

BOOK REVIEWS

Virginia Political Economy: The Selected Works of Gordon Tullock, Volume 1

Charles K. Rowley (ed.)

Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, Inc., 2004, 642 pp.

Virginia Political Economy is the first volume in a 10-volume series of the scholarly articles and monographs by Gordon Tullock from 1954 through 2002. The complete series has been edited by Charles K. Rowley, who has also written a separate introduction for each volume. This first volume, in effect, is an introduction to the whole series by including selected early articles in each subject area to which Tullock has made a major contribution. This first volume also includes a brief biographical note and a table of contents for the whole series. Each of the subsequent volumes includes one or more of the most important contributions by Tullock to a specific subject area.

The most impressive characteristic of the first volume is a reminder of the range of subjects to which Tullock has made an important contribution. The major sections of this first volume address the following issues: the imperialism of economics, especially with respect to political science; the problems of majority voting; the demand-revealing process; rent seeking; redistributive politics; the problem of social cost; law and economics; bioeconomics; and the limited relevance of the public interest theory.

Tullock has maintained a roughly constant utilitarian perspective on each of these issues over the past 50 years, even when it leads him, as in law and economics, to a position that is quite different from most other scholars working on these issues. But he does not insist that utilitarianism explains all human behavior, only that part which is explainable without knowing the distinctive personalities and biographies of those involved. In addition to his coauthorship of *The Calculus of Consent* (with James Buchanan), the major individual contributions for which Tullock still deserves the Nobel Prize are his proofs that democracy usually works rather better than suggested by the theories of Kenneth Arrow and Duncan Black and that the social costs of inefficient policies are substantially larger than suggested by Arnold Harberger. But there should also be some reward, wherever economists spend their afterlife, for

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making valuable contributions to so many subjects, for good writing, and for relatively little use of mathematics.

One of Tullock's major early articles (1959) explains the effects of vote-trading (logrolling) in a legislature, pointing out that this process permits expression of the intensity of preferences and explains both the protection of intense minorities and special interest legislation. An important 1967 article demonstrates that the misallocation caused by political favors such as tariffs or legal monopolies includes the costs of both acquiring and defending the favors, a process that would later be described as rent seeking. (A similar article explains why it is so difficult to get rid of blue laws, limits on taxicab licenses, etc.) A 1969 article explains the conditions that determine the optimal degree of centralization in a federal system, pointing out that decentralization may increase the share of voters that favor the outcomes of the political process. A series of articles published in the 1970s explores such topics as anarchy, bribery, corruption, and revolution. Tullock brings his utilitarian perspective and training as a lawyer to articles on crime, juries, trials, and judicial errors. And starting in the 1970s, Tullock was one of the first economists since Malthus to recognize the similarity of biological and economic reasoning, leading him to write interesting articles on "The Coal Tit as a Careful Shopper" and on "The Economics of (Very) Primitive Societies" and to be a founder of the modern field of bioeconomics.

All of us have been Tullock's students, even those, as in my case, who have never taken one of his courses. In the summer of 1967, he worked at the Institute for Defense Analyses where I was the director of the economics division. In lunchtime conversations, he recognized that I had been thinking about bureaucratic behavior for some years but that I had not yet formulated a general theory about such behavior; these conversations and his encouragement led me to write my 1968 article ("The Peculiar Economics of Bureaucracy") and my 1971 book (*Bureaucracy and Representative Government*) on this issue. Subsequent discussions about most any subject have made it clear that Tullock reads a great deal more history than I do; I don't know how he finds the time. One way or another, we are all in his debt.

The quality of any series of edited volumes, of course, also depends on both the editor and publisher. Judging by the first volume, Charles Rowley has done a first-rate job of editing these volumes, with special care in selecting those Tullock articles and monographs that are most likely to make a lasting contribution; the first volume reflects special care in choosing articles that are an effective introduction to the whole range of subjects to which Tullock contributed. The Liberty Fund also merits special thanks for investing in these volumes. The paperbacks are handsome and are priced at only \$12! All in all, one of the most impressive academic collections in some time.

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