



What Are Your Most Underappreciated Works?: First Tranche of Responses

Econ Journal Watch

[LINK TO ABSTRACT](#)

prologue by Daniel B. Klein

At a scholar's Scholar Profile page at [Google Scholar](#)—for example [this one for Angus Deaton](#)—one finds a list of the scholar's publications, the citation count for each, and the scholar's h-index. The h-index is the largest number h such that h publications have at least h citations.

We posted an [open invitation](#) to scholars working primarily in the social sciences and/or humanities with at least 4,000 Google Scholar citations, asking them to identify one or two publications with publication date 2012 or prior, for which the citation count is lower than their present h-index, that they consider underappreciated. We encouraged them to remark briefly on why they selected the publication, and to provide a link to it.

We believed that this project would be useful, first, because a scholar herself is likely to be a good judge of what work of hers is underappreciated and therefore this project will alert people to works worthy of greater attention, and, second, because the selection she makes here will inform understandings of that scholar herself.

We received 18 responses. The contributors are Douglas Allen, Niclas Berggren, Christian Bjørnskov, Peter J. Boettke, Nick Bostrom, Bryan Caplan, Joshua Gans, Terri Griffith, N. Zoe Hilton, Daniel B. Klein, Douglas Noonan, Michael Ostrovsky, Sam Peltzman, Eric Rasmusen, Paul H. Rubin, Steven Sheffrin, Stefan Voigt, and Richard E. Wagner.

The plan is panning out nicely. We look to publish another tranche of responses in a future issue of this journal. So [the invitation](#) remains open!

response from Douglas Allen

Allen, Douglas. 1992. What Does She See in Him?: The Effect of Sharing on the Choice of Spouse. *Economic Inquiry* 30(1): 57–67.

Written in 1986, the paper contains one of the first double moral-hazard models, and, to my knowledge, is still the only moral-hazard matching model. Most matching models match fixed types to maximize joint utility. In this paper, different matches generate different levels of moral-hazard losses. The result is that, without side payments, in equilibrium similar people match and share 50-50. The paper has been ignored, even by survey papers on matching. Instead of selling it as spouse-selection paper, I should have sold it as a matching paper.

response from Niclas Berggren

Berggren, Niclas. 2006. Legal Positivism and Property Rights: A Critique of Hayek and Peczenik. *Constitutional Political Economy* 17(3): 217–235. [Link](#)

The article's first point is that legal positivism is compatible with a defense of the institutions of a free society, since legal positivism is about form and not content. Legal positivism is an idea about what law is, not what the laws should say.

The second point is that legal positivism is unlikely to weaken the institutions of a free society, since it is hard to see how a formal idea could influence preferences and law-making and since legal positivism is compatible with legal features that offer protection for the institutions of a free society, such as the common law and constitutional constraints.

People in favor of a free society of the Hayekian type can, therefore, not only embrace legal positivism but also stop fearing its embrace by others. The article argues that classical liberals should focus on explaining how the institutions of a free society can contribute to human well-being, as opposed to on combatting a legal philosophy.

response from Christian Bjørnskov

Bjørnskov, Christian. 2012. Can Bribes Buy Protection Against International Competition? *Review of World Economics* 148: 751–775.

The paper shows that companies can buy protection against international competition by bribing officials or politicians. It documents that more corruption is strongly associated with higher non-tariff barriers.

The article further demonstrates that higher levels of press freedom reduce the ability to buy non-tariff barriers. When the media are free to write about it, buying interventionist and protectionist policies becomes more costly to the corrupt, and potentially prohibitively so.

response from Peter J. Boettke

Boettke, Peter J., and Christopher Coyne. 2007. Political Economy of Forgiveness. *Society* 44: 53–59. [Link](#)

The topic is of vital importance for political economy of development in general and specifically for periods following atrocity, regime collapse, and war. How do we reconcile with our problematic past, and our troubling present? Wrestling with these questions is key to making progress.

response from Nick Bostrom

Bostrom, Nick. 2006. Quantity of Experience: Brain-duplication and Degrees of Consciousness. *Minds and Machines* 16: 185–200. [Link](#)

If a brain is duplicated, so that there are two identical copies of the same brain states, are there then two “minds,” that is, two numerically distinct streams of phenomenal experience, or only a single (redundantly instantiated) one? I argue that there are two. I show that the answer has implications for what it means to implement a computation. I then consider what happens when a computation is implemented in a system that uses either unreliable components or various forms of parallelism. I show that in such cases there can be, in a deep and intriguing sense, a *fractional* (non-integer) number of qualitatively identical phenomenal

experiences—there could, for example, exist 1.57 qualitatively identical experiences of a particular experience of eating an apple. Finally, I show that these findings undercut two famous thought experiments, by David Chalmers and John Searle, respectively, thus casting light on a central issue in the philosophy of consciousness. These issues are theoretically interesting and will become practically important when AI advances to the point of making it possible to create sentient digital minds.

response from Bryan Caplan

Caplan, Bryan. 2006. The Economics of Szasz: Preferences, Constraints and Mental Illness. *Rationality and Society* 18(3): 333–366. [Link](#)

