

# GORDON TULLOCK, THE MAN AND THE TEACHER: THE WAY IT WAS

J. RONNIE DAVIS

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## First Days: Who Is That Masked Man, Anyway?

The year was 1964, and I was a nervous, insecure, scared twenty-three year old, first-generation college student from backwater Mississippi. And here I was in Charlottesville, Virginia, home to Mr. Jefferson's "academical village," about to embark on a journey through the Ph.D. program in economics with no confidence whatsoever and only a modicum of hope that the journey would terminate in a successful destination. With a master's degree in economics earned at the University of Southern Mississippi, I had come to the University of Virginia to study under James McGill Buchanan. And now, having been admitted and awarded a generous fellowship, I was finally here and mindful of the old saying, "Be careful what you pray for."

Classes would begin in a couple of weeks. In my hands, I held a book that not only confirmed every fear I had, but exacerbated every fear I already had and originated still others. It was a simple book I had pulled off the shelf at the bookstore where I was browsing, a book with the curious title, *The Calculus of Consent*. Despite my belief that I had read everything written by Buchanan, this book carried the claim it was written by Buchanan and some mystery man of whom I never had heard, Gordon Tullock. In spite of its title, when I slowly turned the pages, I saw *no calculus* whatsoever. Worse, I saw *no economics* that was recognizable. Still worse, I saw what looked like political science!<sup>2</sup> So, this book looked as alien as a moon rock. I thought, *what's wrong with this picture?* Here was this book in my hands, *The Calculus of Consent*, a book written by Buchanan and a sidekick named Tullock, with no calculus and no economics, with a strange, inexplicable resemblance to topics I would have associated with the dustbin of political

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<sup>1</sup>J. Ronnie Davis is Professor of Economics, Department of Economics and Finance, University of New Orleans. Since 1981, he also is Editor, *Public Finance Review*. I am grateful to Arthurine Payton Davis for her help in writing and editing this essay.

<sup>2</sup>At that moment, I could not have imagined that, only eleven years later, I would have a paper published in *the journal* in political science. See Eric M. Uslaner and J. Ronnie Davis, "The Paradox of Vote-Trading: Effects of Decision Rules and Voting Strategies on Externalities," *American Political Science Review*, 69 (September 1975), 929-942.

science. What could be worse? A strange, inexplicable resemblance to topics ordinarily associated with sociology, I suppose.

What kind of man was this Tullock? What kind of man could draw away the high priest—nay, maybe even the *god*—of the religious order of which I meant to be a postulant? What kind of man could adulterate the purity of the religion itself with demonic power of association with said high priest to sway him from the one true faith. What kind of man, indeed. Little did I know at that moment. Soon, I would know more. Only days later, Leland Yeager told me my fall schedule would include the first of a two-course sequence, *The Theory of Simple Agreements*, followed naturally by *The Theory of Complex Agreements*. Taught, naturally, by Gordon Tullock. My life's journey was about to turn a corner and take a radical change in direction.

### **How I Learned That Exams Are A Random Sampling of Knowledge**

Before classes began, the returning veteran graduate students invited us rookies to a beer drinking contest, which, as I recall, the rookies lost. Those second- and third-year men could really drink. At the party, I stood around nervously, drinking the free beer, waiting anxiously for one of the grizzled veterans to come over to introduce himself—it was all guys in those days—but, of course, none of them ever did. After all, I was a green freshman in the Ph.D. program. So, I hung around, listened to them talk about writing their dissertations or settling on dissertation topics, while thinking to myself that I never will be able to write one myself. I was startled from my reverie when I heard Tullock's name in the conversation. From their talk, I gathered that Tullock had been in the hospital, and some of the graduate students had visited him. They were talking about how surprised Tullock had been. And how much the student visits seemed to have touched him. Just when I was relaxing upon hearing this exchange, one of them—Dick Wagner, I think—turned to me and, with that wry smile of his, said, “You guys are lucky. Mr. Tullock has mellowed out. I think he was surprised that any of us cared whether he lived or died.” At that comment, I relaxed.

