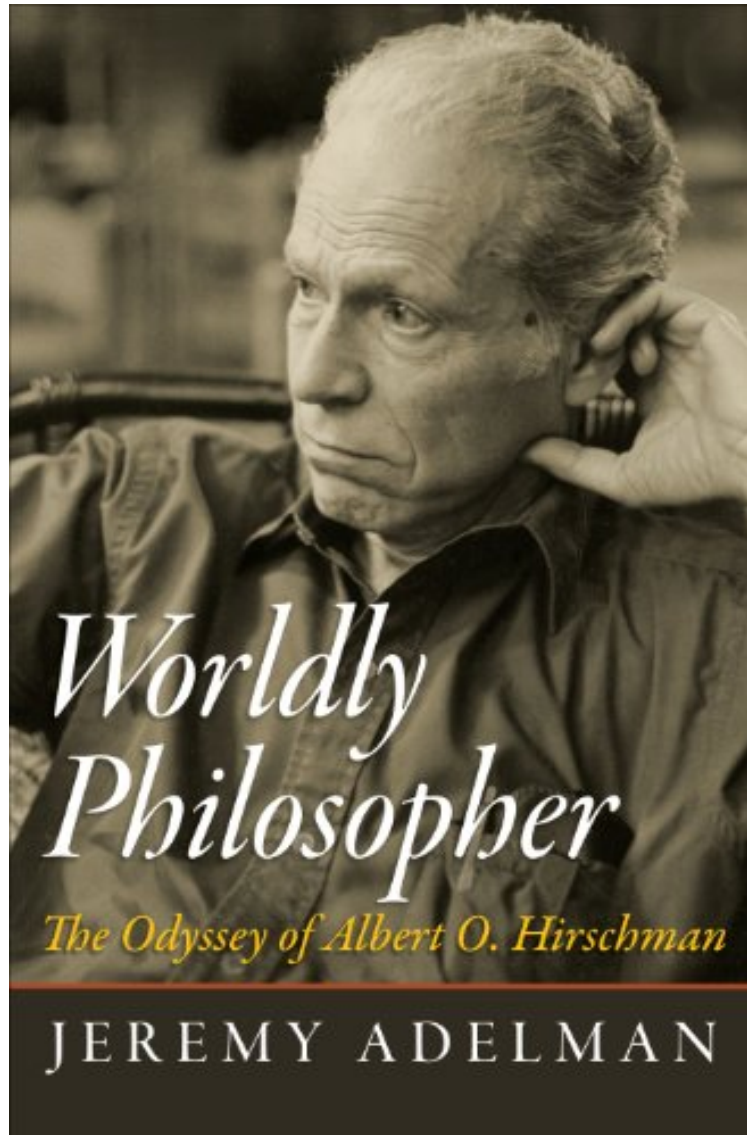


Worldly Philosopher: The Odyssey of Albert O. Hirschman

Jeremy Adelman

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Jeremy Adelman : Worldly Philosopher: The Odyssey of Albert O. Hirschman before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Worldly Philosopher: The Odyssey of Albert O. Hirschman:

29 of 30 people found the following review helpful. Excellent biography of an important thinker and activistBy Erik BloomAlbert Hirschman (1915-2012) was one of the most important and influential development economists of our times. This book, by Princeton history professor Jeremy Aldeman, is the definitive biography of Hirschman, his life and his thought. Hirschman had a very interesting life-- growing up watching the Nazis destroy Germany, serving in

