

REVIEW OF PETER J. BOETTKE AND ALAIN MARCIANO (EDS.),
THE SOUL OF CLASSICAL POLITICAL ECONOMY:
JAMES M. BUCHANAN FROM THE ARCHIVES, FAIRFAX, VA:
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In this new book Peter Boettke and Alain Marciano curate a selection of material from the archives of Nobel laureate and founder of public choice theory James Buchanan held at George Mason University in the USA. The book is organised into thematic sections covering important aspects of Buchanan's work: public economics; subjectivist economics; politics and morals; the organisation of scientific activity; Frank Knight's legacy; and postcrisis economics. All sections bar one collate previously unpublished papers from the archives introduced by a new essay by the editors; the exception is the longest section which collects the Virginia Lectures in Political Economy given at George Mason by distinguished guest speakers from 1985 to 2001, including Geoffrey Brennan, Harmut Kliemt and Mancur Olson. Most of the lectures were subsequently revised for publication, but collected here the texts nicely demonstrate the intellectual breadth and scope of Virginian political economy.

The Buchanan archives have already played a controversial role in Buchanan's posthumous legacy after historian Nancy MacLean used papers left in Buchanan's office after his death, before his archive was formally documented and made public, to write her critical biography. Now that the formal process of organising, preserving and indexing the archives for future scholars is near completion, this welcome book provides a comprehensive guide to its contents and highlights some of the treasures therein.

The Buchanan papers chosen by Boettke and Marciano offer a fascinating insight into his thinking, particularly his ongoing fight to create institutional spaces for the community of scholars engaged in public choice

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theory. Scholars who achieve eminence in their personal research activities often free-ride on the institution building and maintenance work of others, but Buchanan saw his personal research strategy as inextricably linked to his own efforts at institution building. Buchanan understood that the advancement of public choice as a research agenda required not only his own intellectual contributions, but also the construction of institution spaces within which public choice scholars could work, engage with one another and external peers, and publish. To achieve this Buchanan led the creation of a succession of research centres, first at the University of Virginia, then at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and finally at George Mason University, and contributed to the establishment of the Public Choice Society and the academic journals *Public Choice* and *Constitutional Political Economy*.

A highlight of this collection is the publication of two of Buchanan's most important statements of his combined approach to scholarly research and institutional construction: "We Must Dare to be Different" and "The Dishwater of the Orthodoxies". The first was written in response to a memo from a senior manager at the University of Virginia in 1962 asking faculty to submit ideas for the university's long-term strategy. Buchanan responded by arguing that seeking to replicate what had been successful elsewhere guaranteed mediocrity as a second-rate version of successful schools and that the university should have the courage to build on its own unique strengths. Buchanan highlighted the first public choice centre, the Thomas Jefferson Center for Studies in Political Economy, as an exemplar of a research centre within the university that was unlike anything that existed elsewhere and reflected the unique character of the university located in the state that was most central to America's constitutional foundation. Buchanan's text was written in the context of growing tension between the university administration and the Thomas Jefferson Center that ultimately led to its closure and Buchanan's ill-fated move to UCLA in 1968.

"The Dishwater of the Orthodoxies", an informal after dinner address given in 1982, returns to the same subject. Here, Buchanan extolled the importance of challenging the "dull, dead, drab, and dirty" scholarly orthodoxies that replicated mainstream thinking (p. 100). The dull regimes of the orthodox offered significant rents for those who used accepted methods to reproduce established conclusions, whereas those, like Buchanan, who sought to challenge and ultimately to shift academic and public attitudes were "treated as heretics [...] excommunicated and reviled" (p. 101). Seeking to challenge orthodox thinking and practice led to rejection by peers and hostility from university administrators who often measured success in terms of mainstream acceptance and esteem. Consequently, Buchanan argued, the genuine academic innovator-entrepreneur could only ever hope for a temporary setting congenial to their efforts before their schol-

arly activities were eventually challenged and even derailed by bureaucratic interference.

From the perspective of the present, Buchanan probably under-estimated the difficulties of challenging established orthodoxies in academia. For most of his career Buchanan consistently published in what were considered the most prestigious journals in economics, but later in his career his publications in these outlets slowed, not, I think, because of any decline in the quality of his work, but because those outlets became less receptive to scholarship that did not meet increasingly narrow evaluative criteria. Today very little genuinely unorthodox work is published in the top-ranked journals throughout the social sciences. Individuals who follow a research strategy that produces interesting work addressing big questions of social organisation almost certainly reduce their chances of success across multiple margins compared to work that seeks to make a minor contribution to a recognised body of knowledge. University administrators focused on league tables based on metrics of established success are likely to be reluctant to sanction the appointment of colleagues or support the creation of research centres that may not obviously contribute to success on these metrics. To be different is now more daring than ever and it is crucial that individuals in positions of influence or leadership articulate the case for intellectually interesting work over that which contributes little but meets the narrow success criteria employed by the guardians of the orthodoxy.

Of course, Buchanan's work is not without its tensions and Boettke and Marciano do a good job of drawing some of these out – sometimes implicitly. Buchanan was aghast when at UCLA in 1968 students challenged what they perceived to be the hegemony of white, male, Chicago-connected scholars within the economics department. Buchanan's response to this attempted disruption of the orthodoxy was to resign his position and return to the intellectual sanctuary of Virginia where he remained for the remainder of his career. As Boettke and Marciano discuss, for Buchanan the student unrest he witnessed at UCLA threatened a complete breakdown of rules and order and a descent into anarchy in academia that would make scholarly activity impossible (pp. 77-78). But this incident may nevertheless demonstrate that Buchanan did not believe that all orthodoxies should be challenged – indeed, he was arguably committed to his own orthodoxy of classical liberal values.

Boettke and Marciano have done an outstanding job in selecting and organising these papers from the Buchanan archives. The new introductory essays to each section are well-written, thoughtful and insightful. This collection shows that Buchanan's work still has much to tell us about the theory and practice of political economy in the classical tradition – not

least the difficulty of reconciling the desire to do interesting, original work that challenges accepted wisdom and our wish to meet the standards of scholarly success recognised by our peers. Buchanan showed, in his time at least, that this particular circle could be squared and one could dare to be different and attain the highest scientific accolades.