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Honoring a pioneer: Gordon Tullock (1922–2014)

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Abstract Gordon Tullock made seminal contributions to three disciplines, economics, political science, and biology. He was also a founder of bioeconomics. Although economic theory has moved beyond the rational self-interest assumption that underlies his work, Tullock's contributions were important theoretical stepping stones.

Keywords Economic theory · Public choice · Rent seeking · Rational actor

Gordon Tullock was an original—a non-economist by training who made seminal contributions to three disciplines: economics, political science, and biology. Indeed, he could also be called a patron saint of bioeconomics, along with Michael Ghiselin and a handful of other founding fathers. For a very short history of bioeconomics as a "subversive science," see Corning (2005). See also Landa and Ghiselin (1999).

At the core, Tullock's contributions were grounded in a very simple idea, namely, that the basic assumption of neo-classical economics—"rational self-interest"—is the motivational foundation of economic behavior and could be extended to political behavior and even the "economy of nature" (as Darwin himself put it). Together with his co-author, James Buchanan, who won the Nobel Prize in 1986 for his contributions, Tullock created the field of "public choice. " Tullock also was known for his path-breaking work on the concept of rent seeking in the pubic choice literature. His twenty three books cover a vast political terrain, from legal systems to voting behavior, lobbying and, of course, political decision making. He believed that economic motives are a dominant force in politics.

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Less well known but equally important was his application of this same perspective to the natural world, where he frequently invoked the relationship between biology and economics, going all the way back to Malthus and Darwin. For instance, in his paper "Biological externalities" (Tullock 1971a), he applied the concepts of externalities and Pareto optimality to ecological contexts generally and environmental pollution in particular. In "The Coal Tit as a careful shopper" (Tullock 1971b), he brought economic analysis to bear on the predatory behavior of a well-known bird species. He even contributed to the debate in sociobiology about altruism and inclusive fitness (or kin selection) theory (Tullock 1977, 1979), and offered a number of insights and some intriguing theoretical leads. As Tullock (1979, p. 2) himself explained it in the latter article, "it could be argued that I never left economics, that all of my 'biological' articles are simply economics articles in which I have rather unusual sets of entities maximizing a rather unusual utility function."

Of course, times have changed, and so has economic theory. To paraphrase the mantra of economist Richard Thaler (2000), the *Homo economicus* model provides numerous insights, but a more complex *Homo sapiens* model offers a more satisfactory understanding of reality. Among other developments in recent years, the extensive work in behavioral and experimental economics has greatly enriched—and complicated—our understanding of human motivation and human behavior. Especially noteworthy is the extensive work in "strong reciprocity theory," including the experiments involving the so-called "ultimatum games," which points to the influence of more "other regarding" and even (selectively) altruistic behaviors in humankind. This theoretical paradigm shift is briefly described and documented in an important new co-authored paper on the evolution of politics by the economist Herbert Gintis and the anthropologists Carel van Schaik and Christopher Boehm (Gintis et al. 2015). They refer to their "take" on this alternative paradigm as "*Homo moralis*."

Nevertheless, Gordon Tullock's enduring contributions remain important stepping stones in the quest to understand the natural world and our own place in it. We are all in his debt.

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