three different armies, and traveling through out the world first as refugee and then as an economist. I would highly recommend this book to a serious reader interested in Hirschman and the history of development economics. The book itself is long (650 pages of text, plus almost fifty in notes) and quite readable. Since the discussion shifts back from the personal to the technical, it remains engaging. I found the discussion of social science ideas quite accessible and not overwhelmed by jargon, perhaps an homage to Hirschman himself who wrote more in words than in numbers and formulae. On the other hand, the book is not treaties of Hirschman's development thinking or a review of the development of economic thought. It is a biography of an important and interesting man and the reader should be prepared from some challenging reading. I personally found the stories about Hirschman in France during the German invasion and occupation as well as his adventures in Colombia (1950s) to be quite compelling and "page turning." The notes and the index are comprehensive and provide a good reference to Hirschman's life. I have never met Hirschman but now I which of my friends and colleagues have (at least two bosses, it turns out). The biography mixes discussion about Hirschman family and personal life with the evolution of his thinking. I first encountered Hirschman when I was an undergraduate student starting the development economics series, through the book *Pioneers in Development*. Hirschman was immediately my favorite pioneer, both due to his Colombian connections and his approach as a "rebel" (as he put it in his autobiography). After reading Adelman's book, I would say that Hirschman could be better described as a "optimistic doubter" than as a rebel. His doubting messages are often uncomfortable to authority despite his underlying optimism. Hirschman was born in Berlin to an "assimilated," well-to-do Jewish family. After the Nazis took power in 1933, Hirschman moved to France, Italy, England, Spain, and the United States. He also managed to serve in the Spanish Republican Army, the French Army (during the German invasion), and the American Army. He also played a major role in the Varian Fry's group that smuggled many leading intellectuals to the United States as well as serving as the the translator for the first war crimes trial after World War Two. Not bad for a thirty year old. As an economist, Hirschman was forced by circumstance to go to Colombia as a high level economic advisor, where he lived from 1952 to 1956. This was a life-changing experience that sparked a life-long interest in Latin America and development economics as well as thrusting him in the academic and policy limelight. From there, he moved among the Ivy League Universities (he variously associated with Yale, Columbia and Harvard), before ending up in Princeton. One theme running through the book is how early Hirschman starting thinking about big themes with his "little ideas" (as he called them). While he was definitely a believer in big development projects (and consequently, foreign aid), he was always expecting the unexpected. This, he argued, was at the center of the development process. While today it is common to consider (at least after the fact!) "unexpected benefits" or "externalities" in development, at the time this was a novel and even revolutionary approach. Development was largely focused on strategies to accumulate capital, overcome constraints, and fill gaps. He also played an important role in encouraging the evaluation of the World Bank and its projects as way to learn from what has worked and what has not worked. If you are primarily interested in his thinking on development, try the chapter in the *Pioneers in Development*. The *New Yorker* (June 2013) and the *New York Review of Books* (May 2013) have detailed reviews of the book that are worth looking at and the *New York Times* (Dec. 2012) and *American Interest* (Jan. 2013 by Francis Fukuyama) provide detailed obituaries. Finally, as Adelman concludes his book, I would like to say "Thank you, Albert." 8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. GREAT VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY By Yehezkel Dror This book well presents the great voyage of discovery of Hirschman, both of his life narrative and his intellectual-professional-scientific work, as interacting synergically. Hirschman fought in three wars, lived in a number of countries, worked as an advisor and institution builders around the world, and served as a scholar in major universities and research institutes. On the basis of these experiences and opportunities, he made a unique contribution to the study and improvement of development economics and policies, while also writing striking books of broader importance. All this is well described and discussed in this biography, which presents evolving outstanding achievements as well as serious failures. Thus, Hirschman was often too optimistic, taken by surprise by the emergence of authoritarian regimes in Latin America (e.g. p. 502). Two features of Hirschman's approach are of special interest. The first is his extensive field work, with special attention to unanticipated positive results on the local level of development projects, such as "empowerment," even when failing to achieve their declared objectives. The second is integrating theory building with close personal involvement in policy making and implementation. This combination enabled Hirschman to recognize the futility of purely economic approaches and "comprehensive planning" in development and propose instead more selective and concrete approaches. He proposed "possibilism" constantly seeking opportunities, also produced by adverse conditions and partial failures (pp. 450 ff.). And he criticized "the claims of knowledge dressed up in grand theories about the world ...[which] provide a hindrance to understanding it." (p. 339). There is much to learn from his experiences and conclusions, for instance on the futility of "rational choice" theories and the very limited relevance of much of experimental decision psychology, which are quite irrelevant to most of actual high-level choice processes. Hirschman's life was in all respects as "great voyage of discovery," exciting and productive in all respects, despite quite some tragedies and failures. Reading of this book is also a "voyage of discovery" of a fascinating person and of impressive professional and scientific ideas. It is strongly recommended. Professor Yehezkel Dror The Hebrew University of Jerusalem 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. The Economist We Need dash; Why Isn't

