

## When it can be better not to publish

When might it be better to disseminate your scholarly ideas by not publishing your ideas in academic journals? Here are a couple of possible cases. One clue, they could not have happened before the Internet

I started my website [www.brocher.com](http://www.brocher.com) in November 2005 and put some articles on my academic pages there at <http://www.brocher.com/Academic/Academic.htm>, one was a paper on Coase<sup>1</sup>. I added the paper criticising Game Theory<sup>2</sup> a few weeks later. As various articles became accepted for publication in refereed journals I removed the corresponding unpublished version which publishers ask you to do for understandable copyright protection reasons. After all, why should anyone pay to read the journal article if it is still freely available on the Internet?

But the Coase and Game Theory articles were stuck on this website because journals refused to publish them. They are quite different in tone and content, the Coase article argues that Coase misapplied the economic principles of marginal analysis to the nature of the firm (which is a fairly non-trivial point since a major reason that Coase was awarded his Nobel Prize was for the application of marginal analysis in this area). The Game Theory paper was more in the spirit of a critical essay than a conventional academic article. But though they were both quite different in tone and content they were both similar in so far as they did not really chime with what could be regarded as the accepted or conventional view of these issues within the economics profession in the respective cases.

In the case of the Coase paper I can say I have never encountered such unpleasant referees comments which in some cases were vitriolic. Yet in no case could the referees for this paper actually say why I was wrong, and this also aligned with the fact that several senior colleagues in the field whose opinions I respected said they thought the arguments were valid and should be published.

I understood in part why this was happening. If an editor has a paper on Coase to review, you give it people to review who in many cases will have built their academic work and reputation based on what Coase contributed, or what they thought he contributed. If you are an editor with a paper on Game Theory to review, you hand it to Game Theorists. So Denial and Rejection can be understandable human responses in such cases. I was disappointed but realistic about the chances of getting either article published.

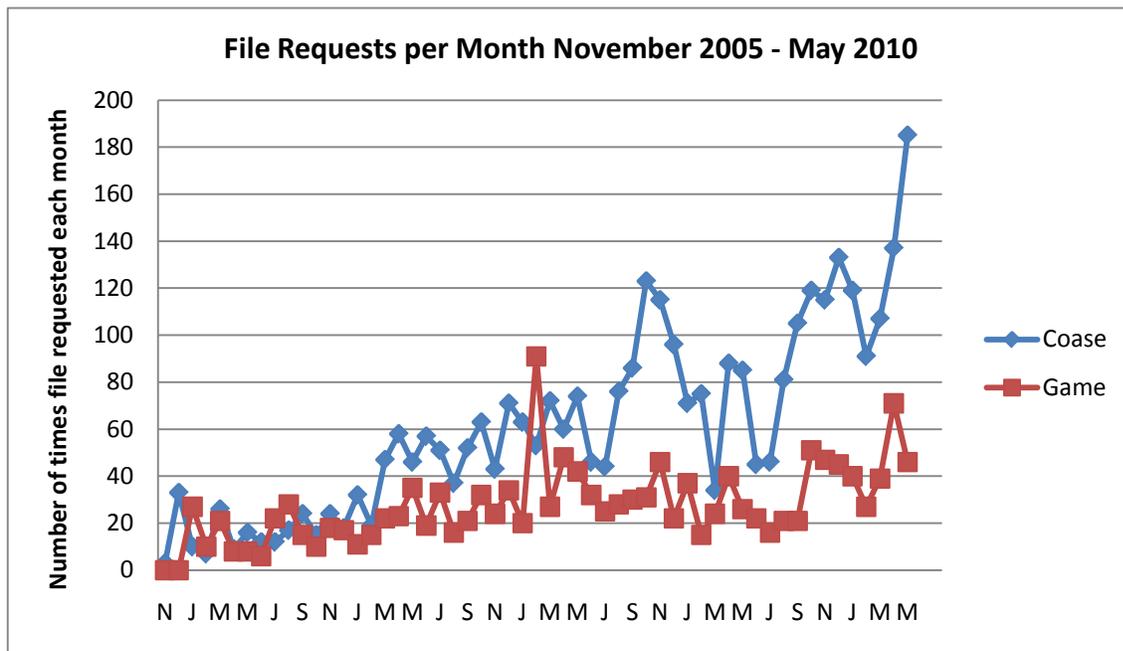
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<sup>1</sup><http://www.brocher.com/Academic/Coase,%20the%20nature%20of%20the%20firm,%20and%20the%20principles%20of%20marginal%20analysis.pdf>

<sup>2</sup><http://www.brocher.com/Academic/Game%20Theory%20as%20Dogma.pdf>

The two articles languished on my website though in 2006 I was pleased to see that some people who found their way on to the academic pages of the website had also bothered to access the two articles. Both seemed about equally popular with about 20 or so views a month.