The first day of class for the *Simple Agreements* seminar, I looked at this man, Gordon Tullock. Natty dresser: tweed sport coat, coordinated slacks, button-down collar with traditional striped tie, classic

penny loafers. Good-looking man: round face, clean shaven, hair short and close to the head, penetrating eyes not quite hidden behind horn-rimmed glasses, eyes with a kind of moist twinkle that evidenced a passion for what he was doing. That was the good news. Now, the bad news. His passion, what he was doing, was intimidating the bejabbers out of us and scaring the bejesus out of us. And he succeeded in his passion.

From the beginning, Mr. Tullock<sup>3</sup> directed questions at us at staccato pace, questions that evoked answers, more often than not, that became embarrassing objects of ridicule, mainly because, as students of economics, we were making up answers to a genre of questions we never knew existed. If we had known the answers to these questions and written them down, they would have resulted in publication. Straightaway, I noticed that, if I volunteered an answer rather than wait until called upon, Mr. Tullock was more tolerant of my foolish answers and certainly more merciful with his grace. So, I became cautiously outspoken, whereas many others held back and, when called upon, seemed to stick out their chins and say, "Go ahead, hit me with your best shot." Mr. Tullock would floor these "corks" for the count.<sup>4</sup> After countless humiliating experiences for them, I could not understand their sitting back and waiting for the inevitable embarrassment. Even worse, they often would try to defend the indefensible, and, once in a hole, they often would try to dig their way out.<sup>5</sup> Gradually, however, as the seminar unfolded, the answers became better and better, and all of us knew we were learning from the questions and the thinking they required to answer.

And then we had our mid-term exam scheduled. I studied what we had covered in class, and I had used due diligence in reading all materials for the class. The day of the examination, I felt confident. Until I saw the exam. The first of many questions—ten, I suppose—dealt with World War II. It seems that

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<sup>3</sup>For those who are not familiar with the Virginia tradition, faculty members were known on the Grounds as "Mr.," not by academic title such as "Dr." or even "Professor." Hence, Tullock was known as Mr. Tullock, Buchanan as Mr. Buchanan, Nutter as Mr. Nutter, and so forth. And the campus was known as "the Grounds." And, at that time, there was a "coat-and-tie tradition." Students and faculty alike wore coat and tie at all times while on the Grounds ("to class and in all other appearances about the Grounds.") Imagine graduate students sitting in a classroom wearing coat and tie, studying in Alderman Library wearing coat and tie, attending a football game at Scott Stadium wearing coat and tie. It was a long time ago. One student—law, I think—was compelled to make a statement of nonconformity in some way. He went barefooted year-round. Even he did not dare to step barefooted on the Grounds without coat and tie.

<sup>4</sup>At Virginia, a student unprepared for recitation, who "openeth not his mouth even as a bottle corked up," was known as a "cork."

<sup>5</sup>I think Denis Healey was the one who said, "It is a good thing to follow the First Law of Holes: If you are in one, stop digging." Not to mention Beauregard's Law: "When you're up to your nose in something, keep your mouth shut."

reconnaissance flights over North Africa were being shot down with enough regularity that pilots began to fly over open desert where it was safe and then fake their reports. Mr. Tullock's question was, what could be done to assure that reconnaissance reports were based on actual flyovers and not faked. The next question dealt with the history of some obscure dynasty in China. Take notice that, as far as graduate students in economics were concerned, all history of China, especially history of Chinese dynasties, was obscure. The remaining questions became, if anything, even more and more obscure, as though the first two were not obscure enough. I assumed that each question could be answered through reference to course materials, course discussions, or those endless questions and feeble answers we had endured in class. I could not connect the dots from what we had covered and what was on the exam.

