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Ideology Über Alles? Economics Bloggers on Uber, Lyft, and Other Transportation Network Companies

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LINK TO ABSTRACT

For decades in most major U.S. cities, taxicab services have been organized as cartels, often with the support of municipal governments. Recently a new competitive threat has emerged in the form of 'ridesharing services' or 'transportation network companies' (TNCs), which operate through smartphone apps.[2] The new apps allow consumers to bypass traditional taxicabs, offering the potential of lower prices, faster service, higher quality, and services when people might not have used a traditional taxicab.

In many cities the taxicab cartels and local regulators have been fighting such services. The fighting has been occurring for one overriding reason: transportation network companies are or have recently been in complete violation of current laws and regulations, or at the very least of questionable legality. In most cities, it is illegal to pick up riders on the street without having the proper government license, and drivers with Uber, Lyft, and other companies typically make no attempt to obtain these licenses. They will either operate in clear violation of the current

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2. In this paper I will use the more cumbersome but accurate phrase *transportation network companies*, abbreviated TNCs, which is being used by courts and the legal system. See, e.g., the California Public Utility Commission (link).

rules, attempt to change the rules, or both—often, sequentially, in that order.[3] The objections raised by traditional taxicabs are often presented as concerns about consumer protection (e.g., safety or consistent pricing) and about protecting their own income stream, considering that they had, in the past, incurred substantial costs to obtain government permission to ply their trade.

Economists' views on taxicab markets and TNCs

A good sense of economists' general views on taxicab markets and their new competitors can be gleaned from two sources I present here. The first is a survey article by Adrian Moore and Ted Balaker (2006), who examined the published research by economists on taxi market deregulation. They found that of 28 works discussing this issue, 19 generally supported deregulation, two had mixed results, and seven generally opposed deregulation. Of the seven opposing deregulation, just one was an empirical study or case study, the others being theoretical works. Meanwhile, eight of the 19 supporting studies were empirical or case studies. While not finding a perfect consensus, Moore and Balaker (2006) does indicate support in the published research for deregulating taxi markets.

The second item worth highlighting upfront is a recent survey of prominent economists conducted as part of the University of Chicago Booth School's Initiative on Global Markets Forum (IGM Economic Experts Panel 2014). In September 2014, the panel was asked to respond to the following statement: "Letting car services such as Uber or Lyft compete with taxi firms on equal footing regarding genuine safety and insurance requirements, but without restrictions on prices or routes, raises consumer welfare." Of the 43 economists on the panel, 40 choose to respond to this statement. All 40 responded with "strongly agree" or "agree," with most answering "strongly agree" ("uncertain" is also an option, though none exercised it on this statement). Taken together, the Moore and Balaker article and the IGM Forum survey indicate there is a lot of support among economists for taxi market deregulation in general and for companies such as Uber and Lyft.

One of the roles of economists as public intellectuals is to comment publicly on issues of importance, particularly those policy issues that will increase social welfare but may be blocked by concentrated interests. One form of public outreach is through online blogging, and many prominent economists now blog regularly;

3. Similar companies that have tried to change the law before beginning operations in the market have not found much success. See, e.g., the case of Night School (Cagle 2015).

other economists have become prominent through blogging. Economists might choose to have a public blog for a variety of reasons, but an overriding reason is likely that they wish to be engaged with the public as a communicator of economic ideas. While some economics blogs cover specific areas (e.g., macroeconomics or monetary theory), many also serve as general interest blogs. These general interest blogs often discuss issues that are currently in the public debate, or bring issues into the public eye.

With the public intellectual role of economics bloggers in mind, I performed a search of top economics blogs for key terms related to TNC apps. My primary interest is to understand which bloggers are covering Uber, Lyft, and related services and whether they are emphasizing the benefits to consumers from the new competition. A secondary interest is to investigate whether there is a connection between the bloggers' political ideologies and their coverage of this issue. Before discussing my search, I will briefly discuss taxicab markets.

Taxicab cartels

In most U.S. cities today, taxicab markets are not organized on the principles of free competition. Instead, suppliers operate as cartels, almost always sanctioned by municipal authorities. To be clear, again: until very recently, TNCs have generally been illegal in U.S. cities. Only recently have TNCs started to push back against regulations in some cities, establishing some legal space to sell rides to willing buyers.