Then around Spring 2007 there seemed to be a separation with the Coase paper increasing to about 50 views a month, the Game Theory paper was still increasing but more slowly. In the last eight months (October 2009 to May 2010) it has seemed to put on another spurt and is now over 40 views a month, most months. The requests for the respective papers (tracked as “Coase” and “Game” respectively) are shown in the figure below.



But it is the Coase paper which now seems to be really taking off with no levelling off in sight. I had noticed a few months ago that it was becoming the most popular single page on my website, but it was when this reached 185 requests for the month of May 2010 - about 6 a day - that I began to ask serious questions about what was going on here. One thing seemed clear was that there was some evidence of seasonality with dips in the summer months most years for both papers – roughly coinciding with university vacations in the Northern Hemisphere.

I had no other clues as to who was reading these papers and how they came to find them. So out of curiosity I put myself in the position of someone interested in “Coase” and the “firm” and Googled as follows: Coase +firm

I was taken aback to find the Coase paper on the first page of Google’s results at number ten – out of about 20 million results

However, on repeating this – and other keyword searches noted below – I found out that the paper could be shunted down to the second or third search page from the first, and then return to the first page the next day. I have no explanation yet for why this could happen. As of today (14<sup>th</sup> June 2010), it was 8<sup>th</sup> ranked result out of 20,200,00 results (see page 5 below)

And admittedly a lot of the subsequent results on that search were nothing more than chaff in terms of meaningful results – for example “Coase” eventually being read in some cases as “Coast” by Google. I refined the search by Googling: Coase +”the firm” ... and as of today it is 4<sup>th</sup> ranked of about 98,400 results (see page 6 below).

I repeated the searches for the Game Theory paper using a variety of search words and phrases. When I put in: “Game theory” +dogma ... today it was the top, not just one, but two results (with another site lodging it) out of 11,500 – probably not so surprising when these three words were in the title (see page 8 below). But when I put in more subtle search terms such as : “Game theory” +fallacy .... It was still 17<sup>th</sup> out of 25,200 (see page 9 below).

So now I have a quandary. Both papers (but especially the Coase paper) are being accessed by large numbers of (presumably interested) readers. These already number in the thousands for the Coase paper and the numbers are still on an upward trend – and what is the expected readership for the average published academic paper? There are various estimates I have seen for this last question, and I can tell you categorically the numbers are never in the thousands.

If I do publish these papers eventually, then the standard editorial instruction will be to remove them from my website and also remove the increasing visibility and implicit recognition of these papers. Will I do this? What do you think?.

I plan for these papers to stay on this website indefinitely. And as for protection of my intellectual property – well, I think ventilation of the arguments are more important, and in any case many more people than I could have hoped from conventional academic distribution are already familiar with these papers, the ideas, and who authored them - that will do for me, though of course I can and will also archive them on a Working Paper site.

Is this a substitute for peer review? Of course not, peer review is like democracy, it is probably the worst possible system, except for all the alternatives that could be considered.

I would not have anything like the interest in my academic webpages in the first place without my peer reviewed papers and my five books of published research. This is not a substitute for peer review, it is complementary to it. These papers would not have been read and taken seriously if there were not such reputational capital to build on in the first case.

But equally, while peer review was necessary to get the attention for my website in the first case, it was not sufficient for interest in these papers. It is the additional reputational capital of having a high Google search ranking in standard Internet searches in those areas that is almost certainly helping to add in the positive feedback loops and network effects that my papers are now benefitting from.

Where does this go from here? If the trends later this year are typical, we should see a dip in terms of requests for these papers during the summer months then the requests will increase to even higher levels of intensity in the Autumn.

Or it may be that most people who want to will have accessed these papers by then and the requests will begin to decline.

Or they may reach some steady state frequency - I don't know, the only answer is to wait and see.

As for any deeper implications, it is possibly too soon to say, I hope to return and consider further in the course of time. One of the few things I can say for sure is that just a few years ago these two papers would have had no real future other than the bin (which to be fair is where more than a few reviewers would like to see them). It may have been better for them that they were not published given what is happening to them now. I have no plans for more papers that I would like to leave unpublished, but if similar circumstances happen in the future, I would not lose sleep over it. Whatever does happen, this promises to be an interesting experience.

