

# Manfred on His 75th Birthday



Heinz D. Kurz



## 1

Dear Manfred, Barbara, friends and colleagues,

Manfred turned 75 on July 25th. We are celebrating his birthday today. I am happy to comply with the request to say a few words about the friend on this occasion. The invitation from Florian Rupp and Martin Leroch refers to a “highlight of the evening”. There are highlights that can be either good or bad. In that sense, the announcement can’t really be wrong. Moreover, what is a highlight for some people may be the opposite for others—it depends on the position of the head and the perspective. If

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we also take into account—well known to Bavarians—that “laudatio” in Bavarian means “Dableck’n”, deriding, then we have every reason to be wary of climaxes.

Of course, on occasions like today’s, Dableck’n must not violate the principle of only bringing up praiseworthy and lovely things, that is, only a part of the truth about Manfred. Whether it is the smaller part is just as open as the question of whether the following can be said to be true at all. Not even Manfred can be sure of that, since, as David Hume knew, reason is always the slave of our passions and, as Adam Smith pointed out, our perception is distorted by our self-love.

Let me at the outset emphasize that my considerations are based on a pitifully small amount of observations about Manfred’s doings and actions, so the word “evidence-based”—the analogue of “cool” among hooligans, which is used today in an inflationary manner in economists’ circles, would, therefore, be completely inappropriate. I console myself with the fact that, according to Schumpeter, the sea of facts is infinite and mute, and which subset of facts is relevant for what? The result of studies depends, therefore, crucially on the facts selected and—no less importantly—how one makes the former speak, which theory one has at one’s disposal. Applied to our case, to the perception of the “Gestalt” of Manfred, I try to portray a kind of comprehensive piece of art on the basis of just a few of its perceived salient features. Most of Manfred must necessarily remain in the dark. Who dares to say what this saves us from!

## 2

I should briefly state the empirical basis of my considerations. Manfred and I were born in the same year—he barely two months after me. However, we only got to know each other in the late 1960s when we were studying economics in Munich. I remember Manfred for his clever remarks and questions in lectures and seminars, but even more for his mischievous look.



What can words express compared to eyes! But as soon as we became aware of each other, Manfred disappeared together with his eyes to Lausanne to study law. Law at Léon Walras' former workplace? How good that he soon returned to Munich! If I am not mistaken, we met again in Giovanni Heinemann's exam preparation course. Manfred caught my attention again with his clever comments and questions, and of course with his eyes. In the summer semester of 1971, we obtained our diploma in Munich. Manfred then went on to study political economy. I followed Albert Jeck to Kiel as a research assistant. And so Manfred and I lost sight of each other for several years. Only coincidence brought us together again, and the coincidence I am alluding to was far more coincidental than the one described by Karl Valentin in the famous "Orchestra Rehearsal". Manfred was now a professor in Aarhus and I was one in Bremen. We met on the train from Hanover to Munich—it must have been towards the end of my time in Bremen and shortly before my time in Graz, probably in 1987. It was great to see him again.

In the meantime, Manfred had lived several lives in one, including as a scientific entrepreneur, a founder of publishing houses and periodicals, an intellectual networker, a successful theorist, a textbook author and so on and so forth. His activities manifested themselves in what he said, lectured, proclaimed, founded, organized, designed, printed and published. His works are far too numerous and varied to be mentioned here. Also, there is the hope and expectation that before long entirely new tools and algorithms will be developed by Big Data aficionados and evidence-based people that will allow us to scour ether and airwaves for the voices and sounds of every human being that has ever walked and talked on planet Earth. I am already today certain of two results of this future meritorious activity: First, Manfred will be assigned a share of the scraps of words collected far above-average, and secondly, his contribution to what will one day be called anthropogenic vocal ether pollution will prove to be far below-average. In other words: while Manfred talks a lot, what he says is usually not stupid, on the contrary.

After the aforementioned meeting on the train, Manfred was kind enough to appoint me to the editorial board of the *European Journal of Political Economy*, which he had founded. I am afraid to say that I have not been of much help to him in this capacity and I hope he will be lenient. Anyway, we were in touch again.

