

The Hidden Gordon Tullock

9-30-15

I. Introduction

This conference has for the most part been about the public Gordon Tullock, about his published academic work, his journal, and his interactions with other persons. Gordon's public persona has also been remarked on, his history, his brashness, his humor, and his outspokenness. What has been missing is any accounting of his more private activities.

I thought that it would be appropriate to conclude the conference with a short review of the private Tullock, the part that is not so easily seen, but is, perhaps, obvious on reflection.

II. Gordon the Private Scholar

Gordon was a voracious reader, which is evidenced in the very large library that he assembled over his career. That library was left at the Center for Study of Public Choice when he left for the University of Arizona. It was a collection of several thousand books, virtually all marked up here and there as Gordon read through them. The collection covered such fields as biology, meteorology, history, law, political science, economics, and foreign affairs.

Gordon often liked to give the impression that it all was intuitively obvious to him, but his intuition was formed both through his education in law (Chicago), politics and foreign affairs (Yale and Cornell), his far ranging reading, and a broad range of conversations with friends and colleagues.

Although he did not remember everything that he read, he remembered much and often could provide an obscure historical figure or fact when necessary to buttress a point that he was making in an argument and in his writing.

When someone suggested that Gordon read only himself--as suggested in a quote included in the Munger-Vanberg paper yesterday--that was clearly false. Although Gordon did like to give that impression. In fact, he spent many evenings and much time in his office

reading books on topics well outside the normal range of that of most of his colleagues in the various economics departments that he was a member of.

There are occasional historical citations in his work, but little else from that extensive reading appears directly in his published work.

As an example of his erudition, I remember Gordon pointing out to me at one of the visitor lunches that Japan was less dictatorial during WWII than generally thought. Japan had held regularly scheduled election for at least the first decade of their efforts to build an empire. I dug a bit more deeply into Japanese history and found confirmation of that fact--although not easily. That remark, thus, indirectly led to the Japanese chapter of *Perfecting Parliament*.

Gordon the scholar remained hidden by Gordon the intellectual, who rarely cited other person's work--a type of behavior not uncommon among University of Chicago graduates of his vintage and caliber. His intuition was excellent, but it was thoroughly grounded and vetted by his far-ranging scholarship.

III. Tullock the Benefactor

Gordon often gave the impression that he was a self-centered person. This was not entirely the case. Although most persons that achieve as much as he did are driven and self motivated, this is another instance in which there was a hidden side to Gordon that was easy to miss.

First, he was very generous with his time to students. He was always willing to listen to and critique an argument (and, of course, to insult the arguer). The latter tended to bruise many easily bruised egos, but his time, if one took the time to notice, often provided very useful hints and criticism. Gordon's door was always open.

Second, it bears noting that Gordon was generous with his property. The library mentioned above left at the Center when he left, and subsequently given to some combination of institutes in Kenya, Guatemala, and Palo Alto. That gift alone would have been an excess of \$50,000 dollars. He also financed an endowed chair at the center for study of public choice, the Duncan Black Chair in political economy, once held by Charles Rowley

and now by Pete Leeson. He also, I believe, made a significant gift to the department of economics shortly before his retirement.

He was also generous to his immediate family, giving his house in Tucson to his sister and her husband upon his return to GMU, for use as a place to escape the winters of Iowa. He also invested in the family companies of his sister's family, including if I remember correctly a chemical business and a clothing print shop.

IV. Tullock the Entrepreneur

Gordon was himself also a bit of an entrepreneur and organization builder, although he also tended to do this in a manner that was not entirely obvious to outsiders. It has been mentioned several times that Gordon established the journal Public Choice, and initially financed it himself, although it quickly became more or less self financing.

He also published many of his books himself, and both held and sold the inventory--which is partly why he often had copies to give to visitors and students. He claimed to have always made a small profit on his print runs. He also created public choice ties, one of which I am presently wearing.

And as Dennis Mueller mentioned in his talk, and which has been mentioned by others he both encouraged the creation of public choice societies in Europe and Japan, and supported the far flung public choice societies around the world after they were up and running by being a regulator attendee. Peter Bernholz, the second president of the European Public Choice Society referred to Gordon as the Ambassador of Public Choice. (He subsidized his first class and business class seats by paying the difference between coach and the more comfortable classes, which of course helped make such extensive travels far less painful.)

Again, his public persona as the intellectual fount and could easily be overlooked. In this case, the "hidden behavior" was done in public, but tended to be overlooked by most.

V. Tullock the Hidden Man

All this suggests that Tullock the Man was more complex than Tullock the public persona, just as there is a sense in which his research is more complex and deeper than it appears at first glance.

It is the innovative intellectual public Tullock that most of this conference has been dedicated to exploring. That man may be the one that has the most lasting impact.

However, it is the hidden man, the man who could be a friend, if not always the easiest man to deal with, that has been the focus of that last part. Both men will be missed.

But for those of us that thought of Gordon as a friend, it is the hidden man that will be missed most.