Neil Kay 14<sup>th</sup> June 2010

Google search for:

Coase +firm

14<sup>th</sup> June 2010

“Coase” paper 8<sup>th</sup> out of about 20,200,000 results

Coase +firm - Google Search - Mozilla Firefox

http://www.google.co.uk/search?hl=en&client=firefox-a&hs=#&its=org.mozilla%3Aen-US%3Aofficial&channel=s&q=Coase+%2Bfirm&aq=f&aqi=6a

Coase +firm - Google Search

Google

Coase +firm Search

About 20,200,000 results (0.08 seconds) [Advanced search](#)

**Theory of the firm - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia**  
Ronald Coase set out his transaction cost theory of the **firm** in 1937, making it one of the first (neo-classical) attempts to define the **firm** theoretically ...  
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**Ronald Coase - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia**  
Coase is best known for two articles in particular: "The Nature of the Firm" (1937), which introduces the concept of transaction costs to explain the nature ...  
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**COASE--The Nature of the Firm**  
COASE--The Nature of the Firm. Uncategorizable-Uncategorizable.  
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**Coase: "The Nature of the Firm"**  
Under Coase's definition of the **firm**, do traveling salesmen who sell the products of only one **firm** and get paid solely on commission count as employees? ...  
[www.kellogg.northwestern.edu/faculty/.../3COASE.htm](http://www.kellogg.northwestern.edu/faculty/.../3COASE.htm) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)

**Ronald Coase: The Nature of Firms and Their Costs - Economic ...**  
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"The Nature of the **Firm**," Coase explained that firms exist because they reduce the transaction costs that emerge during production and exchange, cap- ...  
[www.dallasted.org/research/et/e0303.pdf](http://www.dallasted.org/research/et/e0303.pdf) - [Similar](#)

**The Nature of the Firm R. H. Coase Economica, New Series, Vol. 4 ...**  
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by R.H. Coase - Cited by 16135 - [Related articles](#)  
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[www.sonoma.edu/users/e/eyler/426/coase1.pdf](http://www.sonoma.edu/users/e/eyler/426/coase1.pdf) - [Similar](#)

**Amazon.com: The Firm, the Market, and the Law (9780226111018): R...**  
Ronald Coase is a Nobel Prize-winning economist, whose work is probably cited more often by lawyers than by economists. "The Firm, The Market, and the Law" ...  
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**COASE, THE NATURE OF THE FIRM, AND THE PRINCIPLES OF MARGINAL ANALYSIS**  
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Coase (1937) argues that analysis of the **firm** may be illuminated by the .... **firm**. Coase argues that as long as MCt is less than MCM, the **firm** will expand ...  
[www.brocher.com/.../Coase,%20the%20nature%20of%20the%20firm,%20and%20the%20principles%20of%20marginal%20analysis.pdf](http://www.brocher.com/.../Coase,%20the%20nature%20of%20the%20firm,%20and%20the%20principles%20of%20marginal%20analysis.pdf) - [Similar](#)

Done

start Coase +firm - Google... Document1 - Microsof...

09:15

Google search for:

Coase + "the firm"

June 14<sup>th</sup> 2010

"Coase" paper 4<sup>th</sup> of about 98,400 results

The screenshot shows a Mozilla Firefox browser window displaying Google search results for the query "Coase + the firm". The search bar at the top shows the query and a "Search" button. Below the search bar, it indicates "About 98,400 results (0.26 seconds)". The left sidebar contains navigation options like "Everything", "Books", and "The web". The main content area lists several search results:

