

Book Reviews

THE ECONOMIC POINT OF VIEW, by Israel M. Kirzner, Foreword by Ludwig Von Mises, D. Van Nostrand Co., Inc., Princeton, New Jersey, 1960, \$5.50.

The author won a prize essay contest a few years ago, offered to graduate students at New York University, on Henry George's applicability to today's problems. He criticized George on two points that seem to me inconsistent—first, that the rent of land would be insufficient for today's governmental budgets; and second, that the single tax would make government too powerful!

No matter; Israel Kirzner has since written this book in which Henry George comes in for little mention, not unfavorably. He has received his Ph.D. and became an assistant professor of economics at New York University.

The purpose of the book is to take a look at the way economists have approached their subject matter, what they have conceived is its central purpose, what they say "economics" is all about. Various economists have emphasized different aspects—the "science of avarice," the mechanics of the market place, the hedonistic motive, the social nature of the study, the common weal, the study of choices. Classical economics dealt with *wealth*, and Henry George hewed to this line, predicting chaos in the field when he noticed that the science of wealth was being abandoned.

Recent concepts of economics have strayed even further from wealth. The most popular modern definition is probably that of Lionel Robbins, who called economics "the science which

studies human behavior as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternate uses." Kirzner closes with the "praxeological" view of Ludwig von Mises. In this view, economics is the science of *all* human action, meaning action initiated to achieve a given purpose.

In following this rarefied discussion, I kept wondering what had happened to the science of wealth. Isn't there anything left of the production, distribution and exchange of wealth?

I do not see much promise in this armchair sport of making up new definitions of economics. Some "economist" dreams up a new "science of economics" and writes a book about it—proving that everything else can be squeezed into his definition. Nobody really bothers much to work out the bland details implied in this new definition when there is more interesting and exciting work to be done—namely, making up another definition.

Why, I'm stimulated to play the game myself. How's this: "Economics is the study of the order in which desires are satisfied." Or this: "Economics is the study of the way in which people relate to one another in pursuing individual goals." Let's have done with it and get back to "the science of the nature of wealth and the laws governing its production and distribution."

—Robert Clancy

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EPISTEMOLOGICAL PROBLEMS OF ECONOMICS, by Ludwig Von Mises, D. Van Nostrand Co. Inc., Princeton, New Jersey, \$5.50.

This book is a collection of essays devoted largely to the discussion and criticism of the writings of other economic authors. In his Preface to the English Language Edition, Professor Von Mises admits that many of the authors he discusses are little known to the American public, but he claims