He Famous? By Gary Alan Chamberlain. The plural of anecdote is not evidence, quipped an investment expert in *Barrons* a few weeks ago. I'll (harshly) paraphrase a quote from a book I'll also review: In today's world, if you can't understand and process complex data, you're just another schmuck with an opinion. And a third, from Aristotle (my translation): No discipline investigates what concerns the individual—medicine, for example, what makes Socrates or Callias healthy—but what concerns a category or class of like incidences. This, you see, can be studied and taught, while what concerns the individual is infinite and unknowable through systematic investigation. Albert O. Hirschman was an economist previously unknown to me, who died only last December at the age of 97. The author, Jeremy Adelman, first read Hirschman's *The Passions and the Interests* (1977) as a teenager, and became personally close both to Hirschman and to his wife Sarah (who died in January 2012, after seventy years of marriage, having reviewed Adelman's first two drafts). I prefaced my review with two modern quotes to underline Hirschman's commitment to thoughtful empirical inquiry and respect for objective fact. But Hirschman did his far-reaching work in economic development as a passionately engaged individual, honoring the resilient courage, hope, and insight of those with whom he lived and worked; his studies, too, ranged widely across disciplines and centuries, and the Aristotle quote marks my homage to his combination of intellectual range and human depth. As Adelman says, "What he stood for, fought for, and wrote for was a proposition that humans are improvable creatures. Armed with an admixture of daring humility, they could act while being uncertain and embrace alternatives without losing sight of reality." (p. 653f) There was some literal fighting. Raised in Germany, Hirschman left as Hitler came to power and fought (briefly) against Fascism in Spain. After college in Paris he earned a doctorate in Trieste while he cooperated with (and lost close friends in) the Italian resistance to Mussolini. Back in Paris, he utterly mastered French; Montaigne's *Essays* would be the one book he would carry with him in all his wanderings. When war came he enlisted in the armies first of France (1939) and then the United States (1943-46, in the OSS as an expert in European languages and economics, an interpreter at the trial of the first Nazi general executed for war crimes); in between (in Marseilles) he skillfully and daringly helped coordinate the rescue of hundreds of Jews (including Hannah Arendt, Andre Breton, and Marc Chagall, just through the letter C!) from Vichy France, and (with a fellowship at Berkley) met and married Sarah Chapiro (Russian, from France, whose parents brought her to America). Incredibly, despite his American military service followed by work with the Marshall Plan on Europe's reconstruction, the postwar FBI labeled him a likely Communist; unaware of this, and unable to find a satisfying and stable position in America, he moved with his family to Colombia in 1952. He worked on ground-level development projects with local people for nearly five years, years which were, says Adelman, ". . . in many respects, among the best of their lives. Adventurous, culturally exciting, and intellectually awakening, this war-torn country gave Albert Hirschman an environment to reinvent himself." (p. 295) This face-to-face involvement strengthened his inclination to observe, to act in hope, resolutely to assess the facts of what succeeded and what failed, and then to try again. We don't need to understand the causes of a problem before we can go to work on the problem; in fact we best know the causes, and the obstacles to change, only by getting involved. That was one difference between Hirschman and other economists. Another was his rejection of the rational, selfish, maximizing homo oeconomicus as a useful reductive model of the human. From studying Adam Smith's "Lectures on Jurisprudence", responsive to the theme of the interdependence of markets and effective civil government, he launched into a sustained reading (including several lesser-known works by Machiavelli) of the Renaissance tradition of thinking about freedom and the common good as inextricably bound up with each other. (p. 507) I have no space to review the years as professor at Harvard and Yale, development consultant and mentor to a generation of Latin America's best economists, and fellow at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton. Nor could I do justice to the integrity, subtlety and clarity of his thinking and writing, which Adelman treats appreciatively and at length. And woven through it all runs his remarkable marriage and family, a story as patient and grand as any I know. Read the book. That this man's life and thought remain so little known disgraces our departmentalized academic disciplines and the simplistic sloganeering of our political and cultural discourse. By coincidence, besides the opening quote in *Barrons* that same week also provided a review of a book describing the development work in Africa (supervised and inspired largely at a distance) of a very famous and influential economist. All the difficulties the reviewer describes show how much Hirschman has to teach but we have refused to learn. As he said, too many economists prescribe remedies for economic scarcity with "no sense of the limits of their own prowess." (p. 596) And, I add, no openness to the perceptions, energy, and creativity of the people these "experts" propose to help.

Worldly Philosopher chronicles the times and writings of Albert O. Hirschman, one of the twentieth century's most original and provocative thinkers. In this gripping biography, Jeremy Adelman tells the story of a man shaped by modern horrors and hopes, a worldly intellectual who fought for and wrote in defense of the values of tolerance and change. This is the first major account of Hirschman's remarkable life, and a tale of the twentieth century as seen through the story of an astute and passionate observer. Adelman's riveting narrative traces how Hirschman's personal experiences shaped his unique intellectual perspective, and how his enduring legacy is one

of hope, open-mindedness, and practical idealism.