The clearest examples of cartel behavior are in cities where there is a numerical cap on the number of taxicab permits, enforced by government power. In cities which operate under permit or medallion systems, the number of taxicabs is fixed by a government agency or a private organization that is delegated such powers by the municipal government. The permit systems are often accompanied by a uniform pricing system to prevent price competition within the cartel. In some cities permits are allowed to be traded on a secondary market, which gives us good price data on the value of the restricted market to the taxicabs. In the largest U.S. cities, permits are often purchased for hundreds of thousands of dollars (Badger 2014). In New York City, the "average market price" for an individual medallion was recently reported to be over a million dollars (Flegenheimer 2013).

The fact that individual taxicab drivers and corporate taxicab companies are willing to pay such large sums for the permits is a strong indication that monopoly rents are being earned. It also strongly suggests that there is a large loss of consumer surplus and a deadweight loss to society. Such results can be represented in basic supply-and-demand analysis. But that basic analysis is inadequate when it comes to illuminating what really happens on the supply side of the market, and the welfare effects over time.

In an early application of his new theory of rent seeking, Gordon Tullock (1975) described a problem he termed the "transitional gains trap." Tullock specifically used the New York City taxicab medallion system as an example of a market subject to this trap, where a historical limit on the number of taxicabs gradually capitalized value into the licenses as demand increased over the years. Over time, Tullock noted, those who enter on the supply side of the market do not earn super-normal returns, because the privilege of supplying the market is something *they have to pay for*. All of the super-normal profits were delivered in the past, to the recipients of the privileges when these were first created. New suppliers pay dearly to enter the market, so, even though they receive artificially high prices thereafter, those revenues have to be put against the artificially high entry costs they incurred.

It is no wonder that those who have incurred such artificially high costs are extremely angry about the TNCs, and even feel as though an injustice is being visited upon them. They now stand to lose out from the system ending, and they may be willing to mount lobbying efforts that approach the value of their investments (which include the investments in their privileges). Meanwhile, consumers have little individual incentive to lobby against the medallion system; they may not even know that it harms them. The "trap" thus closes: few if any real resources are directed toward the prospect of reform, while powerful efforts are consistently mobilized in support of the status-quo rules.

The moral of Tullock's story is that society's falling into the transitional gains trap is tragic. The super-normal beneficiaries are all in the past, and now and forever into the future the living are stuck in a system in which *no one* really garners super-normal returns—and, of course, the system is also otherwise inefficient, with higher prices and lower quantities transacted.

Tullock's analysis helps us enter into the disappointment and anger of the suppliers threatened by the TNCs. But it also helps us to see the larger picture: The emergence of the TNCs creates a golden opportunity to escape the transitional gains trap. Such an escape would hurt the incumbent privileged suppliers; but that would be a one-time hurt; and maybe it would be possible to offer up some aid to them for this one-time hurt? But the larger opportunity is to open up a market that now has discovered numerous fabulous new modes of production efficiency and consumer satisfaction, meaning that, by comparison, the restricted system is even more inefficient, even more tragic, than it had been. The question is whether society will escape this particular transitional gains trap.

Dynamic pricing

Uber and Lyft both use a form of dynamic pricing, sometimes called "surge" pricing, in contrast to the fixed pricing in traditional taxicabs based only on mileage and time.[4] Prices can adjust upward from the base rate when quantity demanded exceeds quantity supplied, sometimes several multiples of the base rate.[5] This is not, generally speaking, a pricing method that consumers otherwise encounter in their day-to-day lives. Gasoline prices come the closest, but even these change at most only a few times a day, and only by small amounts.

While dynamic pricing can be a source of frustration for consumers unfamiliar with the practice, it is an excellent example that economics bloggers could use to teach the public about the role of prices. Dynamic pricing provides an incentive for more drivers to get on the road, or to go to specific areas, and an incentive for consumers to wait until busy times pass (Hall, Kendrick, and Nosko 2015). Neither the drivers nor riders need know why the price increase occurs, but the dynamic pricing induces them to act in socially beneficial ways much as Friedrich Hayek describes in his famous essay "The Use of Knowledge in Society" (1945).

Dynamic pricing has been a target of much criticism. Governments of the city and state of New York both have seen bills introduced to regulate it (Eisinger and Fermino 2015; Brunelle and Rubinstein 2015). And prominent University of Chicago law professor Eric Posner (2015) has argued for price caps on Uber and similar services on the grounds that TNCs could, someday, displace taxi cartels as the new monopoly.

