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## BOOK REVIEWS

*A Survey of Agricultural Economics Literature. Volume 2. Quantitative Methods in Agricultural Economics, 1940s to 1970s.* Edited by George G. Judge, Richard H. Day, S. R. Johnson, Gordon C. Rausser, and Lee R. Martin. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press for the American Agricultural Economics Association, 1977.) Pp. 473, ISBN 0 8166 0818 0.

The fields surveyed in this volume are estimation and statistical inference; economic optimisation; systems analysis and simulation; and agricultural information systems. While a more international flavour is apparent here than in *Volume 1* of this series, the text is dominated by references to the United States literature.

Few amongst the diverse target readership listed in the foreword to this series are likely to find this volume comfortable reading, as most sections require at least some familiarity with relatively specialised terminology. While the surveys provide a valuable introduction to a significant body of agricultural economics literature, the book is likely to be used predominantly as a reference volume. As such, its value is greatly reduced by the absence of an index.

The omission of an index is particularly regrettable in the case of Judge's chapter (Part I), where a chronological structure and uninformative subheadings combine to make the cross-referencing of any particular topic a major task. Judge provides an historical summary of methodological developments in econometrics, emphasising the evolution of the concepts which underpinned successive statistical models. While Judge cites a variety of applications, the role of econometric methods is illuminated by a brief review of personal experience from Foote.

Three contributions on optimisation form Part II. Day provides a 'nontechnical' survey which requires some familiarity with mathematical-programming terminology. A concise comparison of the properties of alternative programming models is associated with a stimulating overview of the relationships between programming approaches and neoclassical analyses of optimisation problems.

Applications of optimisation models, particularly programming models, are surveyed by Day and Sparling who devote successive sections to food and diet, farm and agribusiness management, farm firm development, production response, interregional and spatial economics, natural resources, and agricultural development problems. United States applications of production function analyses, at both macro and micro levels, are reviewed by Woodworth. The summary of problems in the use of crop production functions is of direct relevance to the Australian scene, but the discussion of work related to animal production is largely confined to highly intensive management systems and ignores such topics as optimal stocking rates for grazing systems.

The third part of the volume is a lengthy chapter by Johnson and Rausser on systems analysis and simulation. This is more self-contained

than earlier chapters, as the first section discusses basic concepts, terminology and problems in some detail. Later sections are distinguished by an emphasis on the potential role of adaptive control approaches in both the design and application of simulation models. The last part of the chapter, a survey of applications, is supplemented by a tabular classification which concisely indicates many of the major features of the studies which are considered.

Four chapters deal with the final topic, agricultural information systems, with a near-exclusive emphasis on the United States: 'international data' are dismissed in less than three pages. Upchurch provides a detailed outline of the coverage and structure of agricultural statistics in the U.S., while a brief chapter by Trelogan and associates summarises the historical evolution of the methodology of agricultural estimates. The chapter by Bonnen provides an assessment of the U.S. agricultural data base, but is of general relevance in its discussion of problems of compatibility between the evolving requirements of data users and the structure and management of information systems. A final chapter by Bryant is directed to the socio-economic data required for such applications as the analysis of rural welfare problems, and highlights the influence of institutional structures on the nature of national agricultural statistics.

S. J. FILAN

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*The Economic Growth Debate—An Assessment.* By E. J. Mishan. (London: Geo. Allen & Unwin, 1977.) Pp. 277, ISBN 0 04 330281 5.

This passionately written book goes well beyond Mishan's influential *The Costs of Economic Growth*, Penguin (1969). The space devoted to economics is smaller. It is discursive and polemical rather than analytical. Mishan believes that, because of the limitations of the economists' approach, 'the study of economic growth is too serious to be left to the economists' (p. 12). It must incorporate insights from anthropology, sociology, psychology, politics, philosophy and history. Such a comprehensive approach leads Mishan to the conclusion that 'despite the abundance of man-made goods produced by continued economic growth, its net effect on human health and happiness could be adverse and possibly disastrous' (p. 9).

The book is in two parts. Book 1 discusses the limitations of conventional economic premises and concepts, and probes the conventional pro-growth arguments of economists. The usual points, and some unusual ones, are presented on why growth in gross national product overstates welfare gains, and on the technological, biological and sociological hazards associated with further growth and urban concentration in the highly industrialised economies. He challenges the notions that the common man knows his own interests best, and that he has chosen growth. (In fact, says Mishan, the individual has very little real choice about his life style.) He attacks the idea of science as a beneficent servant of man, and of growth as a means of achieving a more equitable distribution of income within and between nations ('Growth as a perpetual charity ball').