Even hard-core rational choice theorists have long made an exception for “mental illness.” This article questions that exception. Most alleged mental illnesses are, in textbook terms, clearly preferences, not constraints. Consistent with this insight, there is strong empirical evidence that even severe mental illness responds to incentives. Upshot: The view of the late dissident psychiatrist, Thomas Szasz, that mental illness is a myth, should actually be economists’ default position. Reports of Szasz’s craziness have been grossly exaggerated. The ongoing medicalization of human behavior is a thinly veiled effort to replace hard questions of moral philosophy with scientism.

response from Joshua Gans

Gans, Joshua S. 2005. Markets for Ownership. *Rand Journal of Economics* 36(2): 433–445. [Link](#)

Oliver Hart and John Moore’s famous result was that outside owners will not own the assets of a firm because they contribute nothing and ownership takes away rents used to incentivise others. That didn’t square with reality for many firms. What if the asset was allocated via an auction rather than assumed efficiency?

The outcome hinges on willingness to pay. The auction has externalities as some agents earn rents even if they don’t win. Productive agents’ willingness to pay for ownership is the amount they will get from owning less the amount they will get from non-owning. If differing productive agents are complementary (or essential), then non-ownership gives them each a relatively high rent share. Suppose \$1 can be created with an asset and two agents and nothing otherwise. Under outside

ownership, each agent splits value three ways ($1/3$ each). If a productive agent owns the asset, there are only 2 parties for $1/2$ each. So the WTP of an outside owner is $1/3$ and for a productive agent it is $1/6 (= 1/2 - 1/3)$. The outside owner wins the auction. The Hart-Moore result didn't hold up for a very reasonable and realistic extension.

response from Terri Griffith

Griffith, Terri L., and John E. Sawyer. 2009. Research Team Design and Management for Centralized R&D. *IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management* 57(2): 211–224. [Link](#)

It is a field study of 39 research teams within a global *Fortune 100* science/technology company. As we write in the abstract, we demonstrate that “teams containing breadth of both research and business unit experience are more effective in their innovation efforts under two conditions: 1) there must be a knowledge-sharing climate in the team (arguably allowing the team to have access to the knowledge developed through the members' breadth of experience) and 2) the team leader also has a breadth of research and business experience allowing for the member breadth to be knowledgeably managed.” With 13 years perspective, I still find these results valuable and often share them in my innovation management courses.

response from N. Zoe Hilton

Hilton, N. Zoe. 1991. Mediating Wife Assault: Battered Women and the “New Family.” *Canadian Journal of Family Law* 9(2): 29–53. [Link](#)

It analyzes perceptions of battered women in family law disputes and showed how those perceptions affected settlements. Women who conformed to traditional notions of a subordinate wife and ‘weak victim’ had relatively fair settlements (50 percent of marital property). Those who appeared to be ‘willing victims,’ by not immediately and effectively leaving abusive relationships, had less favorable results.

The article critically appraised using mediation in domestic violence cases during mediation's apparent peak of popularity, and challenged the ‘public vs. private’ concept in feminist scholarship.

The lessons from this research remain relevant and important in today's post-feminist society, which assumes that gender equality is established

([Soklaridis and López 2014](#)). Parents protecting children from domestic violence may be accused of ‘parental alienation,’ a claim whose use in U.S. courts has increased 20-fold since 1990 ([Lorandos 2020](#)). Many family law and criminal cases are settled out of court in mediation and other negotiations, where violence risks may be unassessed and requests for protection are often abandoned ([Government of Canada 2021](#)).

response from Daniel B. Klein

Klein, Daniel B., and Michael J. Clark. 2010. Direct and Overall Liberty: Areas and Extent of Disagreement. *Reason Papers* 32(Fall): 41–66. [Link](#)

In the 2011 volume of *Reason Papers* there were two comments on the piece, and a reply from us in 2012; see [here](#).

Klein, Daniel B., and Brandon Lucas. 2011. In a Word or Two, Placed in the Middle: The Invisible Hand in Smith’s Tomes. *Economic Affairs* 31(1): 43–52. [Link](#)

Three comments on the piece appeared concurrently in March 2011, and we replied in the June 2011 issue; see [here](#). The paper poses a mystery: Was what Figure 1 shows for the first edition of *The Wealth of Nations* and the last edition of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* intentional? Maybe. On the other hand, maybe it “was not part of his intention.” If it was intentional, perhaps one of Smith’s aims was to teach us that mystery often surrounds intentions.

response from Douglas Noonan

Turaga, Rama Mohana R., Douglas Noonan, and Ann Bostrom. 2011. Hot Spots Regulation and Environmental Justice. *Ecological Economics* 70(7): 1395–1405. [Link](#) (ungated [here](#))