Professor Posner notwithstanding, I believe, and proceed on the supposition, that the government-created taxi cartels are undesirable, and that legalizing the TNCs and allowing dynamic pricing would be greatly to the good.

Method of the blog search

To perform the search on economics blogs, I used an August 2013 list of the top 200 economics blogs from Onalytica.[6] It was the only such list I could find

4. The pricing practices of traditional taxicabs are of course often regulated, which is to say they are specified by the regulator.
5. See "What is Surge Pricing?" on Uber's website (**link**) and "Prime Time" on Lyft's website (**link**).
6. The Onalytica webpage currently appears to be down (**link**), but an archived version is available (**link**).

that is produced in a semi-transparent way, and it included all of the blogs that are popularly referenced in the economics blogosphere.

When possible, I used a blog's internal search engine to perform the search. If these searches appeared to be missing relevant posts, I supplemented the searches with a site search via Google or other search engines to find additional relevant posts. The terms I searched for were "Uber" and "Lyft," as these are the dominant TNCs. Any discussion of the issue of taxicab cartels is highly likely to mention one of these services. I did not limit my search by date, and I attempted to include as many blog posts as possible; the data goes through August 2015.

Several blogs on the Onalytica list were excluded from my search. In this paper I am primarily interested in academic economists based in the United States writing for a general audience. Thus, the search was mostly limited to those with a Ph.D., currently teaching at a U.S. institution, though prominent policy analysts with advanced degrees were also included (even if they have no current academic affiliation). Graduate students in economics programs were also included. Many blogs were excluded on one or more of the following grounds:

- Any blogs from economists not primarily based in the United States were excluded.
- Any large 'group blogs' with multiple bloggers were excluded. Having more than one blogger was not solely a condition for exclusion, but blogs with many bloggers and many rotating guest bloggers were excluded as it would be extremely difficult to ascertain the ideology of all these individuals (in many cases, they are not academic economists anyway).
- Blogs written under pseudonyms were excluded.
- Blogs that are not written by economists (e.g., law blogs, finance blogs, or tax blogs) were also excluded, as were several blogs focused on investing and stock markets (even though some of them discuss matters related to TNCs, e.g., Uber's market valuation).
- Several blogs now appear to be defunct as they have not updated the blog in months or years. A list of the excluded blogs can be found in the Excel file that accompanies this paper (**link**).

Finally, I should note that I included all blogs that were not excluded by one of the criteria discussed above, even if the blogs do not have a general-interest outlook. While I did not expect, for example, a blog focused on monetary theory to discuss the politics of Uber, I included such blogs in the search anyway for completeness.

Results of the blog search

Of the 200 blogs from the Onalytica list mentioned above, by my criteria 138 of the blogs were excluded, from one or more of the exclusion criteria (including 12 blogs that appear to be defunct or haven't been updated in more than a year). After the exclusion criteria were applied, 62 blogs were left to search for mentions of Uber or Lyft. Of these 62 blogs in my sample, 37 made no mention of Uber or Lyft through August 2015. The remaining 25 did mention Uber or Lyft at least once, and for six blogs by more than one blogger.

I then analyzed the content of the relevant blog posts to get an idea of whether the blogger was expressing support for Uber and Lyft, and if so whether that support was strong or weak. I coded any blog post as "strong support" if the author seemed, on the whole, to support strongly the freedom of TNCs and their trading partners, as shown, for example, by the author's accentuating the benefits to consumers of the increased competition or free pricing system. I coded a blog post "weak support" if it was supportive, on the whole, but only mildly. For blog posts that were openly hostile to TNCs, without any real discussion of corresponding benefits, I coded the blog post "negative." Blog posts that were simply informative, without any clear support or opposition, I coded "neutral."

Whatever downsides new TNCs may have, they are, in my view, a likely overall boon to local economies. Prior to smartphone-based TNCs, the case for taxi deregulation was already strong (Moore and Balaker 2006). New technology makes it stronger. TNCs serve to break down legal cartels and thereby provide benefits in the form of increasing consumer welfare. There may be legitimate concerns about safety and consumer understand dynamic pricing. Raising these and other concerns in a blog post is perfectly legitimate and perhaps part of the economist's job as public intellectual. But I think that the concerns about TNCs are outweighed by the benefits of breaking down the taxi cartels, of escaping, finally, this particular transitional gains trap.

