding of our own fallibility and of the disastrous consequences that change can wreck, may tempt us to renounce our freedom and try to return to a closed society, where we are insulated from change and do not need to make difficult decisions.

This is what Popper called “the strain of civilization”. It results from the fact that open society deprives us of clear and unquestioned moral certainties, as well as a clear and unquestioned place in society itself. People in closed societies “know their place”. But people in open societies compete with each other to improve their situations. This forces them to make decisions regarding what they should do and how they should act, and they may soon find that freedom does not make them happy. The anxiety that comes with making decisions in an uncertain world is just one aspect of the strain of civilization. The discomfort that accompanies competition, struggle, and failure is another. And a third, no doubt, is the loss of the comfort and security that one feels from being an accepted member of a real or concrete social group.

Popper said that the strain of civilization makes us “more and more

painfully aware of the gross imperfections in our life, of personal as well as of institutional imperfection; of avoiding suffering, of waste and of unnecessary ugliness; and at the same time of the fact that it is not impossible for us to do something about all this, but that such improvements would be just as hard to achieve as they are important" (Popper, Vol. I, pp. 199–200). He thought that all of this results in an awareness of personal responsibility that may in the end lead us to yearn for the lost paradise of a closed society where we are not called upon to choose and do not feel threatened by change. And he argued that it almost inevitably leads to reactionary attempts to return to the comfort and security of the group.

Popper also tried to show how the strain of civilization led Plato, Hegel and Marx to historicism and to utopian engineering projects in an attempt to quell the terrors of change. He described their proposals to reform society as reactionary attempts to reclaim a lost certainty and security. He was willing to acknowledge that Marx, and perhaps even Plato, had the best intentions. But he argued that their ideas have given comfort to authoritarian and totalitarian regimes – and that the utopian attempt to reclaim the lost security and certainty of the closed society is a philosophical double-think that is doomed to fail:

We can never return to the alleged innocence and beauty of the closed society. Our dream of heaven cannot be realized on earth. Once we begin to rely upon our reason, and to use our powers of criticism, once we feel the call of personal responsibilities, and with it, the responsibility of helping to advance knowledge, we cannot return to a state of implicit submission to tribal magic. For those who have eaten of the tree of knowledge, paradise is lost. The more we try to return to the heroic age of tribalism, the more surely do we arrive at the Inquisition, at the Secret Police, and at a romanticized gangsterism. Beginning with the suppression of reason and truth, we must end with the most brutal and violent destruction of all that is human. *There is no return to a harmonious state of nature. If we turn back, then we must go the whole way – we must return to the beasts.* (Popper, Vol. I, pp. 199–200)

Popper described open society as a "cross" and a "strain"; as the "unknown", the "uncertain", and the "insecure"; and as something before which we may "lose courage" and "flinch" (Popper, Vol. I, p. 201). He said that we suffer from "the shock of its birth" (Popper, Vol. I, p. 1). But he thought that there is no going back to the womb. For we have tasted our freedom and reason, as well as our own fallibility. And we must now use "what reason we may have to plan as well as we can for both security *and* freedom" (Popper, Vol. I, p. 201). Open society may or may not be original sin. But it certainly is not Popper's utopia.

Contrary to Hacothen's, Popper's liberal utopia would have been a *closed* society that could somehow allow for human freedom. It might

have been the communist state without Stalin's totalitarian repression, or the Garden of Eden without the snake. But the whole point of *The Open Society and Its Enemies* was to say that such a utopia is extremely difficult, if not actually impossible, to achieve – and that the attempt to produce a heaven on earth may all too easily lead to hell.

