

An academic blog? Come on.....

<https://www.taxresearch.org.uk/Blog/2018/06/19/an-academic-blog-come-on/>

Published: January 12, 2026, 8:08 pm

I've just read a column by Paul Krugman on whether the US has full employment, or not. I think he's called the issue wrong by saying it has, but that's not my reason [for noting the column he wrote](#). I am instead drawing attention to what he has said on the state of academic discourse on this and other issues, by saying:

*An aside: the way this discussion is taking place marks a kind of new frontier in the mechanics of scientific communication — and, I think, an unfortunate one. **Once upon a time economic debate took place in the pages of refereed journals, but that stopped being true at least 30 years ago**, with working papers becoming the principal means of communication. Even that turned out to be too slow in the face of rapid change; so during the crisis years, say from 2008-2013, a lot of discussion and debate moved to blogs, which I'd say worked very well. In retrospect, the debates we all had over leverage, monetary policy, fiscal policy and more were really classic — the 21st-century equivalent of, say, Keynes vs. Ohlin on trade balances and relative prices.*

But this latest debate has taken place largely through dueling Twitter threads — which is, I'd say, awful. The economists involved are very smart, and the threads very informative; but for people trying to keep track, including students, this is really a mess. If you want an entry point, you might try this [tweet by Nick Bunker](#). **But guys, we really need something like, you know, articles — blog posts would do the trick - that summarize your positions.**

I add the emphasis for a reason. It's because he is right: refereed academic journals are really not where academic debate now is. It can take two or more years to get a paper out in such a journal. To get published you have to concentrate on a single, usually minute, point of contention. And then you have to make it seem as if this single issue is really important and in itself in need of resolution, even if that means ignoring the whole bigger picture of what really matters.

But academics have to write such contrived pieces. I'm learning the game. I am not wholly sure it is a useful one. Certainly, as a means for advancing understanding in

social science I doubt its efficacy, especially when the considerable cost of academic time dedicated to such work because of the arcane way in which academic achievement is appraised is taken into account.

In 2005 when considering how to create the tax justice movement John Christensen and I both realised that we would never create change by writing academic journal papers, even though we were both linked to universities at the time. I am quite sure in retrospect that we were right.

Now I am a full time academic as my day job and I have five such papers in progress right now. But what will have more impact, those papers, or this blog? You already know the answer to that.

We need more academic blogs.

And we need their role to be recognised as of importance in themselves.

But I am not sure there is much chance of that happening. We'll throw money at producing papers of little likely overall consequence instead, I am afraid to say.