Book 2, which develops the central thesis, consists of two parts—Constituents of the Good Life, and Technology and Freedom. Beginning with some ideas of the consensus view of the basic material and psychological needs of ordinary men, and of their aspirations towards the good life, he looks at the main economic and social developments of recent decades to determine whether, on balance, these needs and aspirations are being realised or not. The good life involves 'The establishment of an external order that does no violence to a man's internal order: one in which his vital instincts find vent, and range without harm to others or himself' (p. 149). His conclusion is that economic growth, which he links with science, technology and scepticism, has undermined the institutions, customs, moral values and myths that invested all pre-industrial society with stability and cohesion. We are moving away from the good life. Social order is visibly disintegrating and the Western democracies are heading towards the totalitarian state.

Few, if any of the ills of modern industrial society, are not attributed to growth. This is understandable, and in fact rather tautologous, given that Mishan's 'definition' of economic growth (in fact, nothing as precise as a definition is explicitly provided) is so wide as to be nearly co-terminous with 'modern industrial society'. With varying degrees of plausibility, growth is blamed for alienation, insecurity, loss of self-esteem, increased crime, loss of 'instinctual enjoyment' (because of the Protestant Ethic), pornography, the degradation of language and a catalogue of other 'bads'. Even modern society's much-vaunted relief from drudgery contributes to obesity! Essentially, Mishan's message is that pro-growth economists ignore these social externalities, and foster the delusion that growth is providing a free lunch, when in fact we are paying heavily.

Mishan's book is a useful antidote to the well-reasoned but narrowly framed Treasury Economic Paper of 1973, *Economic Growth: Is It Worth Having?* The Treasury confined itself to a rather optimistic treatment of *technical* externalities, pollution in particular. Mishan distrusts the economists' conventional notion that all will be well if governments intervene to correct for externalities, because he believes that many of them cannot or will not be corrected.

Mishan concedes that 'we must not unthinkingly attribute all social developments to economic and technological growth'. But he does go on to warn that 'The temptation to retreat into methodological nihilism—to talk and to act on the assumption that there is nothing at all to be learned from history or from human instinct and experience—is well-nigh irresistible to the mediocre academic mind' (p. 65).

He then proceeds to draw some long bows, but often with a mordant wit. He sees society impelled by growth towards a mindless and spiritless utopia of instant gratification through technology, and asks 'What are the consequences for humanity of achieving so ideal a state of adjustment? Imagine a potential Juliet of this Brave New World stumbling into the arms of a potential Romeo. The first flicker of desire would be quenched by instant fornication. And if, for some perverse reason, Romeo vacillated, Juliet could be counted on to console herself at once with a couple of soma tablets' (p. 179). His shafts against technology include such memorable quips as 'Tis a good wind that blows nobody any harm' (p. 32) and 'Invention is the mother of necessity' (p. 234).

Mishan barely mentions population growth—a curious hiatus since many of the ‘bads’ he discusses are closely related to population, and zero population growth plus growth through technology is a likely scenario for many industrialised nations. Furthermore his ‘good life society’, in which motherhood and the family feature prominently, could become rather crowded, with nineteenth century birth-rates and today’s death-rates.

Most missionaries derive their fervour from a vision of achievable salvation. Not so Mishan, whose assessment of the political feasibility of moving from the growth path is profoundly pessimistic. Our economic institutions all pull in the growth direction. The spirit of innovation pervades society and entrenched interests, including the scientific community, will ensure its continuance. The young offer no hope. ‘For the essence of the growth ethos is not materialism; it is insatiability . . . The young may preen themselves on being in a different league to their fathers, playing for different prizes. But whatever the prizes, the more of them the better. From head to foot, they are maximizers’ (p. 254).

The book is anything but balanced and objective, but it does not pretend to be. The advantages of growth get short shrift, presumably because Mishan believes they are already over-celebrated. That may be true, but J. S. Mill’s dictum still holds—that an argument is not answered until it is answered at its best.

Nevertheless, most economists will benefit by focusing their attention on issues wider than this month’s consumer price index, and even when Mishan’s rhetoric is excessive, it is polished and eloquent. Furthermore, the major issue of the book is vitally important and rather neglected by the profession—viz. the relationship of growth to deterioration in the socio-political environment.

ALAN LLOYD

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*Nontariff Agricultural Trade Barriers.* By J. S. Hillman (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1978.) Pp. 236, ISBN 0 8032 2301 3.

Since this book covers a topic which is extremely important to world agriculture in general and to Australia in particular, its title is likely to catch the attention of many policy-oriented Australian agricultural economists. Unfortunately, most of them are likely to be disappointed with its contents. The book has little analytical or empirical content, and has no in-depth discussion of either the causes or the effects of nontariff agricultural trade barriers (NTABs). Rather, its main contribution is simply to describe the many types of NTABs that have been used by the major developed countries since the 1930s.