When I left the classroom in Rouss Hall that day, I was shaken. That night was the beginning of a lost weekend. On Sunday night, I called Dad and asked him to find out whether that management job offer with Southern Bell was still good because, I told him, it looked like I'd be coming home a failure after the first semester. The following week, Mr. Tullock returned our exams. I knew I had blown the exam. "Flagged" it, as we said at Virginia. Sure enough, I peeked at my grade, which was 16. That's 16 of a possible 100. At that moment, I was clinically depressed. Next, I heard someone ask Mr. Tullock what the highest grade was. I was astounded to hear him say that the highest grade was 25, followed by a 16, a 9, and the others zero. I had made the second highest grade in class! Then, the same student—clearly one of the zeroes—asked, "Mr. Tullock, was anything on the exam covered in class?" In my instant exhilaration, I eagerly awaited Mr. Tullock's answer since I wondered the same in spite of what now was not a grade of 16 but, as I thought of it, the second highest grade in class. I sought and found my comfort in the ageless wisdom of students everywhere: He can't flunk all of us! From the certainty I would flag the course, I now was elevated to the second least likely to flag. So, was anything on the exam covered in class. Without hesitation, Mr. Tullock answered, "Of course not! An examination is a random sampling of knowledge. It would have been most unlikely if anything we covered in class had shown up on the exam." Afterwards, I looked forward to each class and even looked forward to our final exam, knowing that Mr. Tullock eventually would give us the grade he thought we deserved for the course rather than base our grade on examinations.

In *Simple Agreements*, we also played a board game called *Democracy*, invented by the famed sociologist, James Coleman, one of the earliest workers who toiled in the fields of public choice (or non-market decision making, as it was known for a while). The object of *Democracy* was to be elected or reelected in your district. There was a distribution of cards on which the number of votes—for and against—a candidate would receive from his or her constituency based on various issues. Immediately, Tom Ireland and I saw that forming a coalition was the way to win the game. He and I put together an instant coalition of a bare majority of the class with the idea that we would cooperate and collude to ensure all of us were elected or reelected during each round of play. Almost always, because of the distribution of cards, there was a set of positions on the various issues that would succeed for all of us. At other times, because of the distribution, no set of positions was feasible to succeed for all of us, and the one who failed in this instance would be guaranteed to succeed in the next round of play if he voted our way and remained a member of the coalition. In this way, we froze out everyone else in the minority. Mr. Tullock was delighted at the success of our strategy and discipline, and he scoffed at every whining complaint from the minority. He just told them they were learning something about democracy.

During the first semester, I also had taken Mr. Buchanan's course in public finance. The class met once a week, at eight o'clock in the morning (the equivalent of 0-DARK-30 in the military) on Fridays. The first Friday, Betty Tillman came to class and gave us a topic on which to write a 2,000-word paper. The paper was to be turned in the following Friday when Mr. Buchanan himself would begin meeting with us. Of course, the next Friday, he took up that paper and gave us another topic on which to write a 2,000-word paper. After sixteen weeks, we had written sixteen 2,000-word papers. And these topics were not the kind that you could just go to Alderman Library and look up the answers. Each topic was more like the idea for an article so that every paper required original thinking. Indeed, Mr. Buchanan told us the first day he met with us that there was no reading list for the course. "All of the classic literature on public finance is in the library," he said. And then he added, "I expect you to read it." Moreover, he expected us to apply the classic literature to the seminal topics and to center each paper on novel ideas. When we did meet once a week, Mr. Buchanan also asked questions that would blister paint off any surface and peel back your layers of vulnerability until you were left raw.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>One day, Mr. Buchanan asked a theoretical question involving taxation and the firm. I knew the

When the first year was over and the two-course sequence was completed, I was astounded at how much I had learned and how much I had matured in my thinking. Indeed, the second semester had ended on a high note. During the *Complex Agreements* seminar, I was bringing game theory, economics, and politics together in a paper I wrote for Mr. Tullock. He liked it so much that, after revision mainly to expand the topic, he accepted it as a monograph of the Thomas Jefferson Center for the Study of Political Economy.<sup>7</sup>

What we were being taught by both Mr. Tullock and Mr. Buchanan was many things at once. We were being taught to think for ourselves. We were being trained to realize that there are no accidents, that there is always a reason things are the way they are.<sup>8</sup> We were learning that ideas for articles are all around us just by exploring those reasons.<sup>9</sup> We were learning to ask questions ourselves. And, of course, we were learning points of view such as a skepticism for econometrics (“Do we really need another regression just to prove that water, after all, does flow downhill?”) and macroeconomics (“All of macroeconomic theory can be placed on one side of a postcard even if you write big.”).

