Playing for Keeps
Karl Sigmund and Martin A. Nowak

Margaret Thatcher’s famous quip that game theory gives a short-sighted version of methodology in individualism, the atomic hypothesis of behavior, is intended by her opponents in game theory, so interested because parlor games such as chess and poker offer the easiest and most obvious paradoxes of conflict. This evocative term certainly proved to be a major asset in product placement—people are more willing to hear about game theory than, say, structural analysis of economics—but it entailed several costs. One drawback is that game theorists often find themselves forced to explain why they fail to do better at card tables or playing boards. It is for the same reason that students of physics are not any more critical than barristers: working out basic laws yields insight, not proficiency.

The title of Hegel’s engaging book, *Game Theory Evolving* alludes to the checkered history of this young science. The field was born with a 1944 article by John von Neumann and Oscar Morgenstern, a Hungarian and an Austrian, respectively, who were at Princeton. Morgenstern was a mathematician bolding barn burns on the state of his discipline and the accomplishments of his peers; von Neumann, a mathematician-genius banking in the administration of colleagues. Their forbiddingly heavy volume fared well with journalists and spawned a considerable amount of useful hype. More importantly, it attracted, for a limited time span, the attention of none of the best young mathematicians. The most mainstream economists remained aloof. Their reticence, which Sigmund ascribed to the reactionary stance of an estab-

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growing sector of economists (1, 4).

In *Game Theory Evolving*, Gintis provides not a history of this scientific evolution but a testimony of the impact of economists. His spirited attack on *Economic Man*—a fictitious agent relentless- ly maximizing self-centered utility and properly branded by Gintis as a second, actuated by the exigencies of rationality and nonrational choice, has had an enormous influence on economic theory.”

Gintis has wholeheartedly embraced the evolutionary approach to games, but he seems to expect that instructors (“the learned and taught the older tradition of classical game theory”) will guide students through this problem-centered textbook briefly of exercises. The author is an accomplished economist raised in the classical mold, and his background shows in many aspects of the book. He assumes some familiarity with standard terminology in economics, comes to population dynamics only late in the book, and places the new-fangled creed with missionary zeal. His harsh treatment of unenlightened colleagues who still espouse traditional lore recalls the mor-

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References

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