The position of "silence" on this or any issue also deserves a few comments. Uber is but one of many economic issues. But TNCs and taxi cartels are an issue where most economists, regardless of their field of specialization, should be able to offer basic thoughts on the benefits of competition and free pricing. Especially given that there is often negative press about TNCs, the economist has an opportunity to contextualize the issue and provide insights that are lacking in the broader public debate.

Also for the "silent" bloggers, I listed only those individuals who write at a blog where no bloggers had discussed TNCs. For example, on the *EconLog* blog, Bryan Caplan has not discussed Uber or Lyft, but several of his co-bloggers have, so Caplan is not here listed among the "silent."

A further complicating factor in scoring economics blog posts is that a common practice in blogging is to provide quotations from other blogs or simply link to the posts of others. How do we interpret a quotation or link? Is it agreement with the linked material? Or might a quotation be to point out particularly bad analysis? Sometimes, the author of the blog provides guidance on this issue (e.g., "I agree with Professor X. Y. Zee's analysis of Uber"). But in many cases judgment and context are necessary to interpret the citing of other blogs. As a default, my assumption is that the blog author agrees with the individual they are quoting, unless sufficient guidance is given in another direction.[7]

Table 1 shows the results of the blog search and my coding of the posts by the authors, listed within each category code alphabetically by first name. A more detailed list of the relevant blog posts and my codings is found in the Excel file (**link**). I have divided up the list by placing each academic blogger into categories based on the content of their blog posts and provided links to the relevant blog posts. But please note that for some bloggers, not all of their posts correspond to the categories I have placed the blogger under. For example, Tyler Cowen is listed under "multiple strong supporting blog posts" and has six linked blog posts, but this does not mean that *all* six of Cowen's posts are strongly supporting posts (some are neutral posts). Instead, it means that Cowen had more than one strong supporting blog post and no negative blog posts (there were no bloggers that had both negative and positive posts).

To summarize the table, of the 62 blogs in my sample, around 60 percent (37 blogs) made no mention of Uber or Lyft. I also divided up the "silent" blogs into general interest blogs and what I consider niche or specialized blogs, of which there are 19 blogs. Some of these blogs have a narrow focus, such as monetary policy, macroeconomics, or environmental policy. Thus, we probably would not expect them to mention Uber or Lyft. That leaves 18 general interest blogs which were silent.

Focusing just on those that did mention Uber or Lyft, I found that three bloggers were primarily negative in their views of TNCs, four were neutral or mostly neutral, and 25 academic economics bloggers had generally supportive posts about TNCs. If I lump the negative and neutral bloggers with the 18 silent general interest blogs (treating each of these as individual data points), there are 25 in this combined category, exactly equal to the 25 generally supportive bloggers.

7. If any blog author disagrees with my interpretation of his or her meaning, I hope he or she will contact me about it.

TABLE 1. Economists' views on Uber and Lyft, as expressed on economics blogs, grouped and coded by author

Economist	Blog title
Multiple strong supporting blog posts	
Alberto Mingardi (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12)	EconLog
Alex Tabarrok (1, 2, 3)	Marginal Revolution
Art Carden (1, 2, 3, 4, 5)	EconLog
David Henderson (1, 2, 3, 4)	EconLog
Don Boudreaux (1, 2, 3, 4, 5)	Cafe Hayek
John C. Whitehead (1, 2)	Environmental Economics
John Cochrane (1, 2, 3, 4, 5)	Grumpy Economist
Lynne Kiesling (1, 2, 3, 4)	Knowledge Problem
Matthew E. Kahn (1, 2, 3, 4, 5)	Environmental and Urban Economics
Matthew Mitchell (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6)	Neighborhood Effects
Michael Munger (1, 2)	Kids Prefer Cheese
Noah Smith (1, 2, 3)	Noahpinion
Per Bylund (1, 2, 3)	Ludwig von Mises Institute
Russ Roberts (1, 2)	Cafe Hayek
Timothy Taylor (1, 2)	Conversable Economist
Tom Woods (1, 2)	self titled
Tyler Cowen (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6)	Marginal Revolution
One strong supporting blog post	
Abigail Hall (1)	Beacon Blog
David Howden (1)	Ludwig von Mises Institute
Jodi Beggs (1, 2)	Economists Do It With Models
Lawrence J. McQuillan (1)	Beacon Blog
Michael Giberson (1)	Knowledge Problem
Miles Kimball (1)	Confessions of a Supply-Side Liberal
Paul H. Rubin (1)	Truth on the Market
Robert P. Murphy (1)	Free Advice
One weak supporting blog post (plus neutrals)	
Al Roth (1, 2, 3, 4*, 5)	Market Design
Paul Krugman (1, 2*, 3)	Conscience of a Liberal
Negative blog post(s)	
Mark Thoma (1, 2)	Economist's View
Peter Dorman (1)	Econospeak
Robert Reich (1, 2, 3, 4, 5)	self titled
Only neutral blog post(s)	
Brad DeLong (1, 2, 3, 4)	self titled
Jeff Ely (1)	Cheap Talk

