

this magazine, need a philosophical defense of a principle I already hold?" The question is fair enough. One answer is that if you're like most readers of this magazine, you're in a minority among your friends and co-workers, and find yourself needing to justify your positions. A good philosophical rationale will go a long way toward cementing your understanding of liberty and its value, and toward enhancing your ability to persuade others. You could use this book as effectively with your lefty-welfarist friends as with your natural-law theocon friends. And what better way to spend your summer than by arguing about political philosophy?

*Aeon J. Skoble is Chair of the Philosophy Department at Bridgewater State College in Massachusetts. He is the author of the forthcoming "Freedom, Authority, and Social Order" (Open Court), and also writes widely on philosophy and popular culture, most recently contributing to "The Philosophy of Film Noir" (Kentucky).*

This year I've been fortunate enough to encounter a number of entertaining and enlightening books. I'll start with Steven Pinker's bold and masterly "The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature" (Penguin). Pinker, a leading cognitive scientist, surveys the mountain of evidence against the theory that we are born malleable, with our identities (our genders and personalities) formed by our cultural upbringing. He urges that the nature versus nurture debate is over, and nature beats nurture all hollow — to the immense distress of feminists and social reformers everywhere. Also masterly — and accessible — is Mark Skousen's "The Making of Modern Economics: The Lives and Ideas of the Great Thinkers" (M.E. Sharpe). Skousen deftly explains arcane economic concepts and manages to make it all entertaining. He is archly Whiggish: the classical liberals are the good guys, and triumph in the end.

Another fascinating book is Bjørn Lomborg's "The Skeptical Environmentalist: Measuring the Real State of the World" (Cambridge University Press), a work as controversial as it is comprehensive. Lomborg was a devout member of the High Church of Environmentalism, when he came across the writings of the rogue economist Julian Simon. (Those unfamiliar with Simon's work might want to read his autobiography, "A Life Against the Grain" [Transaction Publishers], which I reviewed in the Sept. 2004 issue of Liberty). Simon's research sharply challenged environmentalist dogmas (that the earth is being overpopulated, that the ecosystem is being destroyed, and so forth), and Lomborg set out to refute him. He was eventually forced to admit that Simon was mainly correct. Lomborg provides a wealth of data to buttress his views.

Finally, following the theme of intellectual honesty (a somewhat uncommon quality in the academic worlds I've inhabited), there is Jeffrey Meyers' superb biography, "Orwell: Wintry Conscience of a Generation" (Norton). You might think it odd that a libertarian should admire Orwell, a socialist, but I do: his writings played a key role in discrediting communism, and I admire his genuine journalistic commitment. When he wrote about being down and out, living the homeless life, he wasn't some callow lefty pup, recently graduated from Columbia J-school and writing from the Olympian heights; he lived on the margins for a couple of years to learn what it was really like. The same holds for his description of the lives of

British coal miners; he lived among them too, and his real-life experiences shortened his life considerably. This sort of autobiographically tinged, socially critical writing is rare these days, because contemporary writers' lives are so often bereft of any interesting life experience.

*Gary Jason is a writer, businessman, and philosophy instructor. He lives in San Clemente, Calif.*

These recommendations feel very personal to me. I want to introduce you to two books that have touched and affected me profoundly. They are among the handful of books that I reread every few years or sooner. They have enriched my life, and I hope they will enrich yours.

The first is "The Gadfly," by E.L. Voynich (Kessinger Publishing).

Bertrand Russell said of this extraordinarily dramatic, fiery, and thoughtful book, "It is still one of the most exciting novels I have read in the English language." First published in Europe in 1897, where it has sold more than 12 million copies, and translated into more than 30 languages, "The Gadfly" has been described by Harrison Salisbury as "a story of revolutionaries and conspiracies, of an effort to overthrow an established order and to destroy the grip of a powerful State and Church." It is that, and it is more than that.

At its heart, this novel is a love story, but not of the usual kind. It is the story of the incorruptible love between Arthur, the passionate, courageous revolutionary who is the Gadfly of the title, and the young English girl who is his co-revolutionary. It tells of Arthur's equally incorruptible love for Italy, his country, and of the danger and agony into which that love propels him. It tells of the devotion to his Church of Cardinal Montanelli, Arthur's mentor, who holds locked within himself the secret of Arthur's birth. But most of all, this novel is the story of the desperate love and the equally desperate antagonism between two men of heroic stature, the atheist Arthur and the God-intoxicated Cardinal. Love and antagonism reach their climax in the novel's final chapters, chapters of such power and drama as to be almost unbearably intense.

When I first read this magnificent novel many years ago, I raced through it, half-skipping passages because the excitement of the events led me on to discover what happened next. I then immediately reread it, slowly and carefully; its intel-



"This new religion sounds neat — what kind of fertility rites does it have?"