

Tullock the Teacher/Scholar

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It was impossible for economics doctoral students in the mid- to late 1960s not to know Gordon Tullock's name, especially if some of their faculty were graduates of the University of Virginia. While none may have met him personally, or even attended one of his sessions at the Southern Economic Association meetings, everyone knew that this man brought fresh thinking to every issue he considered. No, it was more than fresh thinking; it was unconstrained, fresh thinking. Indeed, it was more than that. He was not just "thinking out of the box," as one using a slogan of the moment might put it today. There was no box. Tullock exhibited a doubled dose of J.M. Clark's "irrational passion for dispassionate rationality."

We graduate students were told that Gordon Tullock took no prisoners, yielded no ground to wishy-washy thinkers, and if he did not know the answer to a complex question before lunch, he would know the answer and more by the time he resurfaced after lunch. His life was committed to ideas and scholarship.

With that image imprinted on the brain, it is easy to imagine what I expected from my first exchange with Gordon Tullock.

Not knowing better, I submitted a paper to Gordon Tullock, the esteemed editor of *Public Choice*. In the kindest way I could put it, I asked that the piece be considered for publication. The receipt of the paper was promptly acknowledged, and in a matter of days, a two-page analysis and comment arrived.

I still remember holding the thick envelope in my hands and wondering if I should open it in the mailroom, where others might see me. No, I decided to take my mail to my office. With fear and trembling, I opened the envelope, expecting to encounter the blade of a sharp verbal sword. To my amazement, there was no sword. There was criticism to be sure, but there was instruction, a good bit of it, guidance, and an offer properly tendered to read the paper again.

Gordon Tullock easily recognized that he was reading the first effort of a very green assistant professor who was trying to become an economist. He acted like a teacher, one who truly enjoyed discovering another person intrigued by some of the same questions that intrigued him. No, he was no pushover. He did not give a first article pass to aspiring scholars who submitted papers to him, just for the sake of encouraging them. But, unlike most editors of the day, he offered with his criticism encouragement and a willingness to engage in intellectual exchange. His correspondence, like his demeanor, was always civilized.

This was and is Gordon Tullock.

When an academic is called a great teacher, an image transpires of a person holding forth before a massed group of entranced students who hang on every word, never checking the time and always wishing to stay after class to discuss the day's lecture. There undoubtedly are such people. But great teachers come in many other forms.

Gordon Tullock is a great teacher because of his generosity and because his excitement for intellectual inquiry is contagious and unquenchable.