

Editorial

Nobel winner 'curious'

Economic works understood by masses, disciples unclear

James Buchanan, the 1986 recipient of the Nobel Memorial Prize in economics (announced last week) is a rather curious economist: (1) His works are readily accessible to the layman; (2) his work relates to an area not traditionally thought of as economics, and (3) he writes about some topics not typically talked about in scholarly literature.

A lot of Buchanan's writing — as well as that of the school of thought he founded — is accessible to anyone. This in itself is unusual in a time when economics is growing increasingly mathematical.

Although some of his followers' works require several semesters of calculus to understand, Buchanan's seminal work, "The Calculus of Consent" (1962) is overwhelmingly prose (with only a few graphs scattered here and there).

Buchanan's work is in an area not popularly considered economic analysis. For many people, the core of economics is a study of pecuniary money and productive relationships.

Buchanan's work doesn't fit into this model. Instead, his work, as explained in the "Calculus of Consent," is "about the political organization of free men."

Huh. So it's political theory? Yes and no. It's an approach to politics, but from a distinctly economic basis.

Buchanan, in explaining his approach, writes, "its methodology, its conceptual apparatus, and its analytics are derived, essentially, from the discipline that has as its subject the economic organization of . . . society."

Buchanan attempts "to analyze the calculus of the rational individual when he is faced with questions of constitutional choice."

By "rational individual" Buchanan is employing an economic postulate of human behavior known as "utility maximization." It's that premise that provides Buchanan's particular orientation when looking at the role of politicians in society.

In the theory, politicians are viewed simply as actors attempting to maximize their utility along with all the other actors. What Buchanan claims is that no one, including politicians, act as though some metaphysical but knowable "public interest" lies "out there" where it can be seen and grasped.

Jim Rogers



Instead, Buchanan and his group "explicitly reject the idea of an independent 'public interest' as meaningful." Buchanan takes a lot of unjustifiable heat on this point. He's not saying that politicians should act to maximize their own utility (at the expense, sometimes, of many other people). Such a proposition would not be scientific. Rather, he seeks to posit a refutable factual statement: Politicians act to maximize achievement of their own interests (just like everyone else in the economic model).

Given this primary postulate he finds that the "optimization" paradigm of microeconomics is helpful in explaining political behavior as market behavior: "The individual enters into an exchange relationship in which he furthers his own interest by providing

some product or service that is of direct benefit to the individual on the other side of the transaction. At base, political or collective action under the individualistic view of the state is much the same. Two or more individuals find it mutually advantageous to join forces to accomplish certain common purposes. In a very real sense, they 'exchange' inputs in the securing of the commonly shared output."

Finally, some of the topics that Buchanan and his "Public Choice" school talk about are, well, interesting at the very least. Although there are some more run of the middle analysis of political theory (such as Buchanan's review of John Rawls' "A Theory of Justice," there are also some more curious works.

These include works such as "An Economic Approach to Riot Analysis," "Benevolence, Malevolence and Economic Theory," and works such as "On Division of the Question," where one of Buchanan's disciples posits "that the mathematical theory of voting may be used to shield light on traditional rules of parliamentary procedure."

But without doubt, the Center for the Study of Public Choice's monograph, "Explorations in The Theory of Anarchy" takes the cake. It is a moderately mathematical work that looks at the issue in the state of a libertarian anarchy and predates Robert Nozick's seminal work, "Anarchy, State and Utopia," by two years.

Buchanan has to be one of the more interesting economic Nobel prize winners since the prize's inception in the late 1960s.

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Catfights unneeded Candidates should stick to issues

When you're trying to decide who to vote for in a political race, it's best to take cover lest the insults splatter you in the face from both sides. That piece of advice seems especially prudent this election season.

Nebraska voters have seen far too many examples of negative campaigning during the governor's race. Within the last week, Democratic candidate Helen Boosalis charged that Republican counterpart Kay Orr offers "the kind of government mismanagement that went on during the (Charles) Thone years, while Orr says Boosalis' statements on taxes amount to Orwellian "newspeak" of the "war is peace and freedom is slavery" variety.

But it's not limited to the governor's race or to Nebraska. Consider these examples:

● Dave Maurstad of Beatrice, challenging Beatrice Sen. Pat Morehead for the 30th District legislative seat, said Morehead "voted to let drunk drivers get back on the road" by supporting a bill allowing work permits to those convicted of driving while drunk for the first time. Morehead then ran ads saying this of Maurstad: "Distortion. Half-truths. Misrepresentations. Lies."

● Sen. James Abdnor, R-S.D., linked Democratic opponent Rep. Tom Daschle with Jane Fonda and other "Hollywood liberals" and said Daschle opposes eating red meat while representing a cattle state. Not to be outdone, Daschle charged Abdnor had a fund-raiser in Beverly Hills that movie stars attended. Abdnor

denied it.

● Sen. Robert Kasten, R-Wis., said \$750,000 in NFL Players Association funds "disappeared" while his Democratic challenger, Ed Garvey, was executive director "and Ed Garvey didn't know where it went." Garvey called the statements "reckless disregard for the truth" and "libelous."

Had enough? The list goes on.

Who started the name-calling first doesn't really matter. By engaging in verbal frontal assaults on their opponents or returning fire with fire, the candidates do a terrible disservice to democracy. They cloud the issues and records and make it nearly impossible for confused voters to know what they're getting.

Unfortunately, the insults continue because they seem to reach voters who like a good catfight.

All a candidate has to do, it seems, is get enough people upset at the opponent and he or she will win. Even when candidates try to score off their opponents by citing the opponents' records — which might be somewhat legitimate — they often throw out numbers and words without making it clear where they came from. Those attacks are just as bad as name-calling.

