# IA’s long reading list (annotated, unordered)

In no particular order, a short annotated list of books that I highly recommend that you read. After the title is in brackets, the subject matter and the author by last name. Each book ought be easy to find online. A very short oversimplification of the thesis is provided perhaps with some thoughts.

## Subscriptions

Subscribe to *The Economist*. I read it cover to cover over the week.

The *Financial Times* is also excellent. The *New York Times* is generally decent.

## Core reading list

These are core books that I believe everyone should read in their entireties. They convey important ideas which have broad application. At a very broad level: institutions are important, rent-seeking is bad, democracy is not perfect, authoritarianism is bad.

* Seeing like a state (Public policy) (Scott)
  + States prefer simplification of reality. In the modern era, authoritarian governments attempted to make reality conform to their simplifications. It does not.
  + Smooth operation of production and societies requires people to employ situation-specific skills that can only be learnt by experience. Modes of operation which move people around to make those skills useless fail.
* Democracy for realists (Political science) (Achen, Bartels)
  + Democracy does not pick policies from people’s preferences. People are born into parties or factions. Those parties then shape their preferences and update them over time.
  + When not guided by party loyalty, people choose based on near-term blind retrospection. Shark attacks in 1916 mean vote out the incumbents, even if they had nothing to do with them.
  + Democracy is good not because of policy effectiveness, but because of a stable framework in which power can be peacefully transferred from one group to another.
* Myth of the rational voter (Political economy) (Caplan)
  + Voters at the polls do not pick rational economic policies. They are systematically biased *against markets*, *against foreigners*, *towards misallocating labour*, and *towards pessimism*. These are human biases.
  + Voters have no reason to update their biases because an individual’s vote does not matter. There is no cost to the voter to believing false information.
* Dead aid (Development, Political economy) (Moyo)
  + Aid to the developing world does not work because it disconnects regimes from their tax bases, creates rent seeking, and encourages corruption.
  + It would be preferable for the world to deny future aid flows to Africa, excepting extraordinary aid like disaster or famine relief, so to reduce corruption and build a civil society.
* Why nations fail (Development) (Acemoglu, Robinson)
  + Development is fundamentally premised on the creation of inclusive institutions which permit people to stably pursue economic activity.
* Political order and political decay (Political science) (Fukuyama)
  + The modern state is premised on effective exercise of power, the rule of law, and democratic accountability. This permits people to trust the public good is being upheld and delegate power to people who know enough to do it.
  + Patrimonialism, where favours are exchanged for patronage, undermines the modern impersonal state. It also turns the state from a problem-solving mechanism to an ATM for special interests.
* The Dictator’s Handbook (Political science)
  + There are keys to power. Use them. Discard the unnecessary ones.
  + Tax or natural resources are treasure. Bribe the necessary people and do not let them find a better person (for them) to put in charge of distributions.
* Paradox of plenty (Political economy) (Karl)
  + Natural resources are a curse. Dutch disease is a thing.
  + Rent seeking behaviours around natural resources centralise power in the state, undermine civil society, and hollow out all other industries.

## Pure economics

Books in this section are too varied on too many topics to summarise easily. I still recommend them because they give technical knowledge about how the world works.

But first, a shout-out to the American Economic Association’s Journal of Economic Perspectives, which is generally for the educated mass market. They have a number of articles on a lot of different things which you can find here: <https://www.aeaweb.org/journals/jep/classroom>. Very broad; for recent articles, still quite relevant; and generally interesting.

The books:

* Economics of Money, Banking, and Financial Markets (Economics) (Mishkin). Undergraduate financial economics textbook.
* Macroeconomics of the Financial System (Economics) (Mankiw). Undergraduate financial macroeconomics text.
* International Finance: Theory & Policy (Economics) (Krugman, Obstfeld, Melitz). Undergraduate international macroeconomics textbook.
* Crisis and Response: An FDIC history (Economics) (Various, FDIC)
* Economic Development (Economics) (Todaro, Smith). Undergraduate economic development textbook. General introduction at the 30-thousand-foot level to:
  + theories,
  + domestic policy (e.g. urbanisation, human capital, agricultural policy, the environment, the civil society), and
  + international policy (e.g. international trade, balance of payments, finance, fiscal policy).

Citations are also plentiful and helpful for finding widely-cited academic articles.

* Introduction to Modern Economic Growth (Economics) (Acemoglu). *Graduate level* introduction on the current stock theoretical models of economic growth and development. This is theory side.
* Introduction to Econometrics (Econometrics) (Stock, Watson). Undergraduate econometrics textbook; this is a highly standardised text which is used in most American universities. Mostly, it has to do with methods of showing something from empirical data. This is empirics side.

These are some articles or chapters that I thought especially interesting. I only ever memorised Bluebook because all the other ones could be automated. Pardon any incorrectly formed citations (omitting years).

* The Economics of Healthcare (Economics) (Mankiw). [Excerpt](https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/mankiw/files/economics_of_healthcare.pdf) from a chapter of a textbook, provided by the author on his website. It gives a broad overview of how the healthcare market *doesn’t* work.
* Deaton, *Income, Health and Well-being around the world: Evidence from the Gallup World Poll*, 22 J Econ Perspectives 53. How good is GDP as a measure of happiness? Decent, not a sufficient statistic.
* Posner, *An Economic Theory of the Criminal Law*, 85 Colum L Rev 1193.
* Diamond, Saez, *Case for a progressive tax*, 25 J Econ Perspectives 165.
* Hanson, Kashyap, Stein, *Macroprudential approach to financial regulation*, 25 J Econ Perspectives 3.
* Shapira, Zingales, *Is Pollution Value-Maximising? The DuPont Case*, Nat’l Bureau of Econ Research Working paper 23866.

## Esoterica

This section is about esoterica which most people probably aren’t interested in, but I found interesting.

* Sapiens (History) (Harari). Why are humans the dominant species on planet Earth? Read this and find out.
* Against the grain (History) (Scott)
  + All of the early civilisations were founded on violence. Human bondage was central to the survival of early civilisations.
  + The traditional story about the development of civilisations is wrong. Life in early civilisations was worse than in hunter-gatherer societies, which is why force was necessary to keep labourers present.
  + Agriculture was a step back for human living standards from hunter-gathering, until basically the Industrial revolution.
* Debt: The First 5000 Years (Economic history) (Graeber)
  + Barter is a myth. People in all societies have always operated on informal credit or trading of favours.
  + Debt bondage was widely practiced among ancient societies. Later parts of the book, I think are valuable as a perspective, but not as a policy recommendation.
* Law, Liberty, and the Constitution (Legal history) (Potter). Charts the development of the rule of law in England.
* 1177 BC (Late bronze age history) (Cline).[[1]](#footnote-2) The Late Bronze Age civilisations all collapsed in the eastern Mediterranean all around the same time, excluding Egypt. It was a perfect storm of drought, bad harvests, invasion, etc.
  + Informally, from conversation with the author, trade likely did not collapse:
    - In fact, some new evidence suggests that trade continued after the collapse in a less organised fashion for a long period of time, just not in the centralised way that can be found easily.
    - Bronze production did not stop after the collapse, which suggests tin and arsenic were still being adequately traded. Also, the switch to iron filled in a metallurgical gap.
  + End of the autocratic Bronze age civilisations was probably good for humanity in the long run, as what one could call proto-freedom finally emerged.[[2]](#footnote-3)
* Ridley, *The Fall of the Roman Republic*, ? Agora 63(2016). Article on the fall of the Roman Republic. Very terse, but tells you what you probably need to know about it.

1. Also a professor of mine! [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Going to go with *No* on the “Greeks were free”. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)