



*Econ Journal Watch,  
Volume 3, Number 1,  
January 2006, pp 180-205.*

## CHARACTER ISSUES

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# Sense and Sensibilities: Myrdal's Plea for Self-Disclosure and Some Disclosures on AEA Members

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*I confess that I am one of those who think that . . .*

—Frédéric Bastiat (1964, 12)

[Abstract](#), [Keywords](#), [JEL Codes](#)

IN THE PRESENT ISSUE OF THIS JOURNAL, WILLIAM MCEACHERN (2006) writes about the campaign contributions of individuals involved in various ways in the American Economic Association (AEA). Those results supplement survey findings (Klein and Stern 2006a, 2006b) to give a picture of the ideological character of the AEA as an organization. Comparative rates of AEA membership by party registration help to clarify the issue.

In private communications, anonymous referee reports, and other murmurs, people have conveyed to me that they find these investigations to be inappropriate. It's disrespectful to pry into the personal information of fellow economists. It's irrelevant whether economists vote one way or the other or hold certain personal opinions. If you want to challenge economic research, analyze the research, not the researcher.

But the Nobel-prize winning economist and leading social democrat Gunnar Myrdal probably would have deemed such investigation to be appropriate. Myrdal pleaded for candor and openness about who we are. In

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I thank William McEachern for suggesting the investigation of AEA membership by voter-registration category, Christopher Cardiff for his care in collecting the bulk of the voter-registration data, and Niclas Berggren for valuable comments.

this article I discuss the three AEA investigations, but first address the appropriateness of such investigation.

### MYRDAL'S PLEA

In his small book *Objectivity in Social Research* (1969), Myrdal explained that, like anybody else, an economist is a creature with values, perspectives, and purposes. Like anybody else, he has ways of interpreting the information he uses and deploys. An economist who takes on real issues necessarily makes many deep judgments—about what is important, what evidence and arguments deserve attention, what formulations illuminate the issue, and so on. These judgments reflect his moral and ideological sensibilities. The idea of doing important economics without deep-seated judgments and commitments is intellectually untenable. An economist who projects a voice about how the enterprise speaks to human kind—that is, an economist who fulfills the purpose of science—must exercise judgments that to some extent differentiate himself, not so much from non-economists, but from anyone, including other economists, with conflicting ideological sensibilities. Myrdal said that the notion of separating economics from ideology is folly or fraud—or both. He asked us to resist the pretense.

When ideological sensibilities are kept in the dark, it is more likely that ideological commitments warp discourse. Myrdal made a specific request: Whenever your ideological sensibilities might influence your behind-the-scenes judgments, you should tell the reader just who you are. You should tell the reader where you are coming from. Disclosing your sensibilities will improve the reader's ability to make sense of what you say. The reader is on the look out for where warping may have occurred. Also, such practice communicates openness and invites others to take up larger challenges against you. Maybe the listener would like to criticize the characterization you give of your sensibilities, and would be ready to relate that characterization to how you have conducted your research. You, the author, are giving your critic more to go on. You are more answerable and hence more alert to warping in your own work. That, said Myrdal, is our best way of respecting those with differing sensibilities. That is our best hope of bridging the sensibilities, and of refining and better justifying our own.

### Myrdal's Own Words

Here they are (all italics are Myrdal's):

In the course of actual day-to-day living, acting, thinking, and talking, a person will be found to focus attention on the valuations on one plane of his moral personality, while leaving in the shadows for the time being, the often conflicting valuations on other planes. The basis for this selective focusing is plainly opportunistic. (1969, 17)

We are imperfect beings, and it is most of the higher valuations that are pushed into the shadows in everyday living. They are preserved for expression on occasions that are more ceremonial in nature or that in one way or another are isolated from daily life where the '*lower*' valuations more often predominate. (1969, 17)

[V]aluations are 'objectified' by being presented as beliefs or simple inferences from beliefs—which implies hiding them and thereby also keeping their lack of consistency out of sight. Through this process beliefs become distorted. (1969, 18)

A scientific scrutiny of popular beliefs shows not only that they are often wrong but also that they are twisted in a systematic way. It also shows blind spots of unnecessary ignorance and, on the other hand, an astonishing eagerness to acquire knowledge when it is opportune for the urge to rationalize. ¶ *All ignorance, like all knowledge, tends thus to be opportunistic.* Every educational effort aimed at correcting distorted beliefs in a society meets strong resistance. (1969, 18-19)

Like people in general, social scientists are apt to conceal valuations and conflicts between valuations by stating their positions as if they were simply logical inferences from the facts. Since, like ordinary people, they suppress valuations *as valuations* and give only 'reasons,' their perception of reality easily becomes distorted, that is, biased. (1969, 50)

Biases are thus not confined to the practical and political conclusions drawn from research. They are much more deeply seated than that. They are the unfortunate results of concealed valuations that insinuate themselves into research at all stages, from its planning to its final presentation. As a result of their concealment, they are not properly sorted out and can thus be kept undefined and vague. (1969, 52)

[B]iases in social science cannot be erased simply by 'keeping to the facts' and refining the methods of dealing with statistical data. Indeed, data and the handling of data are often more susceptible to tendencies towards bias than is 'pure thought.' The chaos of possible data for research does not organize itself into systematic knowledge by mere observation. . . . If, in their attempts to be factual, scientists do not make their viewpoint explicit, they leave room for biases. (1969, 51)

