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Review

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"Presumably nobody unsympathetic to the purposes of history will have read to the end of a book such as this," states the author in the final chapter, "Reflections" (223). Even those who are not fully in sympathy ought not to neglect this chapter, in which the narrator of the story steps forward to speak for himself. Here we learn that the subtitle of the book is in a sense redundant, because for Smith history is precisely the explication of meanings. Many will find his dichotomization of history and social science to be as jarring as the a priori categorization of the scientific and the social which he rejects. However, his forthright appraisal of both the importance and the limitations of discourse analysis deserves careful attention. Among the latter he considers the restricted sense in which it supplies explanations, its tendency to minimize change by bringing out "a static continuity in experience," the ease with which it can slip into portrayals of discourses as monolithic or totalizing, and its discounting of intentionality and purposive behavior (225). Nonetheless, his own fascinating and instructive study shows how much can be accomplished within these limitations.

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*Toward a History of Game Theory*. Edited by E. Roy Weintraub (Durham, N. C., Duke University Press, 1992) 306 pp. \$35.00

This collection of eleven essays examines the development of game theory from its inception in the 1920s to the 1950s and offers examples of games and solutions from the probabilists of the early 1700s. Four general topics are covered, and some chapters deal with more than one.

The first concerns the work of John von Neumann and Émile Borel in the 1920s on the minimax theorem, a theoretical result on equilibrium behavior in two-person, zero-sum games. Von Neumann was the first to prove this theorem, in a paper published in 1928. However his proof followed on the heels of notes by Borel establishing the result for three-strategy and five-strategy games. The ensuing debate as to which of these two mathematical giants had the rightful claim as "the inventor" of game theory was to turn nasty.

The second topic deals with von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern, authors of the classic *Theory of Games and Economic Behavior* (Princeton, 1944), the inspiration for much of the progress to come in game theory. Much of the material comes from rich archival sources. It contains correspondences from the principals, as well as Morgenstern's own diary entries from the time period, and it reveals von Neumann and Morgenstern's work habits, concerns, and attitudes. We learn, for example, how their shared dissatisfaction with the neoclassical model in economics influenced the writing of the text. Two of the chapters take sides in a thinly veiled argument about the extent of Morgenstern's

contribution to the *Theory of Games*, a topic that is understandable given the prodigious talents of Morgenstern's coauthor but not exciting or insightful otherwise.

Philip Mirowski's chapter in this second group stands out, owing to his ability to identify characteristics in the game-theory contributions of von Neumann and Morgenstern that are common to their contemporaneous research in other areas. For example, Mirowski observes a link between von Neumann's interest in the minimax theorem and his theoretical work on quantum mechanics, both of which deal with the unavoidable presence of uncertainty. Similarly, Mirowski credits Kurt Gödel's incompleteness theorem, which effectively immobilized David Hilbert's "formalist" approach to mathematics, of which von Neumann was an active proponent, as an explanation for von Neumann's absence from game theory from 1928 until the late 1930s, when the early work on the *Theory of Games* began.

The third topic involves the personal reflections by Martin Shubik and Howard Raiffa and short interviews with Shubik, Herbert Simon, James Friedman, and Reinhard Selten concerning the heady days after the publication of the *Theory of Games*. Finally, a number of chapters deal with the spread of game theory beyond economics and mathematics into such disciplines as political science and management studies, as well as into the hands of the military. Given the zero-sum focus of much early game theory, the military interest was quite natural, especially in the wake of World War II. Eventually, that application would find a permanent home in the RAND Corporation.

One ironic feature of game theory's history, in light of the title of von Neumann and Morgenstern's seminal book, was the poor reception that it received in the field of economics. Not until the 1970s did game theory firmly establish a foothold (some might say a stranglehold) in economics.

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*Epidemics and Ideas: Essays on the Historical Perception of Pestilence*. Edited by Terence Ranger and Paul Slack (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1992) pp. \$49.95

This volume is about the ways that epidemics influence how people view the societies in which they live as well as how social ideas shape the way that epidemics are interpreted.<sup>1</sup> Organized chronologically, the chapters move from the reception of plague in fifth-century Athens to the early history of AIDS in England. The volume also has an implicit

<sup>1</sup> The articles were presented at a Past and Present Conference on "Epidemics and Ideas" in 1989, except for the one on cholera epidemics by Richard Evans, which was added later.