

Models of My Life (MIT Press)

By Herbert A. Simon

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In this candid and witty autobiography, Nobel laureate Herbert A. Simon looks at his distinguished and varied career, continually asking himself whether (and how) what he learned as a scientist helps to explain other aspects of his life.A brilliant polymath in an age of increasing specialization, Simon is one of those rare scholars whose work defines fields of inquiry. Crossing disciplinary lines in half a dozen fields, Simon's story encompasses an explosion in the information sciences, the transformation of psychology by the information-processing paradigm, and the use of computer simulation for modeling the behavior of highly complex systems.Simon's theory of bounded rationality led to a Nobel Prize in economics, and his work on building machines that think -- based on the notion that human intelligence is the rule-governed manipulation of symbols -- laid conceptual foundations for the new cognitive science. Subsequently, contrasting metaphors of the maze (Simon's view) and of the mind (neural nets) have dominated the artificial intelligence debate.There is also a warm account of his successful marriage and of an unconsummated love affair, letters to his children, columns, a short story, and political and personal intrigue in academe.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly
Simon observes himself as an object for scientific inquiry in this refreshingly innovative autobiography. Principal architect of the field of artificial intelligence, this polymath has applied the metaphor of a decision-making maze to human cognition, management science, economics and politics--winning a Nobel Prize in 1978. Instead of a dry, rationalist exercise, this traipse through the branching paths of his personal labyrinth turns out to be a quirky, soul-baring self-analysis. In early chapters on his introspective Milwaukee childhood, he refers to himself in the third person as "the boy." He is equally objective in discussing his 1930s flirtation with political radicalism, his half-century-long marriage and the politics of scientific infighting. This is a disarming self-portrait by a gifted writer who believes that the real self is an illusion and that one's life need not have a unifying thread. Photos.
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From Library Journal
Simon is a veritable Renaissance man: considered the father of artificial intelligence, he also contributed to the theory of organizational behavior and was the first social scientist to be admitted to the National Academy of Science. In this extensive and entertaining autobiography, he writes smoothly and provocatively on a range of topics from his early youth to his years at UC Berkeley, Illinois, and, finally Carnegie Mellon. He is surprisingly candid in discussing how he "prepared" for his Nobel prize in economics, and his descriptions of political and personal in-fighting in academe document an aspect often not shown. Simon has participated in some of the most wide-ranging intellectual developments of this century, and his autobiography surely will interest many readers.
- *Hilary D. Burton, Lawrence Livermore National Lab., Livermore, Cal.*
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Review
"As much as any one person, Herbert A. Simon has shaped the intellectual agenda of the human and social sciences in the second half of the 20th century .... For many readers, Mr. Simon's view of human endeavor, of love and of work, will seem emblematic not of the pre-Freudian rationalism-that-was but a new, sleeker, rationalism-to-be--a rationalism purged of utopian excess, committed to empirical studies, and wedded to the most modern technology."--Sherry Turkle, "New York Times Book Review"

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