My second example is Hacoheh's account of Popper's relationship to the Vienna Circle, and his critique of its philosophy. Popper had the better arguments, according to Hacoheh, but was ambitious, insecure, and short on social grace. He tells us that "Popper lectured Carnap as if neither age nor position separated them", and that "years later, he cherished memories of the time when he had finally broken out of anonymity to slay the positivist giant". He says that "Carnap's companion, Ina, took an immediate dislike to Popper, complaining to Hempel that his forceful rhetoric got on everyone's nerves", but that Popper himself was oblivious to the "scene" that he created (p. 218):

He somehow expected to go after them, relentlessly pointing out their errors, with no attention to personality or movement, and yet be thanked for his criticism. He never forgot, or forgave, not being invited to Schlick's seminar. Carnap promoted his work. Popper showed him later that no good deed goes unpunished. In postwar years, he pursued him mercilessly, winning one battle after another, pretending all along that truth alone, not rivalry, was at stake. (p. 212)

And he concludes that "Popper was the true inheritor of the Vienna Circle's legacy":

Practicing the intellectual openness that Popper only preached, the circle gave a contentious young philosopher, a social misfit, a chance to develop and articulate the most compelling philosophy to emerge from the interwar Viennese milieu. (p. 213)

The most distinctive philosophical doctrine of the Vienna Circle was that metaphysics – including all normative theory and, indeed, all philosophy – is literally meaningless and must, as Carnap put it, be "eliminated" through the logical analysis of language. Popper criticized this theory throughout his life, beginning with his first publication on the subject in 1933. And Schlick, for this reason, or another, refused to invite him to his seminar. Other logical positivists misrepresented Popper's views about falsifiability despite his many complaints. And Neurath (1945) wrote to Carnap that Popper was "not reliable, when empiricism of the unified science is at stake". I may, perhaps, be missing something here. But I am not quite sure why or how Hacoheh thinks that all this amounts to "intellectual openness". And I can only wonder how he can possibly be sure that Popper was only *pretending* that it was truth, and not rivalry, that was at stake.

Hacohen's allusion to Carnap as "the positivist giant" reminds me of John Watkins's idea that Popper was so critical of Carnap because he was short and envied his height. But this idea does not quite explain why Popper was so critical of *Wittgenstein*, does it? And is there not a simpler explanation, namely, that he disagreed with their *philosophy*?

My own sense, in any event, is that the criticism of ideas without attention to personality, or movement, or age, or position – without, in other words, attention to *academic politics* – is a large part of what *Popper* associated with openness.

My third example is Hacohen's treatment of the Jewish question. Hacohen is intent upon situating Popper as part of the Viennese interwar Jewish intelligentsia. But Popper himself sharply disagreed. Popper acknowledged his "Jewish origins". But he pointed out that *his parents* had converted to Christianity *prior to his birth*. He did not, for this reason, regard himself as a Jew or as an assimilated Jew. For Judaism, according to Popper, is a *religion* – and one that he neither practised nor professed.

Hacohen knows this full well. But he nonetheless portrays Popper as an assimilated Jew. And this goes to the very heart of Popper's social and political philosophy. One may or may not agree with his philosophy, but Popper cited the Judaic doctrine of the chosen people in the opening page of *The Open Society and Its Enemies* to illustrate the tribalism and historicism that he associated with closed societies. And he publicly rejected the idea that he was an assimilated Jew as implying the very sort of racial and nationalistic theories that he was trying to criticize.

It is interesting, in this context, that David Edmonds and John Eidinow's recent book, *Wittgenstein's Poker*, is an attempt to determine whether Popper *lied* about his famous confrontation with Wittgenstein at Cambridge in 1946. Edmonds and Eidinow, who seem to rely upon Hacohen, have chapters entitled "Once a Jew", "Popper Reads Mein Kampf", and "Some Jew!" in their book.

I say this, for it is easy at times to suspect that it was his refusal to portray himself as a Jew – more than anything having to do with the development of his ideas about falsifiability and demarcation – that provides the subtext for Hacohen's charge that Popper distorted and concealed his own history.