Silent on Uber/Lyft (general interest blogs)	
Daniel J. Mitchell	International Liberty
Daniel Kuehn	Facts and Other Stubborn Things
David Friedman	Ideas
Donald Marron	self titled
Ed Dolan	self titled
Evan Soltas	self titled
Greg Mankiw	self titled
J. W. Mason	The Slack Wire
Jared Bernstein	On the Economy
John B. Taylor	Economics One
Jonathan M. F. Catalán	Economic Thought
Keith Hennessey	self titled
Kenneth Thomas	Middle Class Political Economist
Matias Vernengo, David M. Fields, and Nathaniel Cline	Naked Keynesianism
Owen Zidar	self titled
Rajiv Sethi	self titled
Robin Hanson	Overcoming Bias
Steven Landsburg	self titled
Silent on Uber/Lyft (niche/specialized blogs)	
Bill Woolsey	Monetary Freedom
Casey Mulligan	Supply and Demand
Chris Coyne, Dave Prychitko, Frederic Sautet, Pete Boettke, Peter T. Leeson, and Steve Horwitz	Coordination Problem
Dan Ariely	self titled
Dani Rodrik	self titled
Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson	Why Nations Fail
David Andolfatto	MacroMania
David Beckworth	Macro and Other Market Musings
David Glasner	Uneasy Money
Gerald O'Driscoll, Larry White, George Selgin, and Chuck Moulton	Free Banking
Glenn Hubbard and Tim Kane	Balance
James D. Hamilton and Menzie Chinn	Econbrowser
Michael J. Roberts	Greed, Green & Grains
Nicolai J. Foss, Peter G. Klein, Richard Langlois, and Lasse B. Lein	Organizations and Markets
Robert Stavins	An Economic View of the Environment
Scott Sumner	The Money Illusion
Simon Johnson and James Kwak	The Baseline Scenario
Stephen D. Williamson	New Monetarist Economics
William Easterly	NYU Development Research Institute

Paul Krugman

Paul Krugman's blog *The Conscience of a Liberal* mentions Uber in three blog posts. Krugman's blog is, arguably, the most influential economics blog (it was at the top of the Onalytica list) and is published on the website of what is arguably the most influential newspaper, the *New York Times*. For these reasons alone it deserves special attention.

Krugman first mentions Uber in a December 2013 blog post titled "Uber and the Macro Wars." This post is not about TNCs but rather macroeconomic thought (part of a series of posts on the topic). But two paragraphs in the post use Uber as an analogy for the use of "wage stickiness" in macroeconomic models. Krugman suggests that dynamic pricing works in theory (like flexible wages in macro models) but for certain services consumers hate this pricing strategy in practice. I scored this December 2013 Krugman blog post as "neutral."

Krugman's second blog post mentioning Uber was in July 2014, titled "Life Without Cars." He begins his analysis by saying: "the big benefit from new IT-mediated car services will come if they make it possible for lots of people—and not just people in Manhattan—to live without owning their own cars." Krugman's main point is that if Uber and similar services become widespread and reliable, many Americans can forgo owning a car, which is a resource they currently greatly underutilize (according to Krugman). The discussion is supportive of TNCs and explains why dynamic pricing is beneficial. But Krugman claims that the main benefit for both individuals and society is that we would not be tying up so much capital in automobiles. While all valid points, Krugman missed an opportunity to highlight some of the bigger and clearer benefits of TNCs, such as breaking down the cartels and the consequent consumer benefits that would arise—for example, for people who do not at present have a car. I coded this blog post "weak support."