Every student, as a private person and as a responsible citizen, is more or less entangled in the web of conflicting valuations that I discussed [previously]. Like the layman, the scientist is influenced by the psychological need for rationalizations. ¶ The same is true of every executive responsible for other people's research and of the popular and scientific public before which the scientist performs—and whose reactions he has opportunistic reasons to respect. The fact that his fellow scientists usually are conditioned in the same way strengthens the effect of the irrational influences. Generally speaking, we can observe that the scientists in any particular institutional and political setting move as a flock, reserving their controversies and particular originalities for matters that do not call in question the fundamental system of biases they share. (1969, 52-53)

The only way in which we can strive for 'objectivity' in theoretical analysis is to expose the valuations to full light,

make them conscious, specific, and explicit, and permit them to determine the theoretical research. (1969, 55-56)

I am arguing here that value premises should be made explicit so that research can aspire to the 'objective'—in the only sense this term can have in the social sciences. But we also need to specify them for the broader purposes of honesty, clarity, and conclusiveness in scientific inquiry. (1969, 56)

[B]y insisting on the necessity of value premises in all research, the social sciences should be opened more effectively to moral criticism. . . . When these valuations have been brought out into the open, anyone who finds a particular piece of research to have been founded on what he considers wrong valuations can challenge it on that ground. He is also invited to remake the study and remodel its findings by substituting another, different set of value premises for the one utilized. (1969, 73-74)

### **Today, the Trend Is Myrdalian**

Although Myrdal's lectures would have seemed mundane to Adam Smith and Isaiah Berlin,<sup>1</sup> in economics in 1969 they were ahead of their

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<sup>1</sup> Smith (1790: 337): "Frankness and openness conciliate confidence. We trust the man who seems willing to trust us. . . . But this most delightful harmony cannot be obtained unless there is a free communication of sentiments and opinions. We all desire, upon this account, to feel how each other is affected, to penetrate into each other's bosoms, and to observe the sentiments and affections which really subsist there. The man who indulges us in this natural passion, who invites us into his heart, who, as it were, sets open the gates of his breast to us, seems to exercise a species of hospitality more delightful than any other. No man, who is in ordinary good temper, can fail of pleasing, if he has the courage to utter his real sentiments as he feels them, and because he feels them. It is this unreserved sincerity which renders even the prattle of a child agreeable."

Berlin (1969: 115-16): "[H]istorians [re: economists] [cannot] avoid the use of normal language with all its associations and 'built in' moral categories. To seek to avoid this is to adopt another moral outlook, not none at all. The time will come when men will wonder how this strange view, which combines a misunderstanding of relation of value to fact with cynicism disguised as stern impartiality, can ever have achieved such remarkable fame and influence and respectability. For it is not scientific; nor can its reputation be due entirely to a commendable fear of undue arrogance or philistinism or of too bland and uncritical an

time and did not make a splash. However, during the 1980s the Myrdalian ethos busted onto the economics stage in part by virtue of the heroic works of Deirdre McCloskey (e.g., 1985). McCloskey reminded all of us that at the end of the day we were just regular humans, and that our humanness is essential to our scholarly discourse. McCloskey reminded us to ask ourselves what our scholarly effort was really all about. Her frankness and openness about herself, including her ideological sensibilities, and her openness's undeniable relevance to what she was saying, helped to make her basic points convincing. The economics profession took up an immediate fascination with McCloskey's ethos. Other prominent figures from other ideological quarters, such as Amartya Sen (1987), also project the Myrdalian ethos. It is my impression that, since 1990, younger economists have been more thoughtful about the moral, rhetorical, sociological, and ideological aspects of academic economics.

Today the trend of economic discourse is unmistakably Myrdalian. The Myrdalian trend is not manifest in the "top" journals. Rather, the trend is in the changing composition of "economic discourse." Increasingly it is led (in the United States) by Paul Krugman, Brad DeLong, Gary Becker, Tyler Cowen, and dozens of leading economist bloggers, columnists, and book-writers. Just as the successful merchant respects his customers, the successful blogger respects his readers. He makes plain where he is coming from.

The internet not only makes it easy to self-disclose, it makes it harder to self-conceal. In discussing the work of another researcher, bloggers are quick to link to that author's homepage. "What's his story?," we all want to know. Wikipedia ([wikipedia.org](http://wikipedia.org)) includes many entries on economists, and such entries usually directly tell of the subject's ideological sensibilities.

Yet another Myrdalian trend is the proliferation of think tanks, especially free-market think tanks, whose literature is often widely read and ideologically frank.

The new communication is more natural, more genuine. It may be presumed that young economists increasingly enter into the Myrdalian

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imposition of our own dogmas and standards upon others. In part it is due to a genuine misunderstanding of the philosophical implications of the natural sciences, the great prestige of which has been misappropriated by many a fool and imposter since their earliest triumphs. But principally it seems to me to spring from a desire to resign our responsibility, to cease from judging provided we be not judged ourselves and, above all, are not compelled to judge ourselves."

ethos, and recognize that much of what appears in “top” journals is pseudo discourse.<sup>2</sup>

## I CONFESS

I confess that I am one of those who think that the distinction between voluntary and coercive action is, as such things go, highly cogent, that coercion is still coercion when done by government (the imposition of a minimum wage at threat of physical aggression is coercive whether by neighbor or government), and that, for a large variety of reasons, including morals, political culture, and social structure, in nearly all things we should oppose coercion. Accordingly, I think that the vast majority of government restrictions and agencies should be abolished, though not necessarily forthwith. Indeed, one reason to oppose coercion is that coercion makes it harder for people to be sincere and open: governmentalization (of wage rates, drug use, schooling, safety assurance, social insurance) complicates issues and injects fearsome power variables.<sup>3</sup> I have never voted Democratic or Republican. In national politics, where foreign policy matters, my preferences have no tendency either way, but in state and local elections I would usually prefer the Republican to the Democrat.

