Foreword

James M. Buchanan (1919–2013) was an amazing scholar, producing a high volume of quality research for more than 60 years. Much of his first half-century of research was collected into a massive 20-volume collected works in 1999 edited by Geoffrey Brennan, Hartmut Kliemt, and Robert D. Tollison and published by Liberty Fund. The present volume focuses on publications not included in the collection, many of which were not written until after it was published. The papers included in this volume begin in 1998, when Buchanan was 79 and still teaching at George Mason University (GMU) and end in 2013, written shortly before his death. He ‘retired’ from GMU at age 80, but continued to participate in conferences and write for more than a decade. That Buchanan continued to develop new ideas into his 90s is remarkable, and clearly owes much to his partnership with Yong J. Yoon, who worked with Buchanan on a variety of projects during his last two decades.

Although Buchanan wrote the majority of his papers alone, he is best known for his coauthored books and papers, as for example, those with Gordon Tullock and Geoffrey Brennan. In the relatively greater impact of his joint papers and books, one gains an appreciation of how productive such relationships can be, even in cases in which the ‘voice’ of the final product is that of Buchanan. The coauthor’s contributions are creative in their own right, but Buchanan normally integrates them into his own universe, which gives them additional depth and connectivity than his coauthors would have developed on their own; at the same time the insights of his coauthors expand his own universe in directions that he might not have explored working alone.

His work with Yong J. Yoon is similar to his work with other coauthors in that regard. Yoon provided both a sounding board for Buchanan’s own ideas and creative inputs in Buchanan’s own thoughts on the issues being worked out. In many of their joint projects, Yoon provided the mathematics for Jim’s intuitions that made the analysis tighter and conclusions sharper. In at least one of their areas of joint work, it was Yoon that provided the original ideas that launched their research: that on the anti-commons.¹

This collection thus achieves two important purposes: it provides a good sample of Buchanan’s writing during his final decades, which were not covered in his collected works, and allows one to see the unique chemistry between Buchanan and one of his most devoted coauthors.

Careful readers of this volume will see that Buchanan’s intellectual energy and creativity remained high well into his 80s, and that his projects with Yoon represented new lines of research. They explored ideas that were substantially different from his longstanding work on constitutional political economy and public finance, most notably their anti-commons and returns to economies of scale projects. Both represented substantial departures from the existing research in nearby fields, which demonstrates Buchanan’s amazing ability to find neglected holes in what appear to be thoroughly worked areas of research. Several of the individual papers in this volume reveal a similar ability to find fresh insights in well-developed areas of research as with the pieces on management of the commons, prudence, public finance, and voting.

The papers in this volume, like all of Buchanan's work, are well worth dipping into, for the novel insights, his careful development of ideas, and to keep abreast of Buchanan's own expanding universe of scholarship.

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Note

1. This was told to me by Buchanan during one of my visits to his farm outside Blacksburg.