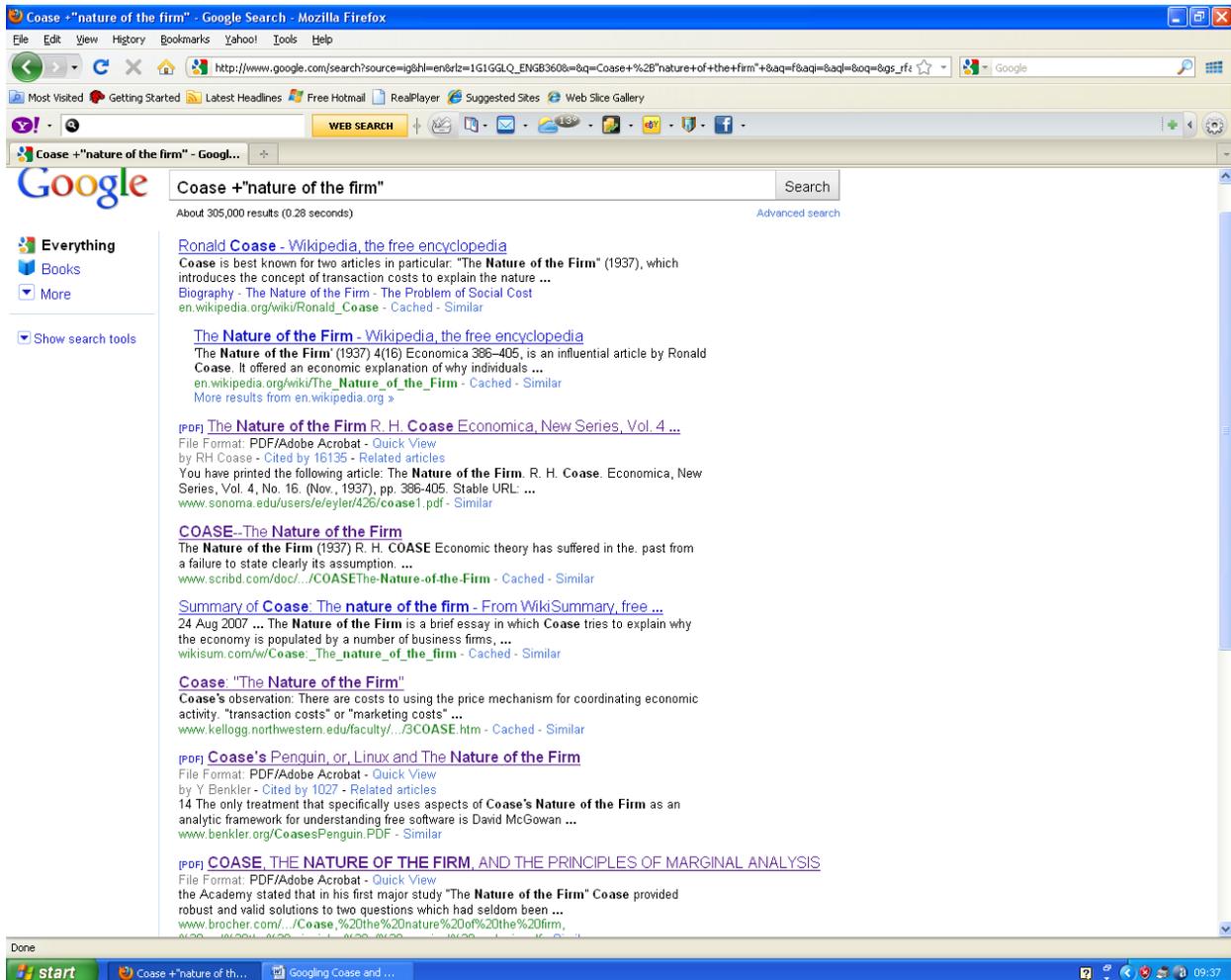
- Scholarly articles for Coase + "the firm"**
  - [The nature of the firm](#) - Coase - Cited by 16135
  - [The firm, the market, and the law](#) - Coase - Cited by 1971
  - [... resource-based theories of the firm and the institutional...](#) - Madhok - Cited by 277
- Theory of the firm** - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia
  - Ronald Coase set out his transaction cost theory of the firm in 1937, making it one of the first (neo-classical) attempts to define the firm theoretically ...
  - [Simplified Summary](#) - [Background](#) - [Summary](#)
  - [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory\\_of\\_the\\_firm](#) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)
- Ronald Coase** - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia
  - Coase is best known for two articles in particular: "The Nature of the Firm" (1937), which introduces the concept of transaction costs to explain the nature ...
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  - The Nature of the Firm (1937) R. H. COASE Economic theory has suffered in the past from a failure to state clearly its assumption. ...
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- PDF COASE, THE NATURE OF THE FIRM, AND THE PRINCIPLES OF MARGINAL ANALYSIS**
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  - Coase (1937) argues that analysis of the firm may be illuminated by the "principle .... The implications for the size and scale of the firm using Coase's ...
  - [www.brocher.com/.../Coase,%20the%20nature%20of%20the%20firm,%20and%20the%20principles%20of%20marginal%20analysis.pdf](#) - [Similar](#)
- Summary of Coase: The nature of the firm** - From WikiSummary, free ...
  - 24 Aug 2007 ... The Nature of the Firm is a brief essay in which Coase tries to explain why the economy is populated by a number of business firms, ...
  - [wikisum.com/w/Coase:\\_The\\_nature\\_of\\_the\\_firm](#) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)
- PDF The Nature of the Firm R. H. Coase** *Economica, New Series, Vol. 4 ...*
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  - You have printed the following article: The Nature of the Firm. R. H. Coase. *Economica, New Series, Vol. 4, No. 16. (Nov., 1937), pp. 386-405. Stable URL: ...*
  - [www.sonoma.edu/users/e/eyler/426/coase1.pdf](#) - [Similar](#)
- Amazon.com: The Firm, the Market, and the Law (9780226111018): R. ...**
  - Ronald Coase is a Nobel Prize-winning economist, whose work is probably cited more often by lawyers than by economists. "The Firm, The Market, and the Law" ...

