

Tullock the Curmudgeon and Fraud

David Kreutzer
James Madison University

The First Course

The first week of class in Tullock's graduate public choice class, he was orally running through a calculation of some sort and asked for somebody to do it on a calculator. Being the proud owner of a fancy new calculator I volunteered and gave him the answer. His response was not "thank you" or "thank you but..." Instead, he informed me that I didn't know how to use my calculator very well and then he did a rough calculation in his head. He was right. In the minutes following his criticism of my calculating skills, I liked him less than I do now.

One of the overriding lessons he taught us in that first course was that self-interest is an endemic, primal and pervasive force. He frequently used examples of his own behavior to make his case. He seemed proud of his self-interest. Then one rare day, I came to class early. Tullock was going around the empty classroom picking up empty soda cans and other litter. I think he was embarrassed that I glimpsed his soft underbelly of charitable behavior. It was all a ruse and fraud. The real Tullock was a nice guy.

A Match Made in Heaven

The weekend before final exams in the spring of my second year in graduate school, David Friedman had a party on Friday night. I think his intent was to filter out those who were well enough prepared that they didn't need to cram all weekend. He unwittingly filtered out some of us who weren't going to start cramming until Monday morning. In any event, I was already at Friedman's house when Tullock arrived. Near the entrance to the house hung a picture of a 17th or 18th century British warship. Within 45 seconds of arriving, Tullock was in an animated argument with Friedman about what sort of cannon was carried on that ship. (Actually, I am not completely sure that they hadn't already branched off into discussions of some other British warship and what sort of cannon it had.)

Perhaps they actually hate each other, I don't know, but it was clear to me that both of them loved to argue and that for ten cents they would have switched sides in the argument. It was also clear that, back in that first week of class, I was supposed to argue. I was supposed to say "My calculation's are right. It's your formula that is stupid," or something like that. At least that is what I think now.

Putting Theory Into Practice

In the mid eighties I attended a PERC/Liberty Fund conference in Montana. Melanie Kirkpatrick from *The Wall Street Journal* was on the shuttle bus from the airport with me. She had not met Gordon and, being a good reporter, was asking all sorts of questions about him. I predicted that the first thing he was likely to do was to try and offend her in

some way, but that there was no reason to take it personally except as a badge of honor that you are worthy of engaging in an argument.

Sure enough in answering the first question that she addressed to him, Tullock used editors and reporters as examples of people who were driven solely by greed without any evidence of ethics whatsoever. After the conference Melanie thanked me for the warning and admitted to enjoying many arguments and conversations with Tullock that week.

So it seems that Gordon Tullock's curmudgeonliness is fraudulent.

Note to Gordon:

I suspect that you will deny any evidence of good intentions or selflessness. I won't believe you.