### Self-Disclosure or Exposing Oneself in Public?

Such “confession” might make you uneasy. It seems gratuitous and egotistical. In scientific discourse we seek harmony in interpretation and belief, yet the confession seems to posit deep-seated disharmony.

Well, there are deep-seated differences. The sensibility to the contrary comes from norms emergent from the institutions and practices of people with an establishment ideological orientation. They tacitly agree to keep

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<sup>2</sup> Most model-building is pseudo discourse. As for empirical papers, Ziliak and McCloskey (2004) show that most empirical *AER* articles during the 1990s do not try to argue that their statistical evidence packs economic significance (or “oomph”).

<sup>3</sup> At the start of this paper I quoted Bastiat saying “I confess that I am one of those who think that.” The reader may be interested in reading the full passage: “I confess that I am one of those who think that the choice, the impulse, should come from below, not from above, from the citizens, not from the legislator; and the contrary doctrine seems to me to lead to the annihilation of liberty and human dignity” (1964, 12).

policy discourse between the 40-yard lines and jacketed by the convention political formulation “liberal versus conservative.” Deviants are denied status; they either submit or are sorted out.

Researchers are inherently egotistical. In the light or in the dark, consciously or subconsciously, they rationalize their habits, sentiments, and commitments. They rationalize their selfhood. The confession informs readers of the ego-emergent agenda. It helps to resolve asymmetric information problems. Any uneasiness is the minor cost of the concomitant benefits.

As a device, the confession is a rhetorical extreme. Instead, one may disclose by making passing remarks, such as: “the findings may be welcomed by those who, like me, support . . .”

The plea, then, is not only to disclose your sensibilities, but to tolerate what might seem to you like unscientific exhibitionism.

### STUDIES IN AEA IDEOLOGY

OK, so ideological sensibilities matter to scholarship. It’s reasonable for stakeholders to want to know about them. This recognition has helped to authorize another Myrdalian trend: the inquiry into who academics are. In the past few years, numerous scholarly investigations have placed the professors under the microscope. The findings have tended to confirm Myrdal’s central conjecture: Professors and other intellectuals are human beings. Social science, it seems, is the handiwork of creatures with their own values, perspectives, and purposes.

The finding also holds for economists, as illuminated by some investigations.

#### **McEachern on 2004-Cycle Campaign Contributions**

William McEachern (2006) investigates the 2004-cycle campaign contributions of people who play a part in the AEA. McEachern’s results appear in this issue of this journal, so the reader can easily find the details. The Democratic-to-Republican giving ratios are overwhelming. The major problem in drawing conclusions is that a large majority gave to neither party. One might nonetheless find the results significant. First, among



regular AEA members the rate of Democratic giving is 3.8 percent (itself remarkably high relative to the general U.S. population), yet the rate is 10.4 percent among authors in the discretionary AEA journals, 14 percent among editors of those journals, and 16.2 percent among search and nominating committee members. Thus, the leadership is vastly disproportionately populated by highly motivated Democrats (that is, individuals who contributed \$200 or more).

Second, the scantiness of Republicans is truly remarkably. Setting aside the general AEA membership and the two retrospective categories (past Presidents and former top editors), the remaining categories covered in McEachern's exhaustive investigation yield an overall "part" count as follows: 172 Democrats to 8 Republicans. Now, in many cases, one person plays multiple parts. The 8 Republican parts are actually just four individuals. Of the four individuals, two accounting for 5 of the 8 parts had held (and likely had hoped to again hold) top appointed posts in Republican administrations. Especially if we chalk up their contributing to personal networking, we may conclude that basically no one who was playing a meaningful part in the AEA, in a population of 1,545 parts, wanted to give to Republicans in the 2004 cycle.<sup>4</sup> Now, as McEachern notes (173), giving to Republicans here pretty much means giving to the re-election bid of George W. Bush. And as McEachern indicates, the Bush administration had given people plenty of reason to conclude that it was inimical to what Smith called "natural liberty." Those with classical-liberal/libertarian sensibilities, even ones who tend to vote Republican, would hardly care for Bush, much less give money to his campaign. Some genuinely rooted for John Kerry.<sup>5</sup> As for conservative Republicans who value the Bush administration and want to contribute to his re-election, we may conclude that McEachern provides significant evidence of their absence from the AEA power structure (including acceptance into any of its publications).

McEachern shows that among AEA leadership there are vastly disproportionate groups of presumably strongly motivated Democrats and virtually no counterparts who supported Bush's re-election. These results

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<sup>4</sup> The numbers in this paragraph may be checked against Tables 1, 2, and 3 in McEachern. I have simply summed all categories in those three tables, exclusive of "former or current top editors" and "AEA presidents."

<sup>5</sup> On this point, here is anecdotal evidence: In 2004 I organized a major campus lecture about the upcoming presidential election, by the libertarian economist David R. Henderson. He came out unequivocally in favor of John Kerry over George Bush, on the grounds of divided government, a symbolic rejection of the Iraq invasion, and Bush's being not much better on domestic policy than Kerry would be.

tell us something about the ideology of the AEA. But they are more meaningful in combination with other results. To get a better read of the AEA's ideological distribution, we need an instrument that directly reads members' policy views.