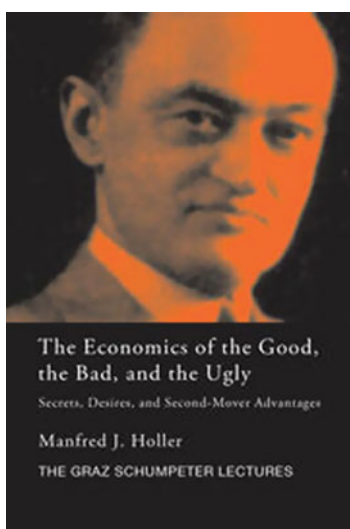


But it was not until about twenty years later that we became much closer again, in Graz, that is. Manfred had meanwhile got to know larger parts of the world and they had got to know him. He had been a full professor in Hamburg since 1991 and had held guest professorships from Paris to Hangzhou, from Rome to Gothenburg, and from Western Ontario to Turin and Turku—impressive proof of his great international reputation and his highly esteemed personality. He had made a name for himself in numerous fields including microeconomics, game theory, economic theory of politics, labour market theory, analysis of political and economic power, electoral analysis, theory of coalitions and collective action, the question of standardization, the theory of negotiations, to name but a few!<sup>1</sup> He had also launched other successful periodicals, including *Homo Oeconomicus*. But Manfred is not only a formidable social scientist, but he and his congenial partner Barbara do also have an extraordinary knowledge of history.

<sup>1</sup> The importance of his pioneering work in the field of power indices has only recently been confirmed again in publications by others. And after these lines had been written, in June 2022 he received the great honour of getting elected into the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters.



And this man, bursting with knowledge down to the tips of his hair, was a guest professor in Graz in the winter semester of 2011–2012! How nice to have been aware again that his mischievous look was resting on me! It was clear that such a talented, versatile, original and productive man had to become a Graz Schumpeter Lecturer. And so it happened in 2013. The topic of Manfred’s related lectures was “The Economics of the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Desires, Secrets, and Second-Mover Advantages”. The lectures were then published in the *Graz Schumpeter Lectures* series (*GSL*) by Routledge, London, in 2019.



Before Manfred began his lectures in Graz, he showed some important scenes from Sergio Leone's film, starring Clint Eastwood, Lee van Clef and Eddie Wallach. I had seen the strip for the first time in the 1970s in Ouagadougou, today Burkina Faso, on the occasion of a visit of my later wife Gabriele, who worked there in an agrostological project. The French title of the movie is "Le Bon, la Brute et Le Truand". It was shown in an open-air cinema.<sup>2</sup> The translation of "Draw your revolver!" in French is "Tire ton pistolet". Could this signal deadly danger and can serious science be done about it? The tsetse flies carrying sleeping sickness buzzing around me in Ouagadougou were a real threat, I thought. But of course, game theorists had picked up the topic of the movie and Manfred, equipped with a huge arsenal of game theory and sophisticated analytical tools offered by economic and political science, sought to deepen the answers given to the questions raised. There was no room for the sleeping sickness that is rampant in lecture halls. In his treatise, Manfred corrects and enriches Schumpeter's theory of innovation. He illuminates the concept "desires", and shows why it is often not the heroes of Schumpeter's story, the "pioneering entrepreneurs", who are successful, but those who follow them, the second movers. People and organizations often have a desire for secrecy, among other things in order to secure second mover advantages for themselves or to circumvent those of others. We owe Manfred a great painting of the conflicts, social problems and failures of politics and companies that result from the interplay of desires, secrets and second mover advantages. But he also has good news, showing that some of the problems that arise hold themselves the key to a solution.



After this highly personal reminiscence concerning the history of our encounters, now something objective, that is, something that goes beyond purely subjective

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<sup>2</sup> It deserves to be noted that in French the word for tyrant is feminine: *la brute*. As we know, language reflects peoples' experiences across centuries.

impressions and based on unreliable memories of times long past, in short: now something evidence-based, factual.

