

## Festschrift Notes

Charles Goetz

Hartfield Professor of Law  
University of Virginia School of Law

One of the great pleasures of life is spending most of my time with interesting and exceptionally smart people. I look around at the faces out there and, indeed, I find exactly that: a lot of exceptionally smart people.

But even among exceptionally smart people, there appears occasionally the equivalent of an Olympic Champion of Smart People. And we are here tonight to honor one of those figurative Gold Medalists of the Brain.

“Citius, Altius, Fortius,” “Swifter, Higher, Stronger,” says the Olympic motto. You folks already know, and others here have already remarked upon, how Gordon’s brain is quicker and stronger and ascends commonly to heights we relative grundoons may only aspire to.

So, I am not here to tell you about Gordon Tullock *qua* Great Scholar. Rather, I have a few memories to share of Gordon the man more like us, a few of the nuances—and, yes, the peculiarities—of having Gordon as a teacher, a colleague and, above all, a friend. In sum, what it was to be “around him” on a daily basis.

So, where did it all start for me?

I had not the foggiest clue as to Gordon’s existence until just about 40 years ago when I was in my first year as a graduate student at UVA. A brand-new faculty appointment, Gordon arrived at midyear. It would be a matter of a few weeks before I first encountered him in the flesh. But other graduate students warned me about the new professor. “That new blankety-blank picks on people and *insults* them,” they cautioned.

Even then, I didn't have sense enough to pay much deference to authority figures. So when I did eventually meet Gordon, I did my best to stand toe-to-toe and fire back at least a few rounds for every booming salvo that he loosed in my direction. Gordon loved it, and so did I. I think that we liked each other right from the start.

Gordon's fearsome reputation in those days was born out of an inability of some to appreciate how much debate and the testing of ideas is ingrained in the Tullockian fiber as his *modus operandi*. For him, it's an essential aspect of the great Academic Game.

Questioning and testing the defensibility of ideas sounds like what *all* academics should be doing all of the time. But most of us are flabby about it. Gordon is ever-earnest, totally committed and tough-minded. For those willing to join him in the Game, that tough-mindedness is part of what makes him a wonderful, stimulating person to be around.

Notwithstanding the fables sometimes circulated to the contrary, I have never once seen Gordon debate ideas in a mean-spirited way. Sure, I have seen him be, shall we say, "acerbic" on occasion. And I enjoyed every such occasion.

The reason is, quite simply, this: Gordon has the praiseworthy characteristic of not being willing to suffer fools gladly. Nor does he suffer fools in the silence that may be taken either as acquiescence or encouragement. One who provocatively draws the sword in Gordon's presence risks becoming the unwilling victim of an intellectual fencing-lesson. Or shall I say a "blood-letting"? I have often been an amused and approving spectator at such formidable exhibitions.

Yet, it would be a mistake to see Gordon as a person ever-ready to enter battle.

Given his scholarly interest in conflict, game theory, strategy, bureaucracy, and things of that ilk, one might expect Tullock to be aggressively engaged in the intrigues and maneuverings that characterize academic politics, the push and pull of appointments and intra-departmental resource allocations. I was surprised to find, in the early days at Virginia Tech, that Gordon could not have cared less about such things. Gordon wastes no time, it seems, in being competitive about pedestrian things. Nor did I ever find him noticeably distracted by pursuits of *amour*. Well, there *was* that one attractive blond woman, a program director at the NSF. I wonder what ever happened there . . .?

Being discriminating in one's interests is not the same thing as being narrow, however.

I see here in the audience many who are champions in their own right in some Intellectual Event. But central to Gordon's attraction is the extraordinary sweep of his mind. Or, to use another analogy, I have had other friends and colleagues in whom the river of the mind runs equally deep— in particular channels. By contrast, the river of Gordon's mind runs not only very deep but astonishingly wide, and it meanders over the intellectual landscape to unusual areas. So, while most of us compete in a single event, Gordon possesses the power to win the laurels in an intellectual decathlon.