### **The Utility Of Rules, One Of Which Must Have Been: Don’t Edit, Rewrite!**

By the end of my first year and completion of two seminars with Mr. Tullock, I decided I actually liked the man. Of course, I kept this decision to myself. I did not want other students to think there was something wrong with me. At the beginning of my second year, I tried to find ways to maintain contact

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answer, but he called on someone in front. (I was hiding in the back of the room.) Whoever he was, he did not know the answer. Then, Mr. Buchanan started going around the room. No one knew the answer. My heart was pounding a little when he came to me. I gave the answer. Mr. Buchanan acknowledged it was the right answer. (I think he was surprised I was the only one in class who knew the answer. I was more than a little surprised myself.) He said, “Good, Mr. Davis. Explain it to the class.” Well, I could not explain it to the class. When my muddled confusion made clear to Mr. Buchanan and to everyone else in class, including me, that if my life depended on it, I would never be able to explain it to the class, he finally came to the rescue and said, “Well, Mr. Davis, I suppose I’ll just have to give you a zero for class today.” What!? What about the others who did not even know the answer? I knew the answer but just could not explain it! Evidently, Mr. Buchanan thought knowing the answer but not being able to explain it was worse than not knowing the answer! I left class that day blistered and raw. I felt like somebody needed to punch my TS card.

<sup>7</sup>J. Ronnie Davis, *A Game Theory Investigation of Economic Criteria and Voting Institutions* (Charlottesville, Virginia: The Thomas Jefferson Center for the Study of Political Economy, University of Virginia, 1966).

<sup>8</sup>For example, Georgia has more counties than any other state, including New York and Texas and California. Well, this cannot be an accident. There must be a reason.

<sup>9</sup>Including a certain book. Charlie Plott, who was a year or two ahead of me, once said, “If you run out of ideas for an article, just pick up a copy of *The Calculus of Consent* and turn to any page. You’ll find something left undone.” I assume he meant it as a compliment to Buchanan and Tullock. I assume.

with Mr. Tullock without appearing that such contact was intentional or obsequious. I heard he went for tea in the Newcomb Hall Dining Area at around eight in the evening. So, when I was on the Grounds at that time, I would happen to go to the Newcomb Hall Dining Area so that we would “bump into one another.”

One unexpectedly rainy afternoon, I was stuck in the Alderman Library. It was getting later and later, and I decided to stick around to bump into Mr. Tullock quite accidentally around eight. I wandered through the stacks and somehow stumbled upon an old business periodical that published a memorandum to President Herbert Hoover, dated 1932, and signed by twelve University of Chicago economists among twenty-four noted economists who signed the memorandum. In it, these economists recommended that “...the Federal Government maintain its program of public works and public services at a level not lower than that of 1930-1931....” And there was a reference to Norman Wait Harris Memorial Foundation Roundtables. When I found the Harris Foundation Proceedings for 1931 in the stacks and began to read the transcript of roundtable discussions, I found that John Maynard Keynes attended as well as all of the key figures of the Chicago School. As I turned the pages, I was astounded at what I found. The Chicago economists were trying to make a Keynesian out of Keynes, and they were failing! Keynes was not yet a Keynesian and the Chicago economists were not the stereotypical Classicists of Keynes versus the Classical School only five years before publication of his famed *General Theory*.<sup>10</sup> Holy Cow!