These, of course, are just examples. But they are not isolated, and they are important. Hacohen says that it would be tempting, but misleading, to describe his intellectual biography of Popper as "historicizing the anti-historicist thinker *par excellence*" (p. 19). But history is also written from a perspective. And some of Hacohen's statements and formulations – his charge that "Popper's cosmopolitanism ignored the legitimate claims of community" (pp. 20–1) is as good an example as any other – seem to beg substantive philosophical questions in its name.

Examples like these eventually add up, so that I find myself, in the end, left wondering exactly what Hacoheh would like the left to learn from Popper. For while he praises Popper as one of the most important and original philosophers of the twentieth century, he too often attributes ideas and motives and characteristics to him that are not only contrary to his philosophy, but would – *if they were true* – ultimately undermine it.

Thus, the characterization of open society as Popper's "liberal utopia" implies that it is just another instance of the very sort of utopian thinking he was trying to criticize – so that his critique of scientific socialism will, in the end, apply to his own account of open society as well. This idea – together with the characterizations of Popper as an assimilated Jew, as only *pretending* that truth alone was at stake, and as preaching but not practising intellectual openness – suggests that his philosophy is itself a utopian dream; and that we cannot, try as we might, ever get away from utopian thinking, or from racism and nationalism, or from being motivated primarily by political concerns for power, as opposed to philosophical and scientific concerns for truth. And it is, for this reason, important to remember that the historical evidence that Hacoheh presents to support his story boils down, in the end, to the fact that he finds Popper's own account "unlikely".

The fact that Popper once regarded himself as a communist may come as a surprise to people who are not familiar with his writings. But it is important to remember, if the academic left is to learn anything at all, that he eventually renounced the communist and socialist ideas that he embraced in his youth as mistaken. The relentless criticism that he practised is no doubt at odds with the political back-slapping that we have somehow come to associate with academia. But if Hacoheh tried to understand Popper's idea of what it means to be "open", instead of substituting one of his own, then he might have come to a different understanding of how Popper really did practise what he preached.

Hacoheh tells us that:

Changing the course of scientific philosophy required a politician as well as a philosopher. It was a problem of human relations as much as of philosophy. Popper was ingenious in dealing with the latter, incompetent with the first. (p. 211)

The idea is fashionable. It may sound like a good explanation, if not a justification, of why some philosophers have dismissed Popper as a "minor positivist". And it may even offer solace to intellectuals who are more concerned with power and politics than with evidence and arguments. But Popper himself would have asked whether it is really true. And the statement, I submit, refutes itself. For Hacoheh thinks that *Popper actually did change the course of scientific philosophy*. And it would seem to follow that either Popper was far more competent as a politician

than he suggests, or that changing the course of scientific philosophy does not really require a politician.

My own sens is that the latter is true.

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*Friedrich Hayek: A biography*, ALAN EBENSTEIN. Palgrave, 2001, xiii + 403 pages

In his new book, Alan Ebenstein aims to “trace the intellectual life of Friedrich von Hayek” (p. xi). The result of his endeavors is a clear and competent intellectual biography, which undoubtedly will be of use to a broad audience. Ebenstein – the author of a biography of Edwin Cannan, among other things – carefully tells the story of Hayek’s life, from its beginnings in Vienna in 1899, through his years in London and Chicago, and back to Vienna, where he was buried in 1992. Along the way, Ebenstein gives an authoritative account of the content of Hayek’s thought and how it changed over time, and neatly situates Hayek in his political, economic and cultural context. Moreover, Ebenstein clarifies the views Hayek opposed as well as those he endorsed.