When we were colleagues in Blacksburg, I marveled at how well-informed Tullock was in such a variety of other disciplines. This was, for instance, the period in which a doctoral dissertation in biology at Oxford was being written about one of Gordon's forays into the behavior of *birds*: "The Coal Tit as a Careful Shopper." The man just knew—and knows—an awful lot about a diverse collection of unexpected things. And he is not a mere dilettante.

Some of these things were, by then at least, *not* unexpected. Gordon had actually been elected to the Executive Committee of the American Political Science Association. So, even the political science department at Virginia Tech acknowledged Gordon as a guru. The department sent its appointments candidates over to be interviewed by Tullock and I was allowed to sit in as a kind of minor asteroid revolving in near-Tullock orbit.

Yet, I can still remember being slack-jawed in amazement at how Gordon ran a Yale Ph.D. candidate through the hoops on the candidate's own dissertation topic, British political history of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Similarly, I heard Gordon hold his own with the Tech history professor who specialized in the Civil War. And I could add a lot more examples.

Where did that man learn all of this stuff? And self-taught! Has there ever been another President of the Southern Economic Association who never had a course in economics?

Around the economics department, Gordon was earnest but never grim. I don't remember him as the perpetrator of the department's many practical jokes, but he enjoyed a little levity and always played along. To illustrate, I hearken back to those interviews for political science faculty positions, which took place in the parlor at the Public Choice Center. Tullock and I would have coffee with the candidate. What the candidate did not know was that his coffee cup was special: it had a little ceramic statue of a frog cemented inside, on the bottom. Imagine, if you can, the moment when those beady little green eyes began to become visible through the inky opaqueness of the coffee!

I could, but will not, tell a story about Tullock and the life-sized inflatable-woman doll in the bathroom at the public choice center.

Gordon also has his own unique brands of humor. I remember his many outrageous examples that tickled my funny-bone. For instance, he'd insist that if the government were really serious about people driving safely, there ought to be a law mandating an iron spike protruding from the steering wheel in the direction of the driver's breast.

As a colleague, Gordon was always generous with his time and with his praise and with his encouragement for good ideas. He'd read manuscripts and give good advice, and do it all promptly. He had the patience to work with and direct the doctoral work of students who were not always at the front of the pack. He was loyal to his friends.

I keep saying "was" although I'm confident that "is" could be substituted in these descriptions of virtue. I haven't had much occasion to be around Gordon in recent years, but I wish that I had more opportunity to take additional Tullockian "samplings".

The lack of opportunity was not always so. I had lunch with Gordon almost every weekday during my years at Virginia Tech. I remember those conversations of more than 25 years ago with enormous pleasure. They were amusing, informative, and stimulating. I think that I'd pay a substantial premium to be able to do it again. If you'd just come to Charlottesville, Gordon, lunch would be on me. All you can eat. The finest, most expensive restaurants. You name it.

Gordon and I also socialized on non-workday occasions. I and my colleagues were his guests on many outings. Who could ever forget dinners at the Blacksburg area's then top-of-the-line eatery, the Newport House? It was run by local resident Ray Perky, who pretended to the title of Baron de Koernigswerther by virtue of having been (ahem) "adopted" by an elderly German noblewoman. Hey, that was "as good as it gets" in those days.

But, having sounded the word "gets," there is indeed the "Goetz Test." The test in question is named after my wonderful wife, Judy Goetz, sitting right over there. If truth be told, Judy was not always wildly enthused about the social companionship of many of my economics colleagues. Pareto-optimality was, understandably, not high among her desiderata for cocktail conversation.

Judy, however, got it into her head that Gordon was a really interesting fellow. Which, in turn, generated invitations to Gordon for many very tasty dinners at Chez Goetz. On this more thorough investigation, Judy concluded that Gordon was not only interesting but also a warm and likable human being, deserving of one's affection and respect. Judy was right. She always is.

Gordon, I hope you will reciprocate by speaking at *my* 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday. You'll only be 97 then, and I expect that you won't have slowed down a bit. But, even if you have, you'll still be a better guy than just about anyone else that I know.

Happy Birthday. As Spock is wont to say in Star Trek, "Live Long and Prosper."