Krugman's most recent relevant post, from July 2015, is titled "Uber and the New Liberal Consensus." The piece points out reasons why Uber has become a hot political topic. Oddly, it does not provide what I consider to be the primary reason, which is that the new competition hurts the traditional, privileged suppliers. Rather, according to Krugman, one reason that Uber has become a hot political topic is that Uber represents the "smartphone revolution." A second reason is given more centrality: Uber's "workers supposedly are free contractors, not employees, exempting the company from most of the regulations designed to protect employee interests," and "Republicans are eager to dismantle as many worker protections as they can." But Krugman does not come out against Uber on this score. He concludes by saying that is it possible "to promote the use of new technology without prejudicing the interests of workers. But progressives need to work on doing that, and not let themselves get painted as enemies of innovation." Krugman coaches progressives on how not to be painted a certain way; I coded the post as "neutral."

Ideology

Of those expressing support for Uber and Lyft, nearly all are either classical liberal or of no very discernible ideology.[8] For left-leaning U.S. academic economics bloggers, they are by and large silent on the issue: Krugman has one supportive post, a few others have neutral posts, while Mark Thoma, Peter Dorman, and Robert Reich are outright hostile towards TNCs.

The silence or lack of clear support from the left-leaning bloggers on TNCs should, perhaps, be considered at least mildly surprising, particularly because outside of the blogosphere a good deal of support has been voiced for TNCs from left-leaning economists. One prominent example is Alan Krueger, the former chair of Obama's Council of Economic Advisers and a strong supporter of minimum-wage increases (Solman 2013). In January 2015, Krueger released a working paper, coauthored with Jonathan Hall of Uber, which examined the labor market for Uber's drivers. Since Krueger's field of specialty is labor economics, it is not surprising that he chose to focus on the supply side of the market rather than on consumers. But even so, Hall and Krueger do say that TNCs "lower prices for consumers compared with" taxis and that TNCs do so without necessarily harming drivers because the lower prices induce a greater quantity demanded (2015, 25). And Krueger has speculated elsewhere that "Uber has 'reduced the value' of companies that had monopolies on the industry," a clear reference to the cartel aspect of most taxicab markets (quoted in Golub 2015).

The general silence of left-leaning economics bloggers on TNCs is also puzzling given that, in notable ways, the matter intersects with traditional concerns of the left. TNCs pit consumers against government-backed cartels. TNCs 'cut out the middle man,' allowing drivers to receive a higher share of their fares as opposed to more profit going to corporate owners. TNC drivers enjoy more secure working conditions than do taxi drivers, as they carry no cash at all, and they have the slightly greater assurance of safety that comes from the riders having registered their identities within the app (as compared to taxis picking up street hails, where the passengers are completely anonymous). One of the longstanding

8. I fully acknowledge that I may be incorrectly interpreting the ideology of bloggers on all sides of this issue. Any feedback from bloggers themselves would be appreciated.

complaints against taxi monopolies has been a possible disinclination to pick up minority passengers or to serve poor neighborhoods (Davis and Johnson 1983, 81; Suzuki 1995; Moore and Balaker 2006, 112), but TNCs stand to enhance mobility by unleashing service to all neighborhoods. TNCs also, of course, offer earnings opportunities to persons with spare time and an automobile.

Above I mentioned the IGM Forum survey question on Uber and Lyft (IGM Economic Experts Panel 2014). It is worth highlighting the panel again in the context of ideology, as it includes members with diverse political views, including many that are left-leaning. For example, another former Obama CEA chair, Austan Goolsbee, is on the panel. Not only did Goolsbee answer "strongly agree" that allowing Uber and Lyft raises consumer welfare, he gave a confidence level of 10 and elected to leave a comment: "yes. yes. a thousand times yes. Instead, try calling for a cab on Saturday night from the south side of Chicago and see what happens." Goolsbee clearly sees legalization of the TNCs as a way to address an issue that left-leaning individuals (and others) should care about: underserved urban areas. The IGM Forum demonstrates that when left-leaning economists are *asked* about TNCs, rather than having to bring the issue up on their own blog, they may often express support and sometimes enthusiasm.

Conclusion

The case in favor of transportation network companies is not unassailable. There are regulatory and equity concerns that should be taken seriously and addressed. Discussing these concerns, but also explaining why TNCs are good for consumers and the economy, is an important activity for economic educators, bloggers, and public intellectuals to take up. Many economics bloggers have chosen to cover this topic, and I commend them for doing so. It offers an excellent opportunity to explain fundamental issues of microeconomics (e.g., price adjustments to changing supply and demand conditions) and political economy (e.g., monopoly rents and rent-seeking). Classical liberal economics bloggers have made much of this opportunity, but the left has been mostly silent.

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