### Survey of AEA Members, 2003

In 2003, I surveyed 1000 AEA members using a list randomly generated by the AEA (the survey was sent out and handled by an independent controller, as explained at the survey homepage<sup>6</sup>). The survey contained questions about 18 policy issues, voting behavior, and background variables. The response was 264 (nonblank) surveys, about 27 percent (adjusting for PO returns). Here I report findings that bear on the ideological profile of the AEA and leave the details to the other papers where the results are properly reported.<sup>7</sup>

The voting question was as follows:

To which political party have the candidates you've voted for in the past ten years mostly belonged?

Democratic       Green       Libertarian       Republican      \_\_\_\_\_ other

Among the 264 respondents, 153 (58 percent) reported voting Democratic and 61 (23 percent) reported voting Republican. The other 50 respondents either checked Green (2), Libertarian (7), gave miscellaneous responses (17), or declined to answer the question (24). It is significant that 90.9 percent of the respondents answered the question. The data yields a Democrat to Republican ratio of about 2.5 to 1.

<sup>6</sup> At the survey homepage one can view a sample survey and documents explaining the methods, independent control, and certification of the results. [Link](#) to survey homepage.

<sup>7</sup> Klein and Stern (2006a) gives a naïve account of the results, showing the distribution of responses for each of the policy questions. Klein and Stern (2006b) breaks down the policy-response data by voting behavior (Democratic or Republican), analyzes the distribution of policy-scores, and addresses the question of why free-market views are attributed to economists when the data indicates that few AEA members support free-market principles. Klein and Stern (2006c) focuses on the academic subset of the AEA respondents and compares them to the academic respondents from five other associations (of other disciplines) also surveyed.

Another question asked whether primary employment was in academia or elsewhere (with three alternatives specified). When we confine the sample to the academics up through the age of 70, there are 72 Democrats and 24 Republicans, for a ratio of 3 to 1. These D to R ratios are consistent with other surveys of AEA members. Of course, one may conjecture that there is a response bias, such as Democrats being more likely to return the survey than Republicans, but there is no evidence of such bias.

The format of the 18 policy questions was in the form of a statement to which the respondents were asked to indicate their view. The question on tariffs can be used as an example:

Tariffs on imported goods to protect American industries and jobs:

- |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| support                  | support                  | have mixed               | oppose                   | oppose                   | have no                  |
| strongly                 | mildly                   | feelings                 | mildly                   | strongly                 | opinion                  |
| <b>1</b>                 | <b>2</b>                 | <b>3</b>                 | <b>4</b>                 | <b>5</b>                 |                          |

The numbers 1-5 did not appear in the survey. They show how we weighted each response when creating a mean response. Here, as in all cases. The “5” value corresponds to strong support of free-market principles.

On the tariff question, all AEA respondents had a mean score of 4.46 and the Democrats had a mean of 4.35. Another question asked about “Government ownership of industrial enterprises,” and all 264 had a mean of 4.28 and the 153 Democrats 4.08. A free-market economist would hope to have seen a more robust opposition, but at least the answers are above 4.0.

The responses to the other questions are another matter. The other issues were minimum wage, occupational safety regulation (OSHA), the FDA, air and water regulation (EPA), discrimination restrictions, controls on hard drugs, prostitution controls, gambling restrictions, gun control, redistribution, government schooling (k through 12), tuning the economy with monetary policy, tuning the economy with fiscal policy, immigration, military action, and foreign aid. On these issues, only three mean scores are above 3.0. On minimum wage laws, for example, the overall average score was 2.83, with Democrats averaging 2.25 and Republicans 4.07. My survey results are highly congruent with those of Robert Whaples, who has

recently conducted a policy-views survey of AEA members with 84 respondents (Whaples 2006).

The monetary-policy question and the military question do not fit the statist-libertarian spectrum (for elaboration, see Klein and Stern 2006b), and here I remove them. We can average a respondent's scores on the remaining 16 issues to arrive at that individual's 16-issue policy index. We then average those within the political-party groups, arriving at Table 1.

**Table 1: 16-issue policy index of economists by voting behavior**

	All n=264	Democratic n=153	Republican n=61	Libertarian n=7	Green n=2
<i>Mean</i>	2.66	2.34	3.30	4.30	2.38
<i>(St.D)</i>	(0.78)	(0.47)	(0.79)		

Democratic (and Green) voters are much more supportive of government intervention.

The data make clear that Democratic voters are not supporters of free-market policy. The highest 16-issue policy index among the Democratic voters is 3.5. Among the Republican voters, 39 percent are above 3.5.

I would suggest 4.0 to be a reasonable cut-point for being a supporter of free-market policy (on the 16-issue policy index). For the 264 AEA respondents, only 22 individuals, or 8.3 percent, met that cut-point.

As McEachern (148) notes, the AEA has long repeated the claim that "People of all shades of economic opinion are found among its members." Yet free-market supporters are very few in the AEA, and evidently none of them votes Democratic. The survey and campaign-giving results develop a picture of the AEA as being dominated by Democrats and antipathetic to libertarian sensibilities.

Given these data, it is no wonder that AEA leaders and officers might feel that the libertarians can be counted out of the game. Consider the following recent words from AEA Vice President Robert J. Shiller:

Mandatory social insurance was one of those difficult pills to swallow that delayed the adoption of important social insurance innovations. But when the arguments for it were made persuasively enough, the innovations eventually did happen and are now accepted by all shades of political

leanings, from the most conservative to the most liberal.  
(Shiller 2005, 280)

But some economists, including a few Nobel laureates, oppose such coercive government programs (though the discourse situation might lead them to focus on diminishing rather than abolishing them). They may even be vocal. But they do not have a place in the AEA. Their libertarian sensibilities are not recognized within “all shades of political leanings.”