Google search for:

Coase + "nature of the firm"

June 14<sup>th</sup> 2010

"Coase" paper 8<sup>th</sup> out of about 305,000 results

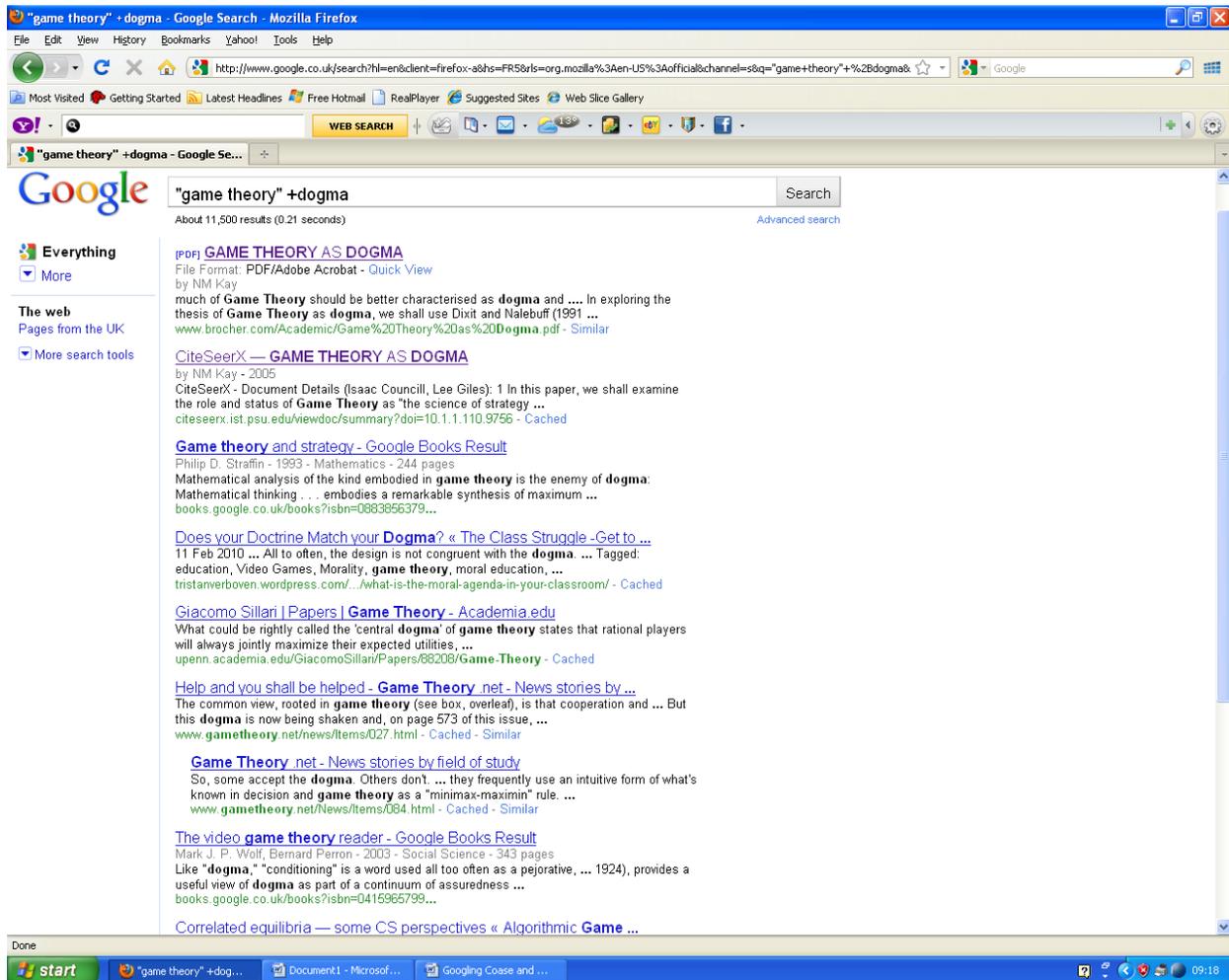


Google search for:

“game theory” +dogma

June 14<sup>th</sup> 2010

“Game” paper 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> out of about 11,500 results



Google search for:

“Game theory” +fallacy

June 14<sup>th</sup> 2010

“Game” paper 17<sup>th</sup> out of about 25,200 results

“game theory” +fallacy - Google Search - Mozilla Firefox

Page 2 of about 25,200 results (0.15 seconds) [Advanced search](#)

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**The Metaphoric - Business is not a Game: The Metaphoric Fallacy**  
by M Hamington - 2009 - Cited by 2 - Related articles  
they do not fall prey to the metaphoric **fallacy** as they remind the reader "economic systems, .... **Game theory** does not offer a theory of ethics as much as ...  
[www.springerlink.com/index/0467361291017704.pdf](http://www.springerlink.com/index/0467361291017704.pdf)

**Gambler's fallacy**  
See **Game Theory**. Many riddles trick the reader into believing that they are an example of Gambler's **Fallacy**, such as the Monty Hall problem. ...  
[en.academic.ru/dic.nsf/enwiki/7746](http://en.academic.ru/dic.nsf/enwiki/7746) - Cached

**Software Development And The Sunk Cost Fallacy**  
19 Apr 2010 ... Infact we take the sunk cost **fallacy** to new heights of awesome :). In the world of finance, .... I agree with the **game theory** explanation. ...  
[www.skorks.com/.../software-development-and-the-sunk-cost-fallacy/](http://www.skorks.com/.../software-development-and-the-sunk-cost-fallacy/) - Cached

**Joystick Division - Pretension +1: The Gameplay Fallacy**  
5 Feb 2010 ... inaugural edition of "Pretension +1" ponders the **fallacy** of gameplay. ... Fisted Reasoning (7); Game Talk (24); **Game Theory** (12) ...  
[www.joystickdivision.com/.../pretension\\_1\\_the\\_gameplay\\_fall.php](http://www.joystickdivision.com/.../pretension_1_the_gameplay_fall.php) - Cached

**Evolutionary Game Theory > Notes (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)**  
by JMK Alexander - 2009 - Cited by 31 - Related articles  
Notes to Evolutionary **Game Theory** .... Moore's "naturalistic **fallacy**" discussed in Principia Ethica differs significantly from the mistaken inference of an ...  
[plato.stanford.edu/entries/game-evolutionary/notes.html](http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/game-evolutionary/notes.html) - Similar

**"Adding Risks: Samuelson's Fallacy of Large Numbers Revisited," S ...**  
19 May 2010 ... "Adding Risks: Samuelson's **Fallacy** of Large Numbers Revisited," S. Ross (1999) ... better off for precisely the reasons in the **fallacy** of large numbers. ... Development - Econometrics - Economic History - **Game Theory** ...  
[afinetheorem.wordpress.com/.../adding-risks-samuelsens-fallacy-of-large-numbers-revisited-s-ross-1999/](http://afinetheorem.wordpress.com/.../adding-risks-samuelsens-fallacy-of-large-numbers-revisited-s-ross-1999/) - Cached

**GAME THEORY AS DOGMA**  
File Format: PDF/Adobe Acrobat - Quick View  
by NM Kay  
(3) So **Game Theory** can explain why Homer Simpson gobbles his burger. Aficionados of "The Simpsons". 15 would have no difficulty in spotting the **fallacy** ...  
[www.brocher.com/Academic/Game%20Theory%20as%20Dogma.pdf](http://www.brocher.com/Academic/Game%20Theory%20as%20Dogma.pdf) - Similar

**The Meaningless Fallacy - Sammy390 - Discussion - RichardDawkins.net**  
10 Jun 2010 ... The Meaningless **Fallacy**. Sammy390's Avatar By SAMMY390 ... Mr. Blackburn is referring to can be pretty obviously derived from **game theory**. ...  
[richarddawkins.net/discussions/476961-the-meaningless-fallacy](http://richarddawkins.net/discussions/476961-the-meaningless-fallacy) - Cached

Done

start "game theory" +falla... Document1 - Microsof... Googling Coase and ... 09:23