After the first two introductory chapters, Chapter 3 points out that NTABs are not so much trade policy instruments as instruments to help cope with the rural adjustment and low farm income problems of developed economies. Chapter 4 presents a taxonomy of the myriad instruments currently used, while Chapter 5 discusses in more detail quantitative import restrictions, export controls and the EEC’s variable levy. The various NTABs used by the US, the UK, Western Europe and Japan are then discussed in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 presents a case study

of NTABs affecting international trade in red meat animals and red meat, and the book concludes with a chapter on the difficulties of negotiating multilaterally to reduce these barriers to agricultural trade.

As the list of chapter headings suggests, there is little in the book that is not already fairly readily available. One might have hoped the author would provide some new measurements of the extent of agricultural protectionism, or throw some new light on the effects of these barriers on, say, the instability of international agricultural prices, or suggest some better ways to negotiate reductions in NTABs, but they are not there. The book serves a useful purpose in reminding us of the pervasiveness of restrictions on international trade in temperate agricultural products, and it may be useful to students who want to know what broad types of NTABs have been used in various developed countries, particularly with respect to red meat in the early 1970s (Chapter 7). But the general issues are addressed much better and with equal contemporary relevance elsewhere, particularly in D. Gale Johnson's *World Agriculture in Disarray* (London: Fontana, 1973), to which this reviewer would rather direct interested readers.

KYM ANDERSON

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*The Agricultural Bureau: A Sociological Study.* Sociology Research Monograph No. 1. By Alan W. Black and Russell A. Craig (Armidale: University of New England, 1978.) Pp. 165, ISBN 0 85834 168 9.

Sometimes it is necessary to prove that the yellow handsized fruit with the pungent oily skin is a lemon. Alan Black and Russell Craig have gone through this exercise in this book *The Agricultural Bureau: A Sociological Study*.

Two postal surveys (64 per cent response) and 327 in-depth interviews (34 Bureau members, 37 ex-Bureau members, and 256 non-Bureau members) provide the data base. Of the 20 statistical tables of analysed data presented, 11 support the generalisation that the Bureau is like any other voluntary association; with the members supporting the main thrust of the constitutional objectives, in this case 'to improve their general knowledge of farming'. It follows in a predictable fashion that dependence on farming for an income is a component of active participation, as is being an office bearer and having a family tradition of Bureau membership.

The early chapters on Forerunners and Evolution of the Bureau form the most important and interesting parts of the book. The emergence of the Bureau and of government Departments of Agriculture is presented in a clear, readable style. The history of the changing relationship between the Bureau and government is of importance to an understanding of the present role of government in agriculture, and provides insight into its extension role. The remainder of the book then concentrates on defining the bureau in terms of membership, participation and effectiveness.

Having described the lemon, Craig and Black seem to be reluctant to investigate its worth. Using the justification that as an educational body the goals are ongoing and their attainment difficult to assess, Craig and

Black have described Bureau effectiveness in terms of Branch condition (in N.S.W. 38 per cent and S.A. 33 per cent of Branches are either 'struggling to survive or having ups and downs').

Although disappointing to the reader, Craig and Black may not have thought it appropriate in a sociological study of this kind to consolidate facts which may have political implications. For example, the Bureau is clearly in a state of decline if measured in membership terms. Several reasons are advanced for this decline but no clear-cut statement is made which draws the threads of the argument together. These data would be of special interest to Bureau and government policy makers in deciding future directions for the Bureau. As well they would be of use to extension workers, because the objectives of the Bureau are not too far removed from those of extension. Since the same potential farmer clientele is involved for extension and the Bureau, decline in Bureau membership may point to a change in demand for the needs it has met so far. If this is so, then extension should also take note of the change in direction. The historical chapters clearly reveal that both Bureau and government Departments of Agriculture emerged from farmer demand.

The final chapters look at the relationships between the Bureau and other organisations and once again, although the authors have skilfully revealed the pattern of existing relationships, they have not critically looked at the implications of changes occurring in this network. For example, the question of continued government support for a farmer organisation with declining membership, especially in giving it an official advisory capacity to the minister, is not examined in the light of the growth of other farmer organisations which have more closely defined political functions. The book barely touches this type of issue. It does, however, pose the question.

After considering the fate of the Bureau as an educational adjunct to a united farmers' organisation, Craig and Black ask, 'Would a new organisation similar to the Bureau then arise or has the era for such an organisation passed?' Craig and Black have described the lemon; who will squeeze it to see what it is worth?

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