### **My Impressions of the *Journal of Economic Perspectives***

*The Journal of Economic Perspectives* in 1995 published a wonderful article, “The Economic Case Against Drug Prohibition” (Miron and Zwiebel 1995). I assigned the article to students and cited its evidence and judgments. With a “we economists” pride, I told students that it came from a journal of the American Economic Association, the nationwide association of professional economists.

That article, however, was exceptional. And especially since that time, I have found the discretionary AEA journals (*JEP*, *JEL*, *AER-P&P*) to be highly unsatisfactory. Most notable is a sort of error of omission: They fail to illuminate the most terrible things that governments are doing to us. Unlike the article by Miron and Zwiebel, they almost never criticize status-quo domestic intervention and make the economic case for liberalization. Indeed, only a small percentage of articles really involve a general evaluation of any economic policy. To test my impressions, I settled into a desk among the library stacks and spent three days examining *JEP* and *JEL* published 1995 thru 2005.

Myrdal reminds us that behind “economic science,” “economic analysis,” and the like are individuals with deep-seated sensibilities. The leadership of *JEP* since inception in 1987 is shown in the insert below. I did not review issues prior to 1995, but during the period 1995 thru 2003, and particularly during the editorship of Alan Krueger 1996 thru 2002, the *JEP* projected an establishment ideology leaning in the social-democratic direction. Not only has the overall balance been social-democratic, but there was hardly a single article that ran significantly counter to that perspective. The journal’s title is misleading. Since the article by Miron and Zwiebel, there has not been a trace of abolitionist judgment on any issue. Search the journal during those years for an article that speaks unequivocally in favor of freeing up markets in the United States, or that

levels any significant criticism against the welfare state, and you will find none. It should not be controversial to suggest that the status quo offers plenty of examples of bad policy calling for sober economic analysis and abolitionist judgments. The diligent reader of *JEP* might get the impression, however, that the democratic process in the U.S. rarely gets policy terribly and obviously wrong. That notion is characteristic of the social-democratic mentality; it is necessary to their fancying themselves stewards of the public culture.

Editorial leadership of <i>The Journal of Economic Perspectives</i> 1987 thru 2005	
<b>Editor</b>	Joseph E. Stiglitz, 1987-1993 Carl Shapiro, 1993-1995 Alan J. Auerbach, 1995-1996 Alan B. Krueger, 1996 thru 2002 Andrei Shleifer, 2003-present
<b>Co-Editors</b>	Carl Shapiro, 1987-1993 Alan B. Krueger, 1993-1996 J. Bradford DeLong, 1996 thru 2003 Michael Waldman, 2000-present James R. Hines, Jr., 2004-present
<b>Managing Editor</b>	Timothy Taylor, 1987-present

In the entire 11-year period reviewed, the *JEP* ran blank on many egregious policies (e.g., the FDA, reproductive, adoptive, and organ policies, agricultural policy, the freeway system, rail transit, union privileges). The journal published two dreadful articles on school vouchers, and one in which the author asked economists to reconsider their opposition to rent control. There have been a few articles critical of intervention, but only tepidly. A close look at those articles (e.g., on the results of deregulation, occupational licensing, housing/land-use restrictions, the European Union, the postal service) reveals that authors pull their punches, fail to make powerful economic arguments, and refrain from drawing abolitionist implications. Meanwhile, many articles have put a

favorable spin on statist policies, policies that other economists have severely criticized.

The social-democratic character of Joseph Stiglitz, Alan Krueger, and Brad DeLong is evident from their activities and well known. Less well known is the ideological character of Timothy Taylor, the Managing Editor since inception. I raise this because the influence that he has had on the journal seems to have been substantial (and his dedication admirable). Of the 462 regular and symposium articles<sup>8</sup> 1995 thru 2005, 63 percent specifically thank him, quite often in a special way. If we omit articles that thank “the editors of this journal” or that have no acknowledgements at all, then it would be 74 percent that thank Taylor by name. Using the internet I investigated Taylor’s writings and activities. “Investigated” here will be appreciated, I hope, as a term of research, not snooping. Again, Myrdal should persuade us that individuals and their deep-seated sensibilities matter, and are part of the scientific debate. “What’s Timothy Taylor’s story?” is part of the economic conversation, for the important role he plays in determining prominent economic discourse. I found that Taylor is an excellent, informative writer with an enviable record of writing for the popular press. He has published dozens of newspaper opinion articles (particularly in the *San Jose Mercury News*), and these generally project a centrist, economically-informed view, on the whole leaning in the social-democratic direction. His writings have favored free-trade, but also raising cigarette taxes, subsidizing recycling, redistributive goals, and universal health insurance coverage. In *Updating America’s Social Contract: Economic Growth and Opportunity in the New Century* (Penner, Sawhill, and Taylor 2000), Taylor and his coauthors write:

[The issues explored in this book] are all part of America’s “social contract,” a term that describes the explicit and implicit agreements among the members of a political community that define the rights and responsibilities of people vis-à-vis their government. Americans place a high value on allowing individuals to pursue their own happiness in their own way. However, collections of individuals with no common vision and no social mechanisms for dealing with problems affecting the whole can be highly vulnerable. The challenge is to find the right