From Booklist*Starred * Economics, philosophy, and more than 700 pages—oh my! That's one way to view Adelman's brilliant biography of economist-philosopher Albert O. Hirschman. But like Hirschman himself, who took a skewed and often inventive look at nearly everything, there are many ways to describe and delight in this book. It is at once an adventure, as the young Hirschman leaves his homeland, Germany, in 1933, at 17, determined to find a place for himself in the world. And what a world he moves through—Marxists, Nazis, wars and revolutions, and many emigrations and migrations (Hirschman, taking on false identities, helped such luminaries as Max Ernst and Hannah Arendt escape a devouring Europe). Later, Hirschman, at times shunned for his economic ideas as well as how he presented them—often sans mathematical formulas—traveled throughout the world, living in many countries, observing, and writing about his observations. Adelman sensitively draws out this enlightening and heartening life, sketching in, along the way, the characters surrounding Hirschman. His wife, Sarah, was part of Hirschman's odyssey, and Adelman portrays her as not only capable but a smart, brave, discerning, and interesting person. Hirschman's primary field was economics, but he eschewed formulaic solutions to human problems, choosing instead aphoristic thinking and petites idées, as "small things could provide big insights" (and throughout, wordsmith Adelman perceptively and astutely serves wordsmith Hirschman). Nearly every page of this book inspires thought or admiration or fear for the outcome or exultation at the revelations. Hirschman's ideas hew to the individual; for instance, because expected outcomes are not achieved, does this make the endeavor a failure, or can one seek instead the surprising good that came from it? A bright world of thought and viable enterprise opens before readers—including, perhaps especially, noneconomists—and it should not be missed. --Eloise Kinney Winner of the 2014 Joseph J. Spengler Best Book Prize, History of Economics Society One of Bloomberg/Businessweek Best Books of 2013, selected by Ollie Rehn One of Financial Times (Alphachat)'s Econ Books of the Year for 2013 One of The Guardian Best Books of 2013, chosen by Malcolm Gladwell Honorable Mention for the 2013 PROSE Award in Biography Autobiography, Association of American Publishers "[A] biography worthy of the man. Adelman brilliantly and beautifully brings Hirschman to life, giving us an unforgettable portrait of one of the twentieth century's most extraordinary intellectuals. . . . [M]agnificent." --Malcolm Gladwell, New Yorker "[A] hugely engaging . . . epic." --Justin Fox, New York Times Book "[An] astonishing and moving biography. . . . Hirschman's work is more than interesting enough to justify a book (or two, or ten), but Adelman's achievement is to demonstrate, in novelistic detail, that he also lived an astounding life, full of narrow paths and ridiculously improbable twists and turns." --Cass Sunstein, New York of Books "[A] massive, erudite biography." --Roger Lowenstein, Wall Street Journal "[T]he winner [Enlightened Economist prize this year] is Jeremy Adelman's *The Worldly Philosopher*, a biography of Albert Hirschman. Hirschman's life story is extraordinary, and his early years make for a gripping tale. What I particularly enjoyed, though, was the portrait of an economist whose economics had a context in the realities of the countries Hirschman studied, their history and politics and culture, and in his wide reading in philosophy and other subjects. . . . A worthy winner--congratulations to Professor Adelman!" --Diane Coyle, *Enlightened Economist* "This is the book I have looked forward to most all year and so far it does not disappoint." --Tyler Cowen, *Marginal Revolution* "Adelman's engrossing biography illustrates how Hirschman's global background, natural linguistic ability, education, and worldly experiences shaped his thoughts and enabled his thinking 'outside the box' to arrive at original and often provocative ideas. . . . Hirschman's story will appeal to many general readers, but especially to economists." --Library Journal "Worldly Philosopher will be the definitive work on Hirschman for some time. . . . If you liked Edmund de Waal's *The Hare with Amber Eyes*, you will find Adelman's story of Hirschman's early life riveting--a book-club quality read. . . . Worldly Philosopher is a prodigious piece of research, lovingly told and immensely worthwhile for the new light it sheds on the odyssey of a writer whose small ideas add up to major insights." --Robert Kuttner, *American Prospect* "Adelman's biography does a thorough job in shedding light not just on the academic and intellectual prowess of the great thinker, but also in informing the reader about the man whose life away from the intellectual world exhibited the same milieu of refreshing variety." --Prashanth Perumal, *Mint* "[T]he only official biography of one of our generation's most extraordinary thinkers." --City Book "Jeremy Adelman's outstanding biography . . . should receive serious attention from prize committees when the best non-fiction works of 2013 are chosen. . . . As Adelman makes eloquently clear, Hirschman . . . was a great deal more than an economist or social scientist." --Stuart Mitchner, *Princeton Magazine* "[I]t is thanks only to this remarkable biography by Jeremy Adelman . . . that we now have the first comprehensive view of the man and his work. Adelman writes with affection and respect and chronicles Hirschman's life through painstaking archival work, extensive interviews, and the examination of personal and professional papers. He brings the work alive by exploring the origins of Hirschman's achievements in the twists and turns of his life--a life, Adelman notes, that 'was a personal history of the twentieth century.' . . . [T]hanks to Adelman's magisterial biography, we can see how Hirschman's social science was informed and strengthened by his deeply moral and principled politics." --Seyla Benhabib, *Democracy* "Economics, philosophy, and more than 700 pages--oh my! That's one way to view Adelman's brilliant biography of economist-philosopher Albert O. Hirschman (1915-2012). But like Hirschman himself, who took a skewed and often inventive look at nearly

