

Research Statement of David A. Spitzley

Current Research

My current research efforts are unsurprisingly directed towards my dissertation topic, the effects of wealth concentration on subsequent economic growth. Specifically, I am using several well-established international datasets to test for the presence of long run growth effects emerging from initial wealth distributions, using standard regression methods. The primary contribution of my research is combining a historically underutilized datasetn assets from the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization with a better theoretically founded growth model than said dataset has been applied to in the past. In addition, I will be attempting to establish whether the dataset in question functions as a valid measure of wealth concentration for countries at all levels of development.

Future Research

My research interests are shaped by three major tendencies: 1) a preference for empirical research: while I am acutely aware of the importance of pure theoretical work in providing tools for future research, I find attempts to test its validity by mapping theory onto reality much more engaging; 2) a concern for well-crafted public policy: I believe that economics is one of the best tools available for devising policies that actually advance their stated goals, and that was one of the primary reasons I entered the field of economics in the first place; and 3) curiosity about the interactions of social and economic systems; while I have minimal interest in purely financial topics such as capital asset pricing, I find everything from the economics of fads to the comparative significance of relative and absolute poverty to be sources of potential research questions.

Clearly, not all of these impulses will be active in every piece of research, but they provide a sense of where I will be inclined to direct my attention. In the short run, I will (as is typical) attempt to refine the observations from my dissertation into publishable form, and as a follow-up I would like to explore the potential for compiling better datasets on wealth distribution from available sources published by national governments. Beyond that, I have contacts with two policy organizations, the National Center for Employee Ownership and the Green Institute, which have an ongoing need for research on subjects germane to their missions; in both cases, the performance and management of employee-owned firms is a likely topic.

If my research agenda seems vague from the above, I claim two major extenuating circumstances. The first is that the time constraints involved in developing a dissertation while working full-time have made it positively dangerous to get too attracted to any other research topics, and thus I have not had the luxury of planning out my future efforts in great detail. The second is that I am by nature a generalist, and as such have not selected a single topic that I intend to pound flat over the course of the next four decades; my hope is that I will be able to work on a variety of subjects over the course of my career. Suffice it to say that coming up with topics for research is not a problem for me, as can be shown by my undertaking two separate directed study projects during my doctoral work.

One final facet of my research tendencies I want to mention is that I am quite comfortable working collaboratively. Several years of helping groups bring application development projects from inception to conclusion has shown that I'm pretty effective at structuring multi-person efforts, and I've found the exchange of ideas that occurs when working as a team to be one of the most intellectually invigorating aspects of my experiences both at work and in my political activities. As such, I believe that I would be a positive influence on the collegial environment of any organization which hires me.