### 3

Manfred's actual birthday, July 25, is the nationwide day of the sea rescuers in Germany, in the USA it is several things at once: the National Carousel or Merry-Go-Round Day, the National Thread the Needle Day, the National Culinary Day, to Christians the day of honour of the apostle Jacob, and worldwide the Day of Joy.

But what has this evidence to do with Manfred? Nothing, on the surface, everything, in essence! That the Day of Joy fits perfectly with Manfred needs no further explanation. But are there also connections in the other cases? The world is as you imagine and react to it. Or does someone seriously want to claim that a Hamburg university professor can never loose the thread? Just look at some of his colleagues in the Hanseatic city to get an idea of what I mean. Or does anyone want to deny that Manfred could ever become nauseous in the always accelerating merry-go-round of life and show signs of madness? And who would seriously doubt that even the most patient of all patients, Manfred, repeatedly lost his patience while threading the needle?



It is a good thing that July 25th is also National Culinary Day. Manfred soothes his mood there, preferably with roast pork, dumplings, coleslaw and wheat beer. The question: Why not celebrate this every day? The clever one has long since decided this for his part.



But what is the relationship between Manfred and Jacob? We can probably rule out that he will have a fate as bad as the one this apostle had according to the legend. But a parallel comes to one's mind: just as Jacob is said to have contributed to driving the "infidels" out of Spain, Manfred is helping to eliminate ignorance. Manfred, we can say without exaggeration, is on a campaign against superstition, misconceptions and misunderstandings—or, to put it in Bavarian terms: against nonsense. If it happens to be true that human stupidity is greater than the expansion of the universe, then Manfred has taken on the greatest of all challenges.

Will he prevail? Of course, we wish him to do so from the bottom of our hearts, but we cannot help recalling the words of the great Voltaire, who was convinced that the world is no better when we leave it than when we entered it. "No better" does not exclude, of course, "significantly worse". In view of the numerous kinds of madness experienced these days, one gets the impression that things are going downhill at an accelerating speed. Man has developed techniques, which allowed him to conquer and subjugate the planet. But as in so many other cases too, the danger is that once you have painstakingly learned to master a technique, it will take control of you. Anyone who knows how to use a hammer sees nails everywhere. Anyone who has learned optimizing techniques often ends up in the imaginary world of Dr. Pangloss in Voltaire's *Candide*, in which everything is assumed to be in the best order possible. However, what is penny-wise may turn out to be pound-foolish.

There is an unmistakable measure of Manfred's considerable success as an apostle of reason—his publications. Someone who has written and published more than 70 books alone or together with others in about 50 years of study and work, some together with Barbara and others with several colleagues who are virtually present today, with some books going through several editions; someone who has published well over 100 articles in academic journals, alone or together with others; someone who has placed well over 120 contributions in anthologies and has also written numerous book reviews; someone like him is truly what is called a "Kapazunder" in Austria



or a luminary in the English-speaking world. I imagine the days and nights full of deprivation at the desk and in front of the computer that Manfred sacrificed for the progress of science. Manfred has wrested the remarkable results of his work by using all his mental and physical strength, repeatedly completely exhausted and with red eyes from overly long seances in front of the screen of his computer, only at the first cockcrow did he sink onto the bed, when many of us were still comfortably lounging in the sheets.

But Manfred is not only an author, as already mentioned, he is also the founder and editor of several specialist journals and book series. As has already been mentioned, he wrote several of his works with Barbara, most recently game theory for managers.<sup>3</sup>



In addition, he is the director and/or member of several research centres and projects near and far, including one on conflict resolution. Machiavelli's *Il Principe* has been on his mind for a long time. Manfred effortlessly transcends narrow disciplinary boundaries, overcoming the limitations of disciplinary thinking without jeopardizing intellectual discipline, reaching out to philosophy, literature, history and art—together with Barbara and his friends and students as complementary think tanks. Manfred's thoughts and aspirations are based on the example of the *homo universalis* of the Renaissance—an ideal that is unattainable today. But it is impressive how far Manfred is getting along the way. No question: Without Manfred and his work, the world would be different. His CO<sub>2</sub> balance is also remarkable, indeed commendable, as he does not own a vehicle with an internal combustion engine. He

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<sup>3</sup> In the late 1980s, the editors of *The New Palgrave* were amazed at the huge sales of the expensive four volumes in Japan. Their attempt to trace the reasons for this revealed that Japanese managers had purchased the volumes for their secretariats in bulk. They had apparently interpreted the subtitle "A Dictionary of Economics" as indicating a handbook useful to their language secretaries in their correspondence with English-speaking countries.

and Barbara cover distances on foot, by bike or by public transport. Well, every now and then they use an aeroplane.