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<sup>8</sup> From this denominator I have omitted symposium introductions of seven pages or less and articles coauthored by Taylor, just 9 articles in all.

balance in the social contract between individual freedoms and what Americans must do as members of a community acting through and with the assistance of a democratically elected government. (16)

The passage displays the social-democratic tendencies of seeing society as an organization administered by “contract” by government, of downplaying non-governmental mechanism for dealing with problems that affect “the whole,” and of affirming government as a spiritual project in community enterprise and “common vision.” By contrast, classical liberal/libertarian sensibilities oppose the organizational view of society. They tend to see the idea of individual liberty and the basic forms of property (beginning with ownership of one’s own person) as salient and emergent within liberal civilization, and even largely self-enforcing in the absence of institutionalized depredations, and the government as a coercive institution operating within a realm otherwise consisting of diverse voluntary institutions and practices. These two worldviews generate a polarity of thinking and social networks within the economics profession, a polarity that is far more significant than the academic culture is ever inclined to admit.<sup>9</sup> One of the reasons that the economics profession is not more enlightenment about the 100 most terrible things government is doing to us is that the editors of *JEP* (and the other AEA journals) have neglected illumination of those issues.

Beginning in 2004, however, there seems to have been a change in the character of *JEP*, under the editorship of Andrei Shleifer, whose ideological sensibilities seem to be somewhat classical liberal. Shleifer has not fixed the core problem—the neglect of terrible status-quo policies—but he has reduced the social-democratic tendencies, and even published a few articles with a classical-liberal flavor.

What would a journal that wanted to explore diverse economic perspectives do? The answer is obvious. For policy issues and broader economic themes, it would invite economists with clashing perspectives to clash. It would arrange debates that included a second round where each tries to destroy the other’s arguments. Readers like debates. They would read and learn more. Free competition is, as Hayek put it, a discovery procedure. For cultural competition especially, Schumpeter’s *creative destruction* is apt.

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<sup>9</sup> Evidence of such polarity is found in the patterns of AEA member’s responses, in my survey and in Whaples’ (2006).



However, *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, even under Shleifer, is practically devoid of criticism and debate. *JEP* symposia sometimes have articles pointing in opposite policy directions (e.g., on anti-trust activism or on personal Social Security accounts), and the journal gives a small amount of space at the back to comments and replies,<sup>10</sup> but its primary modus operandi is to select a field authority to survey the literature and integrate the recognized works into a single overarching interpretation, as though to bring us all into a condition of “common knowledge.” The impetus may be not so much ideological as existential. Cultural elites like to think they lead an enlightened consensus. They promulgate a face of establishment consensus, especially in fields anxious to claim the status of science. That may be the larger explanation for the avoidance of real criticism and debate.

One can peruse the AEA journals and make one’s own judgments. If economists have impressions like mine, then we would expect to find that those who do not favor the social-democratic ideology are less likely to join the AEA. We would expect to find that classical liberals and conservatives are less likely to join the AEA, while Democrats are more likely.

### **Rates of AEA Membership by Party Registration**

In collaboration with me, Christopher Cardiff, Andrew Western, and Patrick Peterson have collected voter-registration data on tenure-track faculty at eleven California colleges and universities (UC-Berkeley, UC-Los Angeles, UC-San Diego, Stanford University, California Institute of Technology, University of San Diego, San Diego State University, Claremont McKenna College, Pepperdine University, Santa Clara University, and Point Loma Nazarene University). Our purpose in collecting the data was to study faculty generally, not just economists. In correspondence, however, William McEachern suggested that I look into the economist data to see if there were differences in AEA membership rates by voter registration category.

In the previous discussion of the survey results, we saw that Republican and Libertarian voters’ policy views are less social-democratic than Democratic and Green voters. The basic issue is whether the AEA is perceived to have a social-democratic orientation, so I sorted the economists into three groups:

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<sup>10</sup> The following average-per-issue quantities are for the 44 issues 1995 thru 2005: 4.7 pages devoted to correspondence/comments/replies, 2.3 letters/comments, 1.1 replies.

- Registered Democrats or Greens; denoted here as “Dem/Gr”.<sup>11</sup>
- Registered Republicans, Libertarians, or American Independents (the AI party is a Pat Buchanan-type conservative party and is the California affiliate of the Constitution Party); denoted here as “Repub/L/AI”.<sup>12</sup>
- Others, which includes those who were not found, registered nonpartisan or “decline to state”, indeterminate because of multiple and conflicting information for the same name, and one member of the Reform Party, whose centrist platform seemed to me to fit neither the social-democratic category nor the non-social-democratic category.

Using the online AEA membership directory, I determined whether the individual was an AEA member. I put into Appendix 1 details about the sample and the data collection, a link to the line-by-line Excel sheet with names redacted, and the overall statistics for each school.

In this data set there are just 34 Repub/L/AIs. Moreover, because the Repub/L/AIs are disproportionately found among the less prestigious schools,<sup>13</sup> where AEA membership rates are lower for all categories, it is appropriate to divide the sample into two sets, high-tier (UCB, UCLA, UCSD, Stanford, and Cal Tech) and lower-tier (USD, SDSU, Claremont, Pepperdine, Santa Clara, and Point Loma Nazarene). This attempt to control for the tier effect *weakens* the flavor of the results.

The AEA membership rates for high-tier and lower-tier are shown in Figures 1 and 2.

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<sup>11</sup> The entire economist sample contains just one registered Green, who was an AEA member.