everything, there are many ways to describe and delight in this book. . . . Adelman sensitively draws out this enlightening and heartening life, sketching in, along the way, the characters surrounding Hirschman. His wife, Sarah, was part of Hirschman's odyssey, and Adelman portrays her as not only capable but a smart, brave, discerning, and interesting person. Hirschman's primary field was economics, but he eschewed formulaic solutions to human problems, choosing instead aphoristic thinking and petites ideacutes, as 'small things could provide big insights' (and throughout, wordsmith Adelman perceptively and astutely serves wordsmith Hirschman). Nearly every page of this book inspires thought or admiration or fear for the outcome or exultation at the revelations. . . . A bright world of thought and viable enterprise opens before readers--including, perhaps especially, noneconomists--and it should not be missed."--Eloise Kinney, Booklist

"Examining the life of a great intellectual living in extraordinary times, Jeremy Adelman has produced a special kind of biography. . . . Adelman beautifully captures Hirschman's intellectual temperament, not only by describing it but also by crafting a book that recapitulates it. Worldly Philosopher is a book of rhymes, in which Hirschman's writing recalls his personal experience, early and late projects betray enduring habits of mind, and Adelman's own judgment and style bear traces of his subject's. . . . Adelman's proximity to Hirschman allows him to interpret a public record that is extensive but opaque, and the resulting book is a sympathetic, internal account of a life complex enough to profit from such treatment. For anyone who knows one part of Hirschman's life, the book opens entire worlds. For anyone who has pored over his cryptic papers, Adelman's mastery of them is revelatory. Worldly Philosopher not only explains Hirschman from the inside out, it gives the reader a taste of his style as a writer: his eye for beauty, love of literature, and sheer range. . . . Worldly Philosopher is, as promised, a sweeping history of the world, and a highly personal one."--Amy C. Offner, Public Books

"Adelman provides a masterful biography of one of the most remarkable economists of the 20th century, Albert O. Hirschman. Any one of Hirschman's many lives would provide ample fodder for an interesting book. . . . [Worldly Philosopher] is obviously a labor of love, in which Adelman painstakingly reconstructs Hirschman's private and intellectual life."--Choice

"Worldly Philosopher is a major contribution to our understanding of the history of twentieth-century social science, and a sympathetic tribute to a man who struggled against personal adversity and who strove to improve the opportunities of ordinary people to live successfully in the face of massive adversity."--Bryan S. Turner, Sociological

"This is a wonderful book about a superb political economist. Adelman invested many years in this admiring biography, which allows readers to fully appreciate the diversity of Albert Hirschman's many contributions to economic scholarship. . . . Hirschman possessed a unique ability to shift from the particular to the general and projected an implicit optimism about humanity's prospects."--Albert Fishlow, Foreign Affairs

"Adelman's richly detailed and highly readable biography provides a valuable introduction to the life and work of a scholar who was unmoved by the proclivity of economists and other social scientists to draw sweeping conclusions from simplified assumptions."--Michael McPherson, Journal of Economic Literature

"This is the first major account of Hirschman's remarkable life, and a tale of the twentieth century as seen through the story of an astute and passionate observer. Adelman's riveting narrative traces how Hirschman's personal experiences shaped his unique intellectual perspective, and how his enduring legacy is one of hope, open-mindedness, and practical idealism."--World Book Industry