We can't do much about the campaigns in other states, but Nebraska candidates, including Orr and Boosalis, ought to cease and desist. It shouldn't be so difficult to stick to telling voters what you will do rather than what a mean, rotten person your opponent is. After all, what candidates do while in office is what matters in the end.

In a paragraph . . .

Just when you thought it was all over

National On Campus Report noted that the movie "Hail Mary," the contemporary retelling of the birth of Christ, has been banned at Louisiana State University. The school's Union governing board refused to fund a showing of the film, prompting charges of censorship from the student government. Sound familiar?

● National On Campus Report also reported that some football fans at the universities of Colorado and Wisconsin will have to undergo behavior modification; result of tough restrictions on rowdy behavior. Wisconsin state laws regarding drinking have been tightened — as have rules against violations like body-passing and object-throwing at both schools. It's not just happening here. (DN editorial, Oct. 20).

● Also in Colorado . . . 25-year-old senior physics major Frank Sanders said the device, a contraction of pipes and steel, would produce the equivalent of more than 4 kilotons of TNT if it were loaded with plutonium or uranium 235. That easily could level Denver, he said. What a comfort to know that a college student has the ability and the

knowledge to destroy a major metropolitan area.

● Closer to home, State Sen. James Pappas of North Platte resigned after being connected with the failed lottery petition drive. He now has turned around and decided he would return to the Legislature if the people in his district were to vote him back in. The correct move would have the people in the 42nd district casting their ballots for Bill Hord of North Platte, Pappas' opponent.

● The NCAA Council made a wise move last week when it proposed a cut of about 50 percent in the recruiting seasons in all college sports. The council is attempting to eliminate recruiting abuse. The rule would reduce pressure on coaches and student-athletes and their families. The proposal will be looked at during the January NCAA convention.

● Along with a new coach the basketball team will sport new attire. The Huskers, under coach Danny Nee, have tossed in the old jerseys for newer, modern-looking ones. The white jerseys carry the players' numbers and the word Huskers in script.

Directory assistance misinformation throws Robertson's hat in the ring

I recently had a visit from the Rev. Pat Robinson, who is pastor of the Hallelujah Ev'body Unified Church of Happiness. He was hopping mad. And if what he says is true, I can't blame him.

As Robinson says: "It's all a terrible misunderstanding. It's me that's supposed to run for president."

What makes you think so?
"I just found out. The Lord told me so."

That you should run for president?
"Absolutely. He just spoke to me and asked me why I hadn't got my campaign started, why I hadn't told my followers

Mike Royko



to get 3 million signatures and raise millions of dollars and all that other stuff."

He told you that?
"Absolutely. So I told him: 'I don't know anything about this. I've been busy looking for a new storefront location for the faithful. A hamburger chain's bought the building and moved me out.'

"And he told me: 'What do you mean, you don't know? I told you what I wanted you to do several weeks ago. I told you I needed a true believer like you in the White House so the true believers people in this country will have a true believer for president.'

"I said: 'You told me that?'
"He said: 'Would I lie?'
"So I asked him: 'When did you tell me to do that?'"

"He says that he'll check his desk calendar. Then he gives me the date. "I checked my own desk calendar. And I said: 'No way. I was at the dentist all that morning. Then I spent the rest of the day downtown yelling at sinners to repent. A guy from a stereo store

finally complained to the cops and they told me to beat it, so I went home, hit the sack, and didn't hear from anybody.

"He says to me: 'I don't understand this.'

"So I said: 'OK, let's figure this out. How did you reach me?'"

"He said: 'I called long-distance.'

"I said: 'You used the phone company? Why didn't you just talk to me direct?'"

"He said: 'I tried talking to you direct all morning, but I didn't get any answer.'

"I said: 'Ah, that must have been when I was at the dentist. He was drilling, and I couldn't have heard a thing, even if you shouted.'

"And he said: 'Anyway, I called long-distance information and I asked for your number and I phoned. And I told you what I wanted you to do and you said you'd do it.'

"I said: 'No way. My phone has been disconnected for six months. Bunch of cheaps in my congregation.'

"And he said: 'But you answered the phone. And when I gave you my instructions, you said you'd get right on it.'

"So I said: 'What number did you call?'"

"He checks his desk calendar again and gives me the number. I called the phone company and asked them whose number it was.

"The phone company told me: 'That number is listed to the Rev. Pat Robertson.'

"So I told him: 'The long-distance operator gave you the wrong number. They must have thought you said Pat Robertson. R-O-B-E-R-T-S-O-N. Not Robinson.'

"And he says: 'Robertson? Why would I tell him to run for president. He's a lawyer, isn't he?'"

"That's right," I said. "But that's what must have happened. It's the phone company's fault. Ever since they broke up AT&T, the service has been goofy."

"And he says: 'This is a terrible mistake. Why would I want another lawyer to run for president? And especially him. He's a name-dropper,

always saying that he talked to me about this or about that, saying that he talked me into stopping a hurricane. I've never even said hello to the man.'

"So I said: 'Well, he thinks you did this time. He's got his followers collecting signatures and money, and he's getting ready to run.'

"And the Lord says: 'I'm not going to pay for that long-distance call. And you've got to let people know this was a mistake. Goodbye.'"

After telling me all this, the Rev. Robinson slapped his hand on my desk and said: "So that's the deal. I'm the one who's supposed to be running for president. And I'd like you to write about this and let the people know that I'm the one who is his choice."

That's an amazing story. But do you think people will believe he actually spoke to you?

"Why not?" asked Robinson. "They believe the other guy, don't they?"

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Royko is a Pulitzer prize-winning columnist for the Chicago Tribune.

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