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[Talcott Parsons Prize Committee, American Academy of Arts and Sciences]

Daniel Bell, Philip Converse, Kingsley Davis, Renée Fox, Clifford Geertz, Gardner Lindzey, and Aaron Wildavsky

Talcott Parsons Prize [nomination text for Albert O. Hirschmann]

In: Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Vol. 37, No.1
(Oct. 1983), ISSN 0002-712X, pp. 5-8.

online source: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3823188>.



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Talcott Parsons Prize

At its most recent meeting last April, the Council of the Academy approved the recommendation of the Talcott Parsons Prize Committee that the 1983 prize be awarded to Albert O. Hirschman of the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, New Jersey. Presentation of this prize for excellence in the social sciences will be made at the March 1984 Stated Meeting. The following is the text of the nomination statement presented to the Council by the Chairman of the Committee, Daniel Bell:

To set forth a paradox, Albert Hirschman is a "man of letters" within the social sciences. While trained as an economist, and doing distinguished work in that field, principally in the areas of economic development, Hirschman has crossed the disciplinary boundaries and made striking contributions in all the social sciences. His unique scholarly range and his ability to uncover unsuspected relationships in the social world, from a variety of new and illuminating perspectives, has demonstrated a versatility and originality that has given new meaning to the word Master.

All of Hirschman's works have been marked by intellectual rigor. They all display a consistent interest in relating his primary focus, economic activity, to social and political activities. *The Strategy of Economic Development* (1958), the book which brought him initial recognition, not only introduced new and revolutionary concepts into the development field—backward and forward linkages, unbalanced growth, etc.,—but placed development theory within explicit social and political matrices that had been lacking in most of the literature to that time. In two other works, dealing with Latin America and India, (*Journeys Toward Progress*, 1963; *Development Projects Observed*, 1967), he worked out the implication of his ideas in concrete settings. By the time *A Bias for Hope* appeared in 1971,

his views, once considered heretical and skeptical, had become “accepted” common sense, though they remained, in the details of his own subtlety, an uncommon sense.

In the last dozen years, Hirschman has turned his attention to the intellectual foundations of modern political economy within the context of Western society and culture. *Exit, Voice and Loyalty* (1970) begins as an account of the firm yet, within a short but beautifully wrought compass, extends that analysis to school systems, trade unions, local communities and even states, applying to them political ideas—the conditions of allegiance or resignation—that deepen and complicate our understanding of the firm. The social world seems “one,” not because everything is interpreted as buying and selling, as among so many economists, but because buying and selling are reinterpreted as complex cultural activities conditioned by moral ideas, political processes and social settings. Because these ingenious interpretations are so readily extendable to the other modes of social inquiry, this lucidly written and original work gained quick recognition as one of the seminal books of the decade.

The Passions and the Interests (1977) reworks in a similar way the character of our economic ideas, transforming that history into cultural analysis and commentary. Hirschman interprets the debate about the emergence of the new capitalism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as an argument not only about economic activity, but about psychology of man, politics, war, and civilization itself. It is not, he contends, an argument that can be resolved, for the answers cannot be technical ones (as are possible within the narrow focus of a utilitarian calculus), but raise permanent questions about the values of man’s many activities. Indeed, as Hirschman shows, the defense of capitalism in the eighteenth century—that it is a means of curbing the passions by substituting interests—becomes a complaint against the system in the nineteenth century. Nor does the debate end there, for as he

has argued in his recent Marc Bloch lecture ("Civilizing, Destructive, or Feeble? Rival Interpretations of Market Society," delivered in Paris on May 27, 1982), these are questions with which we are permanently engaged. As his colleague Clifford Geertz has observed, Hirschman has made himself the historian of our engagement.

His most recent book, *Shifting Involvements* (1982) takes as its starting point certain problems in the theory of consumer choice, characteristically turns these into an account of political participation, and ends by arguing that the two are actually a single social process, governed by hope and disappointment. What seems to be at first some small, if unconventional, idea about "changes in preference" is shown to have unimagined facets and, in the fashion characteristic of Hirschman's work as a whole, it uncovers a larger idea that illuminates the way we live.

Albert Hirschman is one of that European generation that was cast up by the upheavals of the 1930s. He has been an intellectual wanderer, a cosmopolitan in culture, and an exemplar of the humanistic spirit. He was born in Berlin in 1915, educated at the Sorbonne and the London School of Economics, and received a Doctorate in Science from Trieste in 1938. Like many European scholars, he came to this country as a Rockefeller Fellow. From 1941 to 1943, he taught at Berkeley and from 1946 to 1952 worked for the Federal Reserve Board in Washington. For four years, from 1952 to 1956, he was an economic advisor to the government of Colombia but returned to the United States to resume his scholarly career. From 1956 to 1958 he was at Yale, from 1958 to 1964 at Columbia University, and from 1964 to 1974 at Harvard as Littauer Professor of Political Economy. Since 1974, he has been a permanent member of the faculty of the Institute for Advanced Study, as professor of social sciences.

In submitting the name of Albert Otto Hirschman for the Talcott Parsons Prize, we recall not only the intellectual breadth and

distinction of our colleague for whom the award was named, but we also continue the distinguished line of previous designees of the prize, men who, in their own work and being, deny the fear of Max Weber that our times may produce only “specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart.” Albert Hirschman, in his scholarship and intellectual integrity, exemplifies the *wissenschaft als beruf* which is the mark — and task — of our Academy.

This note has been prepared with the invaluable guidance of the first recipient of the Academy Social Science Prize, Clifford Geertz.

Daniel Bell, *Chairman*
Philip Converse
Kingsley Davis
Renée Fox
Clifford Geertz
Gardner Lindzey
Aaron Wildavsky