At eight o'clock, I bumped into Mr. Tullock. I told him what I had discovered. For once, he listened until I finished and then said, “That’s a dissertation.” I had not thought of what I would do with my findings, but a dissertation certainly had not come to mind. My mind ran away with the notion. I could write a revisionist history of the pre-Keynesian period in America, correcting myths about the so-called pre-Keynesian Classical Economists and what we had been led to believe they recommended prior to Keynes. From that one conversation came my dissertation, which won the Tipton R. Snavely Award for the best dissertation presented to the faculty over a five-year period (1966-1969),<sup>11</sup> and then my first article, published in the *American Economic Review*,<sup>12</sup> and my first book,<sup>13</sup> and a number of other articles.

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<sup>10</sup>John Maynard Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1936).

<sup>11</sup>J. Ronnie Davis, *Pre-Keynesian Economic Policy Proposals in the United States During the Great Depression* (June 1967). I later learned from Ronald H. Coase—Nobel Laureate, Economics (1991)—that he had been the judge.

<sup>12</sup>J. Ronnie Davis, "Chicago Economists, Deficit Budgets, and the Early 1930s," *American Economic Review*, 58 (June 1968), 476-482.

But, back to the dissertation. By the end of the second and final year of course work, I was working day and night on my topic. In national competition, I was named a Ford Foundation Doctoral Research Fellow for 1966-1967, which carried with it a very generous grant that allowed me to stay at Virginia and work full-time on my dissertation. By December 1, I was finished. Well, I *thought* I was finished. I took the typed draft to Mr. Tullock to read. He read it overnight! The next day, I sat in his office while he finished typing an article he wanted to get into the mail that day. For the first time, I noticed he had no cuffs on his really swell trousers, which was beyond unusual. In those days, *all* trousers had cuffs. I blurted out, "Mr. Tullock, you don't have cuffs on your pants!"<sup>14</sup> Without looking up from his typewriter, he said, "Cuffs are useless. All they do is collect and compact lint. I never wear trousers with cuffs. It's a rule."

I waited until he finished typing. Then, he stuck the paper in an envelope and mailed it off to a journal. Then, I asked him, "What do you mean, a rule?" Now, I was asking the questions! "Rules have utility," he said. "You make a rule, you never have to decide again. The first rule I made was when I was a boy. I thought, every time I go into the store, I have to decide whether or not to steal anything. So, I made a rule: I will never steal anything when I go into a store. After that, I never had to decide again. Rules have utility. Rules save on decision-making costs."<sup>15</sup> Later, on the way home, I pulled up behind an automobile stopped at a red light. Often, I had wondered how far back I should stop. The rule of the road is one car length for every ten miles per hour, which would mean zero car lengths—bumper to bumper—at zero miles per hour. Thinking that an unwise practice, I made my first rule: Stop far enough back that I can see the rear tires of the car in front of me. That way I never had to think about it again.

"Oh," Mr. Tullock said, "I read your dissertation. It's okay. You've got plenty of time. Rewrite it." I could not believe what I just heard with my own ears. What? I managed to get out a feeble, "Uh, Mr. Tullock, what you read is the *final* draft. If you've got some *specific* changes, I'd be happy to *revise* it. You know, *edit* it. But, if it's okay..." My voice trailed off, a shrill ringing was in my ears, my sinuses

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<sup>13</sup>J. Ronnie Davis, *The New Economics and the Old Economists* (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1971).

<sup>14</sup>In Mississippi, we wore pants, not slacks or trousers. Well, pants and overalls, which we pronounced "overhauls."

