

Writing Books Versus Journal Articles

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- Kimberly Clausing, [Open: The Progressive Case for Free Trade, Immigration, and Global Capital](#) (2019).
- William G. Gale, [Fiscal Therapy: Curing America's Debt Addiction and Investing in the Future](#) (2019).

Why write a book rather than journal articles? Insofar as we write for ourselves, it's a function of the project. Some ideas for projects may best lend themselves to articles, but others may need to be book-length in terms of their scope. But we also write for other people, and one great thing about being an academic is that you have wide entrepreneurial choice regarding which audiences you wish to reach—be it in general, or project-by-project. There's no right or wrong about it (well, maybe there are better and worse choices sometimes), any more than novels should all fit in a particular genre, or scientific research should restrict itself to a particular subject area or methodology. There's also no right answer as between the aims of advancing knowledge, engaging in art for art's sake, and attempting to improve the world—all of these enterprises have value, and of course they often overlap.

Two outstanding recent books by prominent tax economists—[Kim Clausing](#) and [William Gale](#)—show how attempting to improve the world can overlap with advancing the other goals noted above through clear, lucid, convincing explanation and analysis. For the most part, Clausing and Gale explain things that some people already know, in addition to passionately advancing viewpoints to which I am generally sympathetic, although of course not everything they say is wholly beyond debate. Both books reflect admirable project choices by scholars who have done important original research to focus on amalgamation and explanation this time around, in response to the bad place where our country is right now across multiple dimensions (not limited to current political headlines). Clausing and Gale successfully communicate an urgency that even hardcore art-for-art's-sake devotees will respect and admire as showing the authors' commitment to valuable public service. But the books are also very different, in ways that help to show the lack of any single formula for making signal contributions to our society and discourse as a public intellectual.

Kim Clausing's *Open* combines the case for embracing free trade, immigration, and global capital flows with that for vigorously addressing inequality and protecting the vulnerable. It explains not only why protectionism is such a wrong turn—although we should keep in mind the losers from wrenching economic change—but also how markets, properly bounded, can contribute to important social goals that go beyond those associated (to some, pejoratively) merely with neoliberalism. The book ends with a sensible package of proposals (including proposals for real international tax policy reform), which, in a saner political system than we have, we would surely be evaluating.

William Gale's *Fiscal Therapy* examines America's pervasive fiscal myopia. This is not just a matter of budget deficits—or, more broadly, the long-term fiscal gap between projected outlays and revenues—or even of that plus adverse global climate change. It extends also to that sometimes overused, but always under-implemented, phrase, investing in the future, such as through better education, healthcare, and infrastructure improvement. Gale not only explores one complex problem after another with clarity and balance, but offers comprehensive solutions that ought to attract widespread sympathy and dialogue from people of good faith with a broad range of ideological preferences.

Even experts who are unusually polymathic will learn a lot from these two books. But we also owe it to our public calling to help disseminate the issues, ideas, and analyses that Clausing and Gale so skillfully analyze and elucidate. They are each to be thanked both for performing a great public service, and for doing it so engagingly and well.

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