I select this article because I think the environmental justice (EJ) implications of regulating pollution hot spots—a central concern—have not paid sufficient attention to the technical *and* conceptual issues in selecting the spatial resolution for regulation or analysis. This fits more broadly into challenges of unit-of-analysis selection (by researchers *or* regulators), but its salience has only grown as technology and regulatory capacity and interest have enabled ever-finer resolution in

monitoring and regulating. That regulating at more finely resolved spatial units may be a protective regulatory policy but not a redistributive policy in EJ is something that I think is still overlooked. This article fit well in the policy discussions of its time (2010–11), but arguably holds even more relevance for EJ policy discussions a decade later.

response from Michael Ostrovsky

Ostrovsky, Michael, and Michael Schwarz. 2006. Synchronization Under Uncertainty. *International Journal of Economic Theory* 2(1): 1–16. [Link](#)

The setting is realistic and practical; the result is clean and surprising—and useful. In particular, you can use it to explain to your spouse why it’s OK for you to be late half the time—unless your spouse thinks that his/her time is more valuable than yours. (Caveat: try this at your own risk.)

response from Sam Peltzman

Murphy, Kevin M., and Sam Peltzman. 2004. School Performance and the Youth Labor Market. *Journal of Labor Economics* 22(2): 299–327. [Link](#)

We show that when a state’s school system underperforms on test scores it is costly for high school graduates who enter the labor force. Their wages must discount their lower-quality schooling. It is a simple point. The discount was quantitatively important. We hoped that documenting a significant wage penalty for underperforming schools would aid policy discussion.

response from Eric Rasmusen

Rasmusen, Eric. 1997. A Theory of Trustees, and Other Thoughts. In *Public Debt and Its Finance in a Model of a Macroeconomic Policy Game: Papers Presented at a Workshop held in Antalya, Turkey on October 10–11, 1997*, ed. Tahire Akder. Ankara: Central Bank of Turkey. [Link](#)

Can a paper be more obscurely published? I can’t find the volume by Googling, and I’ve even misplaced my own copy.

The idea is that economists should know about the legal concept of the

Trust, as opposed to the Corporation. The paper offers a paradigm for thinking of judges and central bankers as trustees working on behalf of beneficiaries as directed by settlors. It offers a 4 P's Theory of motivation: Place, Pride, Policy, and Power.

response from Paul H. Rubin

By your criteria, which seem reasonable, I actually have no underappreciated articles. At first found a few, but they were incorporated into a book with 260 citations. I did find the exercise useful as it forced me to examine my citations carefully and led me to believe the market for citations is actually quite efficient.

response from Steven Sheffrin

Ong, Qiyang, Yohanes E. Riyanto, and Steven M. Sheffrin. 2012. How Does Voice Matter? Evidence from the Ultimatum Game. *Experimental Economics* 15(4): 604–621. [Link](#)

The paper provides an early and rare analysis of the channels through which ‘voice’ might matter in social interactions. It has broad applications throughout social sciences.

Hartley, James E., Steven M. Sheffrin, and J. David Vasche. 1996. Reform During Crisis: The Transformation of California’s Fiscal System During the Great Depression. *Journal of Economic History* 56(3): 657–678. [Link](#)

The paper provides a lucid account of how the California fiscal system was fundamentally transformed into its modern incarnation and how popular referendum drove it. It straddles fiscal history and taxation with some econometric analysis. For those who think of how fiscal transformations can occur, it should be instructive.

response from Stefan Voigt

Voigt, Stefan, Michael Ebeling, and Lorenz Blume. 2007. Improving Credibility by Delegating Judicial Competence—the Case of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. *Journal of Development Economics* 82(2): 348–373. [Link](#)

Formal government strength is an asset but can also be a weakness: if a government is strong enough not to abide by its promises, it is unable to make credible commitments, and potential investors may be loath to invest. Newly sovereign countries or countries after a regime change, for example, sometimes face such commitment problems. Giving up some autonomy by delegating competences to bodies outside of the control of the nation state may mitigate the problem.

We test this conjecture by analyzing the effect of membership in the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council (JCPC), a Commonwealth court located in London. After becoming independent from Britain, former colonies had the choice to opt out of this court as the highest court of appeal or to keep it. Countries that kept the JCPC do better on various dimensions, such as the interest rates at which government can lend money, domestic and foreign investment, and per capita growth.

I believe these findings are potentially important for many countries as they show that delegation beyond the nation state can help them mitigate their difficulties in making credible commitments.

response from Richard E. Wagner

Wagner, Richard E. 2006. Retrogressive Regime Drift Within a Theory of Emergent Order. *Review of Austrian Economics* 19: 113–123.

This paper clashes with orthodox growth theory in two primary respects, as it argues: (1) growth is governed by systemic properties that no one controls but which everyone lives with; (2) growth is more qualitative within the field of human relationships and organizations than it is quantitative and materialistic.

Wagner, Richard E., and Petrik Runst. 2011. Choice, Emergence, and Constitutional Process. *Journal of Institutional Economics* 7: 131–145.

The paper rejects the orthodox comparative static analysis that distinguishes pre- and post-constitutional modes of existence, denying the value of thinking in terms of such commonplace analogies of people gathering to play poker. To the contrary, social living together in society is a knotted cacophony of never-ending conflict and cooperation.

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