<sup>15</sup>Richard Feynman, Nobel Laureate in Physics (1965) evidently thought the same way. He said, "[W]hen I was a student at MIT, I got sick and tired of having to decide what kind of desert I was going to have at the restaurant, so I decided it would *always* be chocolate ice cream, and never worried about it again—I had the solution to *that* problem. See Richard P. Feynman, "Surely You're Joking, Mr. Feynman!" (New York: Bantam Books, 1986), p. 213.



suddenly blocked up, my vision was blurry, and my skin crawled. I thought I was through with my dissertation. Mr. Tullock had seen the dissertation chapter by chapter, except the last and first, which were merely introduction and conclusion. I had made every change, every revision he wanted. It was not even mid-year of my third year at Virginia, the national meetings were in San Francisco in three weeks, and I wanted to be able to tell everybody there recruiting faculty I was through, finished, done, complete, *fini*, the end.<sup>16</sup> Now, there was this hollow voice, a cavernous echo, cascading over barriers in my addled brain, except now this dissociated voice was saying, “Don’t edit it. Rewrite it.” Mr. Tullock said it once, but I heard it over and over and over again. “Don’t edit. Rewrite.”

Mr. Tullock must have recognized futility, defeat, and despair when he saw it. “Now that you know how it comes out,” he said, “set this draft aside, and rewrite it from beginning to end. You’ve got plenty of time. You’ll still be the first one in your class to finish.” I rewrote it. I set the draft aside, and I rewrote the whole dissertation. If that New Orleans Voodoo Queen, Marie Laveau, had been alive, I would have hired her to stick voodoo pins in a Tullock doll for the next six months. Of course, Mr. Tullock was doing me a big favor. The dissertation was greatly improved after I set aside the first draft and completely rewrote it. Indeed, I was the first in my class to finish. I defended on the last day of April 1967 and joined the economics faculty at Iowa State University the very next day.

When I defended, the entire faculty attended as usual. At Virginia, any question was fair to ask at a final defense, even questions unrelated to the dissertation. It was the faculty’s last opportunity to humble us. I used all of the usual student tricks. I started an argument among the faculty. It was easy in those days. The argument I started dealt with the gold standard and fixed exchange rates versus freely fluctuating exchange rates. The clock ticked on and on wonderfully as the faculty argued and bickered like a quarrelsome couple, and I just stood there knowing that they could not ask me any questions as long as they argued.

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<sup>16</sup>My first job offer was from Harvard. I turned down Richard Caves, Chairman of the Economics Department, to his amazement. You just didn’t turn Harvard down. Mr. Tullock advised against going there. He said they were offering three thousand dollars below market, and it would be a three-year appointment. The only good it’ll do you, he said, would be to use the Harvard name as a stepping stone to a position somewhere else. If you are offered a tenure track position at a top twenty department, Tullock advised, take it. All it takes, he said, is one person to talk to. I started my career at Iowa State University because of Charles W. Meyer, who was that one person to talk to. I still regard Charlie as my mentor from whom I learned a lot of my academic values.

The other trick dealt with chalk. Long before the faculty arrived, I went into the classroom and stole all of the chalk and then, just to be on the safe side, went up and down the hall and stole all of the chalk in other rooms. Sure enough, when even the faculty wearied of argument among themselves, good ol' Andy Whinston—he must have been the designated hitter—asked me to go to the board. “First,” he said, “I want you to see if you can state the Kuhn-Tucker conditions.” As if that was not enough, he added, “Next, I want you to derive the proof for Ford and Fulkerson’s max-flow min-cut theorem and then discuss their augmenting paths algorithm.” My heart was pounding so loud that I thought it certainly could be heard by every faculty member in the room, and I had a bitter taste in my throat like bile backing up from my duodenum. My hands were shaking as I went to the chalkboard, and my lips were moving as I prayed to God that my harmless little deception would work. I looked up and down the chalk tray, and said, voice quavering, “Well, I certainly could do that, Mr. Whinston, but we don’t have any chalk in here.” Of course, at that point, I could not have proved anything as simple as wrestling is fake, much less something as complex as a proof from Ford and Fulkerson’s network theory, although I had read the book.<sup>17</sup> And to me, I always wondered why it took two people to come up with the Kuhn-Tucker Conditions. In solving constrained optimization problems, the Kuhn-Tucker Conditions were used most often to check a point for optimality that has been obtained by some other means. It was hardly the stuff worthy of memory, which was what Whinston seemed to expect of me at that moment. Since I was incapable of performing any of the mathematical legerdemain that he asked of me, I held my breath until the moment passed without further comment. Later—what seemed to be an eternity later—when Leland Yeager finally brought the defense to an end and asked me to step out into the hall, I was pretty pleased with myself. After all, my stupid human tricks had worked beautifully. Later, when Mr. Yeager came out and congratulated me, he concluded by saying, “I was pleased to see you had enough sense to steal the chalk. If you hadn’t removed the chalk, you’d be too dumb to be awarded a doctorate.” Who says crime doesn’t pay!