As the first full-length Hayek biography, Ebenstein’s new book is an important contribution to the literature of the field. The closest substitute is the autobiographical *Hayek on Hayek* (1994), which consists mainly of lightly edited reminiscences. Given its emphasis on Hayek’s intellectual life, the new biography can serve as a good introduction to his thought, as well as to his life and times. At the same time, more dedicated students of Hayek will find it useful as a reference source. Ebenstein has done a great service by interviewing a large number of surviving colleagues, friends and relatives. However, his greatest accomplishment is that he brings together, for the first time, a wealth of material from published and unpublished sources – many of them dispersed or otherwise inaccessible – in one volume. These sources include the Hayek papers stored at the Hoover Institution, previous interviews, letters, video recordings, and so on. Ebenstein’s book thus gives Hayek scholars the opportunity to refer to a reliable secondary source, whenever

appropriate, instead of always quoting primary material. Many readers will find use for the brief chronology of Hayek's major works (pp. 325–6), as well as the comprehensive and well-organized bibliographical essay (pp. 327–48).

Other than merely describing the history and content of Hayek's ideas, Ebenstein occasionally attempts to assess their plausibility. However, his critique is not particularly thorough, and its targets are awkwardly chosen. On the whole, Ebenstein would have been better off if he had restricted himself to tracing the historical roots of Hayek's thought. This point is exemplified by the postscript (pp. 321–23), which is dedicated to showing that "Hayek's epistemology (theory of knowledge) was not entirely satisfactory" (p. 321). In Ebenstein's words, Hayek was wrong in maintaining that the facts of the social world are "'compositive' (i.e., composed of many elements)" whereas the facts of the natural world are not (p. 321). Ebenstein's own thesis, in contrast, is that "[s]ocietal facts and the facts of the natural sciences do not differ in quantity, they differ in quality" (p. 321). However, as I hope to show in the following paragraphs, Ebenstein's critique is unconvincing, and his choice of topic idiosyncratic.

In spite of the fact that the nature of social facts is awarded its own postscript, the discussion of the issue is far too brief and superficial to be persuasive. First, Ebenstein does not explain what it means for a fact to be compositive or non-compositive; as a result, the thesis ascribed to Hayek remains unclear. Moreover, it remains an open question whether Hayek ever held any such thesis. In the paragraph that Ebenstein quotes in support of his reading, Hayek writes:

Take such things as tools, food, medicine, weapons, words ... It is easily seen that all these concepts ... refer not to some objective properties possessed by the things, or which the observer can find out about them, but to views which some other person holds about the things ... If we wish, we could say that all these objects are defined not in terms of their "real" properties but in terms of opinions people hold about them (pp. 321–22).

Whatever the exact claim Hayek is defending here, it appears substantially different from the one Ebenstein identifies. First, Hayek's actual claim is about concepts, not facts. Second, being composed of many elements is not the same thing as being defined in terms of other people's opinions. Since the thesis ascribed to Hayek remains unclear, and Ebenstein's reading of Hayek is unsupported, the critique developed in the postscript fails to convince that Hayek's epistemology was mistaken (though it very well might have been).

Furthermore, it is unclear why Ebenstein chose to devote an entire postscript to this particular issue. As interesting as the nature of social facts may be, the topic was no central concern of Hayek's. In fact, only a



very small part of his work was dedicated to the issue. Instead, it would have been interesting to see a critical discussion of concepts like “rules” and “order”, “spontaneous” and “artificial”, which are far more important for Hayek’s theoretical edifice. Consider the notion of a “spontaneous order”, which Ebenstein says was “among Hayek’s greatest contributions” (p. 237). According to Hayek, spontaneous orders (in the social context) are “the product of the action of many men but are not the result of human design”, and contrast with artificial orders, which have “been made by putting the elements of a set in their places or directing their movements” (Hayek, 1973, p. 37). The paradigmatic example of a spontaneous order, according to Hayek, is that of the competitive market. The application of “spontaneous order”, however, is complicated by the fact that most social wholes have some features that were consciously designed and put in place by a thinking agent, and some that were not. For instance, in many Eastern European countries competitive markets have been intentionally adopted. Thus, they share certain features with what Hayek would call artificial orders. A critical discussion about the conditions under which something can legitimately be called an order, and under what conditions it can be called spontaneous, appears more urgent than one about the nature of social facts.