"In Worldly Philosopher, Jeremy Adelman offers a brilliant--and brilliantly detailed--portrait of Hirschman, making a convincing case for his place among the giants of twentieth-century social science. After reading Adelman's biography, one is hard pressed to come up with a social scientist who led a richer, fuller, or more meaningful life."--Peter A. Coclanis, HAHR

"This is a good book from many different stand points. . . . Many readers will find Worldly Philosopher to be longer than it needs to be, although they would presumably give conflicting opinions about what ought to have been cut, depending on whether they were interested in the book mainly as a summary of Hirschman's ideas, as the life story of a fascinating person, or as a discussion of changing tendencies in modern intellectual, political, and economic life. The book is all of these things and well worth reading for any of them."--Woodruff D. Smith, American Historical

"Jeremy Adelman has written a wonderful book, one worthy of its subject and that is high praise. . . . Adelman demonstrates the importance of situating an author sociologically as well as historically in his times, of understanding the practical experience--including the experience of research--that gave rise to his ideas, and more generally grasping the relationship between his work and the rest of his life. . . . The beauty of this book is that Albert Hirschman comes alive as a man and an author."--Craig Calhoun, Contemporary Sociology

"Worldly Philosopher is an outstanding literary achievement that provides insight into the life of one of the twentieth century's most important social scientists. Jeremy Adelman tells his story in an entertaining and compelling style. In conjunction with The Essential Hirschman, it should go some way toward ensuring that Hirschman's ideas continue to be discussed throughout the twenty-first century."--Adrian Walsh, Australian Book

"Adelman's lengthy life of Hirschman is intrinsically interesting to anyone concerned with the twentieth century in Europe and the Americas."--Robert W. Frizzell, Yearbook of German Studies

"This beautifully written biography of German-born economist Albert O. Hirschman is well worth reading for its insights into a man who experienced the political events that gave birth to today's world, saw the flawed ideologies that got us to where we are now, and saw how to identify and avoid those ideologies that might lead us astray in the future."--William J. Bernstein, Financial Analyst Journal

"Worldly Philosopher is beautifully written and is well worth reading as the biography of a man who experienced, as fully as

anyone could, the political events that gave birth to today's world and who saw, as clearly as anyone could, the flawed ideologies that got us to where we are now--and, most critically, saw how to identify and avoid those ideologies that might lead us astray in the future."--William J. Bernstein, *Enterprising Investor*"[A] magnificent investigation and an essential contribution to global research, written in most enjoyable prose . . . innovative and unsurpassed."--Annie Cohen-Solal, *Times Higher Education*"[A] magnificent biography."--Lourdes Sola, *European of International Studies*"Adelman has written an outstanding book whose depth, breadth, and insight mirrors Hirschman's own."--Daniel Bessner, *Chicago Journals*"Albert Hirschman's many fans will enjoy this absorbing biography of his life and work."--Roger Sandilands, *Journal of the History of Economic Thought*"[A] magnificent exposition."--Joseph Mali, *European Legacy*From the Back Cover"This is an exceptional book. Hirschman's intellectual and political journey is described with sharpness and perspicacity. Family life, cultural encounters, and the imprints of a lifetime highlight the importance and significance of one of the most creative intellectuals of the twentieth century, who had a profound influence on so many people around the world, including myself."--Fernando Henrique Cardoso, former president of Brazil"From the dying days of the Weimar Republic to the fall of the Berlin Wall, Albert Hirschman was a witness to the political turbulence of the twentieth century, shaping its intellectual trajectory while resisting overarching theories and academic convention at every turn. Meticulously researched, gracefully written, and deeply moving, this biography shines a light on not only one of the most fertile minds of the century, but the entire political and intellectual history of the period."--Dani Rodrik, Harvard University"Worldly Philosopher is a brilliant book. It is at once a thrilling story, an inspiring and melancholy intellectual biography, and a history of the shifting involvements of social science in twentieth-century public life."--Emma Rothschild, author of *The Inner Life of Empires: An Eighteenth-Century History*"Albert Hirschman is one of the most distinguished social scientists of the past half century. He has led an exciting and exemplary life, and Jeremy Adelman has researched and written an exhaustive biography. We are all in Adelman's debt for having followed Hirschman's journey, thoroughly and with sympathy."--Charles S. Maier, author of *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and Its Predecessors*