All of a sudden, I was *Dr. Davis*,<sup>18</sup> thanks to many, including Buchanan, Breit, Morrison, Nutter, Yeager, Hochman, and the others, but especially thanks to Tullock. There is more to a teacher than

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<sup>17</sup>L.R. Ford and D.R. Fulkerson, *Flows in Networks* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press), 1962.

<sup>18</sup>Funny thing. I never have introduced myself as Dr. Davis. Actually, when medical doctors introduce themselves as Dr. so-and-so, only then do I introduce myself as Dr. Davis. Even to my MBA students, I am just “Ronnie.”

classroom instruction. There was more to Tullock than a classroom teacher. More than anyone else, Tullock had taught me the craft of inquiry.

### **A Student for Life: Beyond Taking the Degree**

In June 1967, I took my degree.<sup>19</sup> I joined the economics faculty at Iowa State University. In my third year there, I was tenured and promoted to Associate Professor. After my fourth year, I left to join the economics faculty at the University of Florida. After four years in Ames, I think I went to Florida to thaw out. Three years later, I was promoted to Professor.<sup>20</sup> About this time, I thought I might be able to get Tullock to visit Gainesville and give a seminar. He agreed. I picked him up at the airport, got him checked in at his hotel, and then brought him to campus to meet our business dean, Robert F. Lanzillotti. Now, Bob Lanzillotti was a good dean, but he also was highly animated, arrogant, aggressive, egotistical, all the characteristics you look for in a dean. In other words, he was obnoxious. I could not wait to see Tullock, who was now Gordon to me, and Lanzillotti together. When the inevitable sparring started, I knew who I would have my money on.

Gordon had this “no prisoners taken” mentality from his old debating days at Chicago. I had seen it up close and personal. When I was writing my dissertation, W.H. Hutt was a visiting professor. I wanted to talk to him, a famous anti-Keynesian, about the dissertation I was writing. He invited me to join him for tea in the Colonnade Club, which was a faculty club on the West Lawn. I was honored. When I met up with Mr. Hutt, we entered together. We stepped right into a discussion Mr. Tullock was having with a sociologist, apparently an argument about unilateral disarmament. The sociologist evidently had advanced his best argument in favor, and Mr. Tullock—with that irritating, all-knowing smile of his—suddenly said to the sociologist, “What do you think would happen if the United States unilaterally disarmed?” The sociologist fell for the trap, and calmly said, “I think the weight of world opinion would force the Soviet Union and other nations also to disarm.” Tullock said as calmly, “I assume by ‘the weight of world opinion,’ you mean editorial writers for the *New York Times*.” The sociologist, now red-faced, virtually

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<sup>19</sup>At Virginia, “graduate” was never used as a verb. One could be a graduate of the University, but he never was graduated from the University. He “took a degree.”

<sup>20</sup>When I broke the good news to my mother, God bless her, she said innocently, “Do you get to teach your own courses now?”

shrieked, "Well, what do you think would happen?" The trap snapped shut. Mr. Tullock said serenely, "I think we would be captured by Mexico." The sociologist left forthwith.