Looking at all his achievements, one feels small as a colleague and even more so as a laudator who, by virtue of his office, has to get an overview of the scientific achievements of the honouree. More precisely: every additional publication by Manfred one looks at, tends to make one shrink a little more. When you accept the office, you naturally feel a friendly bond with Manfred and consider the task honourable. But this feeling was put to the test in the course of my preparations for tonight. How can Manfred so ruthlessly expose his friends to the swelling feeling of their own mediocrity! Manfred is well acquainted with the Scottish Enlightenment and the doctrine of the unintended consequences of one's own actions and omissions. It can therefore be assumed that he is aware of the sense of failure that his successes prompt in his admirers. The question is close at hand: is it not so much about unintended but about consciously intended consequences? Does he intentionally make us feel our own puniness? Is Manfred, as the Bavarian would put it, malicious "with diligence"? Is his look mocking and condescending rather than mischievous?

We have gathered to praise Manfred and to assure him of our appreciation, affection and friendship. But do we own his? Or are we dealing with a male mutation of the "old moor witch" of a German fairy tale, about whom a nursery rhyme says: "Hält die ganze Welt für dumm, hext herum, hext herum" (Considers the whole world as stupid, witches around, witches around).



Manfred, honestly: Do you think what the witch says? In order to really do you justice, we need to know how you feel about us. If you walk ahead of us at a brisk pace, do you do this in order to be able to mumble unheard unflattering judgments about us?



When gurgling wheat beer jumps down your throat, do the bubbles transport disrespectful things about us? Even worse: Does the arrangement of letters in your writings contain secret messages which, when deciphered, say, for example: “Heinz is dumb” followed by: “and he doesn’t even notice it”?

The more I think about it, the more I get lost. Manfred, dispel the fog! Remember the philanthropic core of Ricardo’s theorem of comparative advantage, which, mind you, contains the good news: Each one of us may be inferior to you in each and every respect, but your superiority varies in degree. So there are mutually beneficial cooperative relationships out there. You too benefit from relationships with us, not just us from relationships with you! Provided, of course, that each one of us specializes in full recognition of your different relative degrees of superiority with regard to the various dimensions under consideration.

It is no coincidence that you are honoured today. The fact that the task of honouring you fell upon me, is much more difficult to explain and is best seen as a whim of fate. But imagine that for whichever reason our roles would be reversed? A quick reflection shows that this would mercilessly reveal the limits of Ricardo’s theorem and, I am afraid to say, potentially also the limits of your relationship with us. Or am I mistaken? The question I am asking, having learned important lessons from you, is this: Did you move too soon and jump ahead too early, thereby pushing each one of us into the position of a potential second mover with a bright future ahead of him or her? Does your own theoretical reasoning in the *GSL* in the end turn against you?

I like to flee into such fantasy worlds, but they quickly burst vis-à-vis your untouchable superiority. What remains to us is to wish you belatedly a happy 75<sup>th</sup> birthday. We do so aloud with the words of the people of Holofernes. According to Nestroy, this people chants in his play *Judith and Holofernes* towards the end of the first scene:

“Weil er uns sonst niederhaut,

Preisen wir ihn Alle laut!"

(Because otherwise he'll cut us down,

Let us all praise him loudly!).

While, as has been stressed at the beginning, the whole Manfred remains hidden from us willy-nilly, we can rule out with a probability bordering on certainty that he will have a fate like that of Holofernes. So: Manfred, keep your head and remain as you are! Or if, surprisingly, you should not be able to do so, try to become an even better being than the one you are and fight the decline of humankind.

To you and Barbara:

Ad multos annos!