



What 21st-Century Works Will Merit a Close Reading in 2050?: First Tranche of Responses

Econ Journal Watch

[LINK TO ABSTRACT](#)

prologue by **Daniel B. Klein**

“To a generous Mind nothing is so agreeable as to commend the Works of others, and to be the Means of ushering into the world such happy Productions, as thro’ their prevailing Merits must in Process of Time be esteemed by every Body.”

—Edmund Burke, *The Reformer* (no. 13, 21 April 1748),
as quoted in *A Note-Book of Edmund Burke*,
ed. H. V. F. Somerset, Cambridge University
Press, 1957, page 1.

Edmund Burke died 223 years prior to this year 2020. Today, Burke is certainly not esteemed by “every Body,” but many still read him. Some in 2020 even find his work timely.

Two hundred twenty-three years from now will be 2243. Will any 21st-century authors to date still be read in 2243? If so, which authors?

Let’s start small and ask about 30 years from now, the year 2050: What 21st-century works will merit a close reading in 2050? That is the question asked of *Econ Journal Watch* **authors** (specifically: those who authored material in sections *other than* the Comments section of the journal). So far we have invited such authors with last names beginning A through K. The invitation to authors L through Z will go out soon.

Our invitation clarified the question as follows:

If you were to provide a reading list for someone who in 2050 was aged 40 and who had already come to an outlook like your own, what works published 2001–2020 would you include? What 2001–2020 works would you urge such a person to read if he or she hasn't already?

Clarifications:

- Assume that the person already basically shares your moral and political sensibilities.
- You may select up to ten works.
- Regarding any of the works you select:
 - The work may be a book, an article, a chapter, or any other written form.
 - It may not be authored or coauthored by yourself.
 - It need not be confined to your own outlook. A listed work may be of whatever flavor.
 - It may be from any discipline, represent any point of view, and may even be fiction or poetry.
 - It may be of any language.
- We also encourage brief remarks or annotations about:
 - your reasons for selecting the works,
 - commentary on the selected works, and/or
 - reflections on making such a list.

We intend to publish the responses and to reveal the identity of the provider of each and every response.

In this tranche we have nine replies, from Niclas Berggren, Arthur Diamond, Lanny Ebenstein, David George, Hannes Gissurarson, Charles Goodhart, Jimena Hurtado, Daniel Klein, and Arnold Kling.

response from Niclas Berggren

This reading list contains ten works that have shaped my way of looking at the world and that I consider essential reading for people in 2050 who largely share my moral and political sensibilities. There are certainly important questions, treated by some of my selections, to which neither classical liberalism nor political economy provide unequivocal answers. Can classical liberalism and political

economy be enriched by and gain insight from these kinds of issues? Can those questions be aided by classical liberal or economic thought? Those are some basic thoughts that have motivated me in making my selections. Each selection concerns a topic of great important to me and is accompanied by a brief motivation. The list is provided in alphabetical order.

Acemoglu, Daron, Simon Johnson, and James A. Robinson (2005). “Institutions as the Fundamental Cause of Long-Run Growth.” In Philippe Aghion and Steven N. Durlauf (Eds.), *Handbook of Economic Growth, Volume 1B*. Elsevier: 385–472 ([link](#)). For its simple yet convincing exposition of the importance of both political and economic institutions for the workings of the economy, and of how they develop dynamically.

Becker, Gary S., and Julio Jorge Elías (2007). “Introducing Incentives in the Market for Live and Cadaveric Organ Donations.” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 21(3): 3–24 ([link](#)). For providing a potent illustration of the power of economic reasoning in the service of increasing human well-being through a market for organs, in particular kidneys.

Benatar, David (2006). *Better Never to Have Been: The Harm of Coming into Existence*. Oxford University Press ([link](#)). For providing a thorough and provocative challenge to notions of the positive value of one’s coming into existence. Might it be better never to have been born?

Buchanan, James M. (2005). “Afraid to Be Free: Dependency as Desideratum.” *Public Choice* 124(1–2): 19–31 ([link](#)). For providing an extended analysis of public choice, taking into consideration what political solutions the citizens themselves demand in a setting where “God is dead” and provides neither safety nor security. Will liberty suffer?

Carvalho, Jean-Paul (2013). “Veiling.” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 128(1): 337–370 ([link](#)). For providing a crisp (mathematical) analysis of how regulations of veiling can result in unintended consequences: While compulsory veiling can reduce religiosity, bans on veiling can increase it. Might freedom be the better policy?

Dekker, Erwin (2016). *The Viennese Students of Civilization: The Meaning and Context of Austrian Economics Reconsidered*. Cambridge University Press ([link](#)). For providing a learned, humanistic, and scintillating account of the development of a unique intellectual milieu that produced insights about economics and the prerequisites of civilization.

Hollingshurt, Alan (2004). *The Line of Beauty*. Picador ([link](#)). For providing an exquisite formulation of how two yearnings in life—for beauty and power—worked, individually and in relation to each other, during the Thatcher years. Conflicts, explosions, purges, pleasures and social liberation emerge. Due to or in spite of politics as such?

Kramer, Matthew K. (2003). *In Defense of Legal Positivism: Law Without Trimmings*. Oxford University Press ([link](#)). For providing a modern clarification of what legal positivism is and is not, and of what it does and does not require of us. Is morality overrated as a guide to human behavior? Or does it take forms other than conceived by many?

Strawson, Galen (2010). *Freedom and Belief*. Oxford University Press ([link](#)). For providing a strong defense of the propositions that there is no free will and that as a consequence there is no ultimate moral responsibility. How does liberalism fit into a world in which this holds?

Sugden, Robert (2018). *The Community of Advantage: A Behavioral Economist's Defense of the Market*. Oxford University Press ([link](#)). For providing a game-theoretically and philosophically informed argument for a liberal worldview in spite of the claims of behavioral economics, rejecting the regular preference-based normative approach for one based on participation in voluntary transactions.