Anyway, I did not know what Gordon would do or how he would do it, but I knew he would take Bob Lanzillotti down a notch. Gordon had a gift. With immediacy, he could identify a person's button and then, with the same immediacy, find a way to push that button. Bob Lanzillotti's did not know it, but his button was about to be pushed by Gordon Tullock. Of course, Lanzillotti thought he had home field advantage. Gordon and I arrived in Lanzillotti's anteroom, and his secretary greeted us, introduced herself to Gordon, and told us that Dean Lanzillotti would be with us in a moment. I saw that the door to his office was closed. The secretary buzzed her boss and told him that we had arrived. She reaffirmed that he would be with us in a moment. I could image Bob Lanzillotti, who I liked and respected very much, sitting inside posing and arranging things so that he would gain the upper hand immediately upon meeting Gordon. After ten minutes of waiting, the secretary's telephone rang. She answered, nodded, hung up the receiver, and told us we could go in. I knocked on the door and heard, in Old Breed, Black Shoe Navy style, "Come!" *Oh, boy!* I thought, *This is going to be good!* When I opened the door, Lanzillotti was still sitting at his desk, which was at the far end of the office, what seemed a mile from us. I saw what he had in mind. He stood, expecting us to walk this great expanse to be received by him. Gordon, however, had spotted a sitting area to the right of the door, consisting of a sofa, two stuffed chairs, and a coffee table. He took a couple of steps to the right and sat down on the sofa so that Lanzillotti now had to walk the entire distance to be received by Gordon. The games had begun. Advantage, Mr. Tullock.

Instead of pleasantries, Gordon immediately said, while looking around, "I'm surprised your office is not bigger." And I'm supposed to keep a straight face. Lanzillotti is on the defensive. "How big is your office?" he asks. Gordon says, "Bigger than yours." Lanzillotti, the temperature of his Italian blood rising to the boiling point, says, "How big?" Gordon stands, steps to his left, positions his heels against the baseboard. Lanzillotti joins him. Together, they begin to step off the distance from wall to wall. So, here are two grown men, pacing off the size of an office as though it mattered. But it did matter to Lanzillotti. "Twenty steps, say, sixty feet," Gordon announces, Lanzillotti nodding in agreement. "My office," Gordon says, "is twenty-five steps." I knew that, regardless of the actual dimension, Gordon's office was going to be just a little larger. And then Gordon looks down and says, "Nice carpet you have in here, but I have

antique Persian rugs over hardwood floors in my office,” naming some century or another just for the sake of invidious detail. Lanzillotti looked like he had taken a blow to the solar plexis, taking all the wind out of him and not letting him inhale. To him, if there was anything worse than having your ego crushed, it was having a faculty member witness the facade falling away.

Gordon was always fun to be around. At least, when he was poking at someone else. And, most of the time, even fun when he was poking at you. He was never boring. Irritating, maybe, but never boring. I liked him, and I still do. He had a way with people, standing there, shifting weight from one foot to the other as though there was a rhythm to his mind, a periodic cycle of thrust and parry, thrust and parry. And just as weapons in antiquity were an extension of the warrior’s arms, Gordon’s words extended from his mind like an unseen rapier, always thrusting and pricking until you felt you were dying from the cumulation of a thousand wounds. I was never around Gordon without learning something from him. Never. And I was never around him without the feeling he was teaching. The question was whether or not I was learning.

### **Gordon Tullock: Educator**

As I recall, the word “educate” is from the Latin for “to lead out” or “to lead forth.” All these years later, thirty-eight years after the seminar on *Theory of Simple Agreements*, I have a glimpse—as though seen through a glass, darkly—of what Gordon was doing over the years. A true teacher leads out what already is there in the first place, rather than thrusts in. In spite of the fun Gordon has with people while pricking the balloon of inflated ego and the bubble of flatulent self-importance, Gordon as a teacher is not a “thruster in” but a “leader out.” As one of his students, he showed me what I had in me and led it out. And he showed that I had far, far more in me than I ever thought or even imagined, and he led it out. In that sense, he was and remains a true *educator*, not merely in graduate school a long time ago, but a true educator in my life. I would not be the person I am today without him and the education he provided in economics and in life. For that, he can be credited or blamed in my case. I’ll let others be the judge. Whichever, I am grateful. Happy 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, Gordon. A generation of students—*educated* students—is indebted to you. Count me among them.