On a different note, the new biography implicitly underlines how much work on Hayek remains to be done. This is not to be read as criticism of Ebenstein’s work. Rather, it is an indication of some areas in which future research on Hayek may prove fruitful. For one thing, Ebenstein’s emphasis on Hayek’s ideas, as well as their logical relationships and change over time, leaves open deeper issues about how personal psychology and the wider social, cultural, and political context may have affected his personal, emotional and intellectual development. Consider, for example, the period referred to as “Hayek’s transformation”, when Hayek turned away from academic economics and toward more interdisciplinary pursuits. Ebenstein explains this shift – which took place during the mid to late 1940s and early 1950s – by reference to Hayek’s disillusionment with technical economics, his perception that he had discredited himself academically by writing the popular book *Road to Serfdom* (1944), and his disappointment with the gains of the British Labour Party. During this period, there were parallel changes in Hayek’s personal circumstances; among other things, he resigned from the London School of Economics, divorced his wife, married his old sweetheart from Vienna, and joined the Committee of Social Thought at the University of Chicago. Though Ebenstein does discuss these events, it is likely that there was more going on in Hayek’s life around this time than could be revealed by any biography that focuses primarily on his intellectual life. Of course, the fact that Ebenstein stresses the content of

Hayek's thought can hardly be held against him, since his explicit purpose is to write intellectual biography. That fact does, however, show that there is a niche for another kind of biography as well.

There is room for an extended treatment when it comes to the content of Hayek's thought too. Ebenstein discusses in detail those elements of Hayek's work that are best known: his critique of Keynes, his stance in the socialist calculation debate, his positive argument in favor of a free market society, and so on. Still, Hayek's work includes many other elements, many of which are less known and sometimes seemingly inconsistent with the main thrust of his argument. These issues – which Ebenstein treats at most in passing – include Hayek's rejection of conservatism, which he denounced for "its paternalistic, nationalist, and power-adoring tendencies"; his critique of *laissez-faire*, which ignores the fact that competition needs "a great deal of government activity" in order to be effective; his advocacy of a minimum income for all; and his profession to share the value judgments, though not the factual beliefs, of his socialist contemporaries. Hayek, like many other controversial figures, is often described – both by friends and by foes – as less complex than he really was. Though the emphasis on the better-known elements of Hayek's thought is justified because of their centrality to Hayek's system, a more thorough treatment of the dissonant elements would lead to a more multifaceted account. It would also make Hayek more interesting, as well as more relevant, to contemporary readers.

Similarly, there is more to be said about the history of Hayek's thought. Consider, for example, his theory of cultural evolution, which many consider the centerpiece of his system (see p. 14). Traditionally, Hayek scholars have emphasized the influence of Carl Menger and the eighteenth-century British moral philosophers. (Ebenstein falls within this tradition too.) More recent research, however, has uncovered other important influences on Hayek's evolutionary thought. Thus, one forthcoming paper argues that Hayek's evolutionary thought was significantly inspired by Alexander M. Carr-Saunders and other Oxford zoologists (Angner, forthcoming). Their influence would account, among other things, for Hayek's notion that cultural evolution is a matter of group selection, an idea that he did not share with either Menger or the British moral philosophers. Other sources of inspiration that deserve further attention include Alfred E. Emerson, whose work on social insects also appears to have guided Hayek's evolutionary thought. These sources have so far been all but ignored by Hayek scholarship. By studying these and similar influences, future research upholds the promise of a better understanding of both Hayek's thought and the context in which he lived.

In closing, it should be repeated that Ebenstein's biography is a

significant addition to the literature. Though I have criticized Ebenstein's attempt at assessing Hayek's thought (e.g., through philosophical argument), and identified a number of issues I believe deserve more attention, I find the biography eminently useful. Ebenstein has fulfilled his promise to write a solid intellectual biography; the result will remain a standard source of biographical information for a long time to come.

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