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Oct 26 2021

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## Fred Foldvary, a Joyous Friend

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By Dan Klein, Oct 26 2021

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I met Fred in the 1990s, through a shared interest in the voluntary provision of collective goods. In 1996 I joined the faculty at Santa Clara University, and soon thereafter worked with Fred, Henry Demmert, Larry Iannaccone, David Friedman, and Bob Finocchio in a campus institute. Fred was a great friend, colleague, and campus partner during my years at Santa Clara. For decades he was immersed in Bay Area free-market, libertarian, and Georgist circles, teaching at SCU, San Jose State, Cal State-East Bay, and elsewhere. He was also a good friend of the [Independent Institute](#) in Oakland. He lived in Berkeley.



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forward for a government intervention. The rationale grows thinner than ever, but the intervention persists, and textbook rationales die hard.

And when I started [Econ Journal Watch](#), Fred was a core partner, working with me, together at Santa Clara University. To the right is a photo from a 2003 planning meeting.

Fred's help in EJW was vital. He contributed [an article](#) that I regard as the go-to explanation of the ground-rent—or “geo-rent”—tax reform. I'm reluctant to talk it up because the coercionists would only add it atop current confiscations. But Fred persuaded me that it is the least-bad tax. The article nicely explains the idea and its comparative merits. [Adam Smith](#) liked the idea, too!

Fred wrote a great economics dissertation at George Mason University under the direction of Richard Wagner, and it became [Public Goods, Private Communities: The Market Provision of Social Services](#) (Elgar, 1994), a work with 600 Google Scholar [citations](#). The book examines the “public good” rationale for the governmentalization of goods and services, exposes “market-failure” cant, and tells of how private parties provide collective goods and services in real life, voluntarily.

Foldvary had great teachers at George Mason in Richard Wagner, Charles Rowley, and others. Still, he was an autodidact. He let all manner of human experience inform his scholarly judgment, and all manner of moral philosophy. In *Public Goods, Private Communities*, he draws on Adam Smith's [The Theory of Moral Sentiments](#) to exposit the realities of voluntary community. Sentiment plays a role in his theorizing. Fred did not let his academic training incapacitate him.

*Public Goods, Private Communities* imparts a richness to the idea of territoriality. There is a lot to territoriality that relates to issues of problems of excluding non-payers. It is not merely a matter of travel costs, but also of local knowledge and of feeling welcomed and liked. A sense of place involves a spirit of propriety. It's not about clubby homophily but rather that free riders and free loaders are disliked. “Nature, when she formed man for society, endowed him with an original... aversion to offend his brethren. She taught him to feel...pain in their unfavourable regard. She rendered...their disapprobation most mortifying and most offensive” (Smith, TMS). Fred brought moral facts into his theorizing.

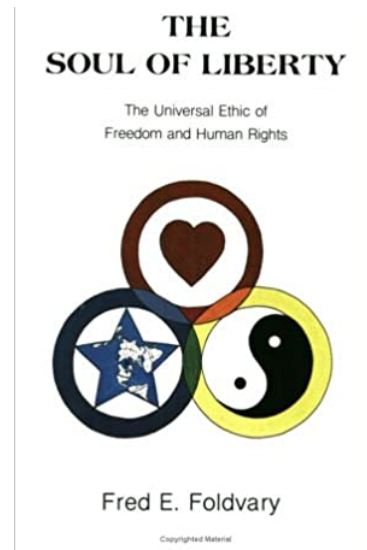


Planning meeting for the formation of Econ Journal Watch, St. Louis, Missouri, 2003. Standing: Randall Holcombe, Donald Boudreaux, George Selgin, Daniel Klein, Matthew Brown. Seated: Bruce Benson, Jane Shaw, Deirdre McCloskey, Lawrence H. White, Fred Foldvary.

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as a computer programmer. But it seems he had always been the intellectual and autodidact. The extensiveness of Fred's thinking showed early, in a little-known book in ethics and intellectual history, [The Soul of Liberty: The Universal Ethic of Freedom and Human Rights](#), published in 1980.

*The Soul of Liberty* is an ambitious and joyous statement of ethics. It was written before Fred became immersed in economics. When he did, he identified especially with Georgism and Austrianism. He worked closely for many decades with the [Robert Schalkenbach Foundation](#). His friends and colleagues there produced [a touching video remembrance](#) of Fred.



In 1997 Fred published "[The Business Cycle: A Georgist-Austrian Synthesis](#)" in the *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*. In it, he wrote: "The 18-year cycle in the US and similar cycles in other countries gives the geo-Austrian cycle theory predictive power: the next major bust, 18 years after the 1990 downturn, will be around 2008, if there is no major interruption such as a global war." Pretty good call more than a decade before the fact! Furthermore, as [Mason Gaffney explains](#), "in Spring 2007, well before the crisis hit, Fred published a booklet entitled *The Depression of 2008*" ([link](#)).

Fred was ever creative, writing copiously for [Progress.org](#) and producing other significant books including [Dictionary of Free-Market Economics](#) and [Beyond Neoclassical Economics: Heterodox Approaches to Economic Theory](#).

Fred was 75 when he died in June 2021. He was a good friend and colleague to me. He was an independent spirit with an independent mind. He was a theist but so far as I know did not go to services. As a supporter of liberty, he was soft-spoken, thoughtful, learned, and dedicated. In the pursuit of wisdom, he was earnest but always playful, too. He taught thousands of students in classrooms. He was liked by everyone who knew him or worked with him.

Thank you, Fred, it's an honor to have shared time together in friendship on this rock.

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Oct 26 2021 at 11:51pm

I knew Fred. Thanks for writing this worthy obituary.

**Mark Brady**



Oct 27 2021 at 12:23am

I too knew Fred. Thank you, Dan, for sharing with us your informed appreciation of the life and accomplishments of Professor Foldvary.

**Gloria Foldvary**



Oct 27 2021 at 12:49am

Thank you so much for your touching tribute to my wonderful husband Fred.

**peter gordon**



Oct 27 2021 at 3:35am

Thanks, Dan. Fred was a good man and a wise man.

**Daniel Klein**



Oct 27 2021 at 8:06am

At Santa Clara, also David Friedman. My apologies David!

David's office is in the Law School—that's my only excuse.

BTW, think David's paper on "natural property" is a masterpiece:

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**Thomas Lee Hutcheson**



Oct 27 2021 at 11:52am

“technological progress often dissolves the rationale put forward for a government intervention”

All sorts of things change the net benefits of regulations. reducing some, increasing others and bringing others into existence. If we were more careful in the way we adopt new regulations, it might be easier to adapt them to changing circumstances.

**Pierre Lemieux**



Oct 30 2021 at 10:40pm

Dan: I did not know that Fred had died. Last time we were in touch, one or two years ago, he suggested that we could meet next time I would be in California. I regret that this meeting never came. He may have persuaded me of the justification of a Georgist land tax, although I share your doubts that they would actually replace other taxes!

Comments are closed.

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By: David Henderson

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By: David Henderson

Sam Enright has written a good review of Bryan Caplan's *Open Borders: The Science and Ethics of Immigration*. I like it for two main reasons: (1) he takes Bryan completely seriously and doesn't take cheap shots, and, related to that, (2) the tone is quite nice. I do have a number of criticisms, but I've been thinking...

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AUSTRIAN ECONOMICS

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By: Dan Klein

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