<sup>12</sup> The entire economist sample contains two registered Libertarians and two registered American Independents, none an AEA member. Line-by-line data (with identifying information redacted) is found in the linked [Excel file](#). For information on the American Independent Party of California, click on [this link](#) to its homepage.

<sup>13</sup> In selecting schools, Chris Cardiff and I sought variety in ideological reputation (e.g., Pepperdine as a conservative school) and religious orientation, so the reader should not infer anything into this particular finding. There is a fair amount of evidence, however, that, in general, more elite schools are more solidly Democratic.

Figure 1: High-Tier AEA Membership rates by Party Registration

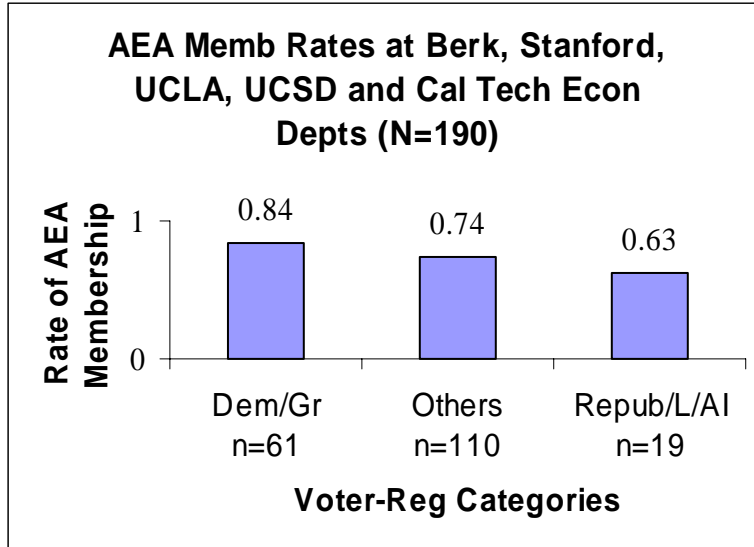
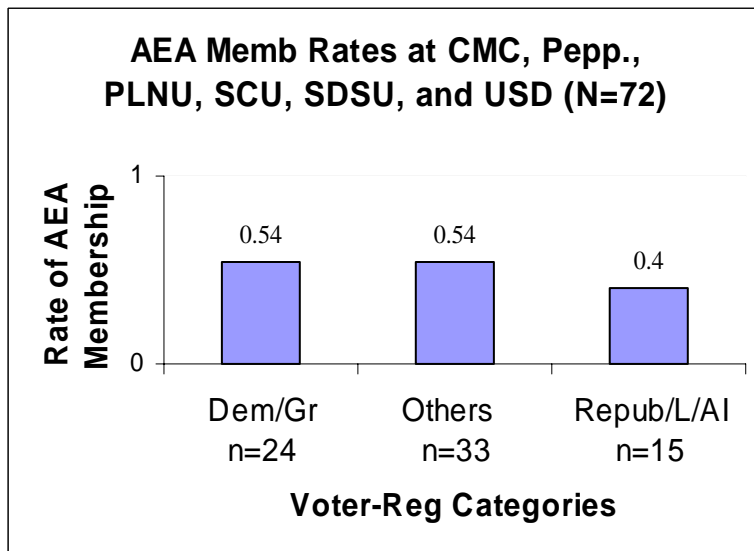


Figure 2: Lower-Tier AEA Membership rates by Party Registration



For the high-tier schools, the rate of AEA membership among Repub/L/AIs is 76 percent of the Dem/Gr rate. For the lower-tier schools, it is 74 percent. Averaging the two, we get Repub/L/AIs being about 75 percent as likely to join the AEA as Dem/Gr. The sub-samples are small, yet for the high-tier group a Pearson Chi-square test shows there would be only a 5.7 percent chance that samples of such size would show (at least) that much difference if the two voter categories were in fact equally likely to join the AEA. At any rate, the results help to clarify the point and indicate the need for further research. Expanding the sample is not easy, because voter registration data generally resides only at dispersed voter-registrar offices.

If meaningful empirical research were to find that Dem/Gr were more likely than Repub/L/AIs to join the AEA, one possible explanation would be that economists perceive a somewhat social-democratic bent to the AEA and are attracted or repelled according to their own ideological proclivities. We would not, however, be able to rule out an alternative explanation: That conservatives and libertarians are less inclined to join a professional association (that is, that they would be less inclined to join the AEA even if it were, to their mind, ideologically unbiased). I am unaware of any evidence that speaks to that proposition.

### WHO ARE YOU?

*The Journal of Economic Literature* takes as its logo a medal bearing the profile of Adam Smith, a man who labored hard and meticulously to establish a strong presumption of natural liberty. We are well aware of the numerous natural-liberty exceptions and inconsistencies in Smith's comprehensive survey of public policy. His libertarianism was not adamant. I believe that to some extent the non-libertarian moments should be understood as the compromises and fudgings necessary of a libertarian individual holding and utilizing a position of cultural royalty. Although he lived prior to the age of social democracy, he gave a visible thumb's down to social-democratic sensibilities and attitudes. There seems to be little place for a Smithian minority report in the array of AEA publications and activities. With an AEA dominated by Democrats, young economists are not going to become exposed to abolitionist ideas or fundamental criticism

of government and politics. Although the lead articles in the *JEL* since 1995 (and particularly under John McMillan 1998 thru 2004) have *not* leaned particularly in the social-democratic direction, the neglect of terrible status-quo policies has been so characteristic that the legitimacy of journal's invocation of Smith is highly questionable.

