

ena as rising illiteracy and the dissolution of the family through divorce.

Above all, Sagan's analysis suggests that high health expenditures do not alone achieve gains in life expectancy, and, after a point, produce diminishing returns. Despite Britain's national health-care system, its lower classes still have higher mortality and morbidity rates than do its upper classes. And although America ranks second only to Sweden in per capita health outlays, it lags behind 18 other countries in average life expectancy.

**ECONOMICS: Between
Predictive Science
and Moral Philosophy**

by James M. Buchanan
compiled by Robert D. Tollison
and Viktor J. Vanberg
Texas A & M, 1988
413 pp. \$48.50

These 26 essays by the 1986 Nobel laureate in economics represent what the volume's editors call "a modern revival of [the] classical political economy" practiced by free-market advocate Adam Smith (1723-90). What Buchanan, a professor at George Mason University, admires most about Smith's approach is its modesty. Instead of trying to predict the outcome of the market process, Smith studied the relationships between the institution and the individual in the hope of finding how self-interest translated into public good.

Such modesty has been lost, says Buchanan. Economics is now a predictive "science," increasingly used by governments seeking to control and promote specific outcomes. Unfortunately, says Buchanan, neither economics nor politics can produce efficiency and justice. Unable to forecast individual choices, economists cannot aggregate individual choices into a "social welfare function." Governments, lacking the unanimous support to produce a truly "collective" choice, use temporary majorities to push through temporary policies.

Governmental hyperactivity in the United States has produced voluminous laws and regulations, which in turn spawn a growing number of interest groups seeking to manipulate government for personal or ideological gain. This unseemly scramble has served only to undercut respect for laws. And in a society with only a minimal "national community," respect for laws, institutions, and the rights of others is crucial.

Buchanan maintains that the restoration of the moral order requires the "rollback of governmental intrusions into the lives of citizens." Simple Reaganism? Perhaps. But it may be foolish to dismiss Buchanan with a partisan label. Foolish, also,

to ignore his suggestion for a modest role for economists: to predict not specific outcomes, but the effects various economic arrangements have upon the choices of individuals.

Arts & Letters

ANTHILLS OF THE SAVANNAH

by Chinua Achebe
Doubleday, 1988
216 pp. \$16.95

In his first novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1959), Nigerian author Achebe depicted a thinly fictionalized West African society gone rotten as a result of colonialism. In *Anthills*, however, Achebe suggests that laying the blame for present-day African ills on "capitalism and imperialism" is an evasion. A greater problem facing the Africans in Achebe's fictional Kangan is their failure to confront the question asked by the heroine, Beatrice Okoh, at the conclusion of the novel: "What must a people do to appease an embittered history?"

One thing they must do, Achebe implies, is to resist the "lies" and "madness" of their corrupted leaders. The Kangan head of state, identified only by his Christian name, Sam, is a charismatic military president who falls into the trap of the personality cult. His failure to become "President-for-Life" has embittered him. It has also brought him into conflict with two childhood friends, Chris Oriko, commissioner for information, and Ikem Osodi, poet and editor of the state-run newspaper. Both had earlier helped bring Sam to power but now refuse to lie for him. Yet even while they resist Sam, Chris and Ikem see their own friendship tragically founder.

This study of crumbling friendships allows Achebe to develop another imperative facing Africa's elite: the need to face conflicts between traditional and Westernized Africans. These conflicts also emerge in the book's most striking character, Chris's lover Beatrice. An educated, independent woman, she knows traditional Africans resent her advantages, just as she resents, and resists, their proverbial wisdom: "That's when you hear all kinds of nonsense talk from girls: Better to marry a rascal than grow a moustache in your father's compound . . ." Yet for the elite to turn their backs on tradition, Achebe knows, is to lose all contact with the "poor and dispossessed" whom they claim to lead.

Shortly before being murdered by state security