

The logo for Marginal Revolution, featuring the words "MARGINAL" and "REVOLUTION" in a bold, sans-serif font. "MARGINAL" is in a lighter teal color, and "REVOLUTION" is in a darker teal color. The text is centered within a solid teal rectangular background.

## MARGINAL REVOLUTION

Tyler Cowen

August 1, 2018

My Conversation with Michelle Dawson

### What I've been reading

1. Annie Lowrey, Give People Money: How a Universal Basic Income Would End Poverty, Revolutionize Work, and Remake the World. A very good book, one of the hot books of the year, and much deeper and broader and balanced than the subtitle might imply.

2. George Magnus, Red Flags: Why Xi's China Is In Jeopardy. The case for pessimism, based on all possible reasons. Worth reading, but who knows?

3. Devin Fergus, Land of the Fee: Hidden Costs and the Decline of the American Middle Class. Not a balanced treatment, but a fact-rich and handy starting point for reading about this topic. You won't learn how many of those fees are efficiency-based, but you will go around asking the question more.

4. François Cusset, How the World Swung to the Right: Fifty Years of Counterrevolutions. Full of generalizations and unsupported claims, but still a better guide to reality than most of what you will find from the other big think books. An attempt at fresh thought, in pocket-sized form.

5. Paula Fredriksen, When Christians Were Jews: The First Generation. Yet another good social and intellectual history of the early, formative period of Christianity.

Charles Silver and David A. Hyman, Overcharged: Why Americans Pay Too Much for Health Care. I find most books on this topic too painful to read, including this one, but it does appear to be comprehensive and the new go-to coverage on this topic.

The post What I've been reading appeared first on Marginal REVOLUTION.

The rate of gdp growth will soon decline again

Posted: 01 Aug 2018 02:40 PM PDT

Yes, comments will be reactivated, and some already are on the newly written posts. All will be back on once we work through the backlog of posts written during the “comments off” period. There is no conspiratorial explanation for the change and return, nor was anything measured either before or after. I simply got sick of reading your comments and wanted a week or so off. I had that break, plus I was traveling a good deal during that period and needed the extra time. Welcome back, oh wise ones!

The post [The rate of gdp growth will soon decline again](#) appeared first on [Marginal REVOLUTION](#).

### [What Price Fame?](#)

A NEW GENERATION of celebrities is selling out concerts, starring in commercials, and amassing huge [Instagram](#) followings. But none of them exist—corporeally, anyway. In recent years, and starting in Japan, technology and social media have spawned a digital demimonde of [computer-generated stars](#), ranging from fake musicians and models to company mascots who appear as holograms (like Betty Crocker, with AI). When they’re not entertaining you, they’re trying to convince you of their humanity, and even the more cartoonish among them have fleshed-out personalities. In a way, it’s the purest expression of celebrity, which has always been an elaborate illusion. [CGI](#) starlets, though, “are much easier to control,” says Ryan Detert, CEO of the branding firm Influential. Except when they misbehave.

There is more of interest, [from Miranda Katz at Wired](#), via the excellent [Samir Varma](#).

The post [What Price Fame?](#) appeared first on [Marginal REVOLUTION](#).

### [My Conversation with Michelle Dawson](#)

Here is [the transcript and audio](#), I am very pleased (and honored) to have been able to do this. She is an autism researcher, and so most of the discussion concerned autism, here is one excerpt:

**COWEN:** What would be the best understanding of autism, from your perspective?

**DAWSON:** The best understanding is seeing autism as atypical brain functioning, resulting in atypical processing of *all* information. So that’s information across domains—social, nonsocial; across modalities—visual, auditory; whatever its source, whether it’s information from your memory, information coming from the outside world, that is atypical. So that is very domain-general atypicality.

What autistic brains do with information is atypical. How it’s atypical, in my view, involves what I’ve called cognitive versatility and less mandatory hierarchies in how the brain works, such that, for example, an autistic brain will consider more possibilities, will nonstrategically

combine information across levels and scales without losing large parts of it, and so on. And that applies to all information.

That is strictly my view. I'm not sure anyone would agree with me.

And:

**COWEN:** Now often, in popular discourse, you'll hear autism or Asperger's associated with a series of personality traits or features of personality psychology—a kind of introversion or people being nerdy in some regard. In your approach, do you see *any* connection between personality traits and autism at all?

**DAWSON:** There is a small literature that shows some connection. I think it's very weak, and I say no, I don't think autism is about personality. Autism is sort of orthogonal to personality. The two are not related. Whatever relation there is does not . . . arises from some third factor, let's say. If there is one—and again, the evidence is, I think, very weak connecting autism to personality—so just say that *maybe*, if there's something, let's say that personality in autistics might be more high variance. That would be my totally wild guess, but I don't think autism itself is about personality.

And here is Michelle again:

We don't—I *hope* we don't look at a blind person who is a successful lawyer and assume that he is only very mildly blind or barely blind at all, and then look at a blind person who has a very bad outcome and assume that they must be very severely blind.

We do make those kinds of judgments in autism, saying, “The more atypical the person is, the worse they must be in some sense.” That kind of bias has not only harmed a lot of autistic people, it really has impeded research.

Here is [Michelle on Twitter](#). We discuss and link to some of her research in the discussion.

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