Questions about the political culture within which the AEA structure has emerged address the broadest frame and reach back to the origins of liberalism. They open up the larger questions of who we are and what we are up to. A broad frame demands that we heed Myrdal's call to keep the fundamental judgments and sensibilities out in the open. The surest way to achieve genuine discourse is to be upfront about where we are coming from.

Consider the short article entitled "Toward National Well-Being Accounts," appearing in the May 2004 *American Economic Review Papers and Proceedings*. The authors write: "Here we propose measuring national well-being by weighting the time allocated to various activities by the subjective experiences associated with those activities" (p. 433). The idea is to rate daily activities like washing the dishes based on how happy people say they are as they do them. Compared to GDP, "a better measure of well-being could help to inform policy" (p. 433). The authors do not specify how these accounts will be used, nor how they will be paid for. Nor do they say much about how they are constructed and how they relate to regard for such things as dignity, individuality, and personal narrative. Now, wouldn't it be refreshing if the authors, Daniel Kahneman, Alan B. Krueger, David Schkade, Norbert Schwarz, and Arthur Stone, came out and said:

"We are proposing an ambitious new empirical formulation of national well-being, and we are lobbying the government to have it paid for by taxpayers. This project involves deep-seated ideological judgments and purposes, and our results could have far-reaching political and policy consequences. Accordingly, we think it only fair that everyone know where we are coming from. We confess that we are among those who think that the government should take a leading, guiding role in social affairs, to promote equality of opportunity and the general welfare, not too constrained by regard for what some call 'individual liberty.' We all vote Democratic and consider ourselves to be liberal in the modern sense of the term."

Or whatever description they would give of themselves.

How nice it would be! How productive when economists tell us who they are—how they vote, how they identify themselves ideologically, and the like. That practice shows respect for our differences, and helps us fit whatever they have to say into larger cultural engagements.

Some economists do not know who they are. Others lack a developed, integrated faculty of judgment. But if you do have a developed faculty of judgment and you know the patterns of your judgment, you do a service by letting on. Next time you write or speak publicly of things of political significance, consider the simple words: “I confess that I am one of those who think that . . .” With those words or passing remarks that serve the same purpose, you earn the esteem of those, like Adam Smith and Gunnar Myrdal, who favor frankness and openness. You advance a culture of frankness and openness. And, inversely, the public culture is degraded by those who conceal who they really are.

### Appendix 1: Data on Voter Registration and AEA Membership

Table 2 provides a breakdown of the data by individual school. For a key to the school-name abbreviations, please see the text above p.196.

**Table 2: Voter Registration and AEA Membership  
at 11 California Schools**

N	School	Dem/Gr		Repub/L/AIs		Others		All	
		<i>AEA</i>	<i>not</i>	<i>AEA</i>	<i>not</i>	<i>AEA</i>	<i>not</i>	<i>AEA</i>	<i>not</i>
55	Berkeley	19	3	1	1	21	10	41	14
16	Cal Tech	2	0	2	1	9	2	13	3
43	Stanford	12	2	4	2	17	6	33	10
44	UCLA	8	3	3	2	19	9	30	14
32	UCSD	10	2	2	1	15	2	24	8
18	CMC	2	1	2	1	9	3	13	5
14	Pepp.	0	0	3	4	2	5	5	9
3	PLNU	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	2
15	SCU	4	3	0	2	3	3	7	8
9	SDSU	2	3	0	0	3	1	5	4
13	USD	4	4	1	1	1	2	6	7
18	High-tier	51	10	12	7	81	29	141	49
70	Lower-tier	13	11	6	9	18	15	37	35
26	TOTAL	64	21	18	16	99	44	178	84

Line-by-line data, with identifying information redacted, and the figures are contained in the Excel file [linked here](#).

Data collection: The data is collected on tenure-track economics department professors (excluding emeriti faculty). For Pepperdine, the economists come from three different schools within Pepperdine (Seaver College, Graziado School of Business and Management, the School of Public Policy) and we included all faculty listed as “economics” faculty. UCLA’s Anderson School of Business has a number of economists associated with it, but they are all doing double-duty at the undergraduate

level and hence were included in the normal Economics Department listing. For Cal Tech, we included all the faculty listed as “economics” or “business economics” faculty. Table 3 provides information about the data collection.

**Table 3: Voter-Registration Data Collection**

<b>Schools</b>	<b>Gatherer of The data</b>	<b>Date voter-reg data gathered</b>	<b>Co. voter-records used</b>	<b>Citation to relevant works</b>
<i>Los Angeles area:</i> UCLA, Cal Tech, CMC, Pepp.	Christopher Cardiff (tifchris@aol.com)	September – December 2005	Los Angeles, Orange, Ventura, San Bernardino, Riverside	Cardiff and Klein (in progress)
<i>San Diego area:</i> UCSD, SDSU, USD, PLNU	Christopher Cardiff (tifchris@aol.com)	August – September 2005	San Diego	Cardiff and Klein (in progress)
UCB and Stanford	Andrew Western (awestern@scu.edu)	January – May 2004	Alameda, Contra Costa, San Fransico, Santa Clara, Solano, San Mateo, Marin	Klein and Western (2004)
Santa Clara	Patrick Peterson (patrickpeterson@yahoo.com)	October – December 2004	Santa Clara, San Mateo, Alemeda, Santa Cruz	Cardiff and Klein (in progress)



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