

My Road to Liberty Went Through Economics



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“One Improved Unit” is an original bi-weekly column appearing every other Monday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by the founder and editor Skyler J. Collins. Archived columns can be found here. OIU-only RSS feed available here.

I understand that many libertarians, including Stefan Molyneux, argue that ethical and moral arguments for liberty are superior to arguing on the consequences of libertarian principles, and that consequentialism should, at least, take a back seat to ethics and morality. I suppose that works for some people, but its not how I became a libertarian. Though my journey of truth seeking began with religion, the fork that went toward liberty had its first stop at economics. I want to share the exact path I took to better understand the economics of liberty. I hope it proves beneficial to others.

Walter Williams

Somewhere in the neighborhood of ten years ago, I discovered a columnist in my local newspaper that would write on economic and racial issues. His name was Walter Williams, and at the time he was the chairman of the economics department at George Mason University. He was also black, so I paid attention to what he wrote regarding blacks. And what he wrote would have been controversial had it been penned by a white person. He talked about minimum wage and its effects on black teenagers and other very interesting things. I suppose his race gave him credibility in my eyes on racial issues, and his position at George Mason on economic issues. After reading his column for a few weeks, I found his staff page and discovered his columns archive. I read almost all of it. He is a very good writer, and a very good teacher. At one point I discovered a series of his titled “Economics for the Citizen,” and studied it. He was helping me to fall in love with economics. He also recommended what would become my first libertarian book, *The Law* by 19th century French economist Frederic Bastiat. And further, he introduced me to *The Freeman*, a magazine published by the Foundation for Economic Education.

Thomas Sowell

It was at this point that I discovered Thomas Sowell, again in my local newspaper. He too is a black economist and was writing on economic and racial issues. He sounded a lot like

Walter Williams. I then did some searching for his website and found that he had written several books on economics, race, and society. His book *Basic Economics* sounded like a good first text on the subject, so I bought it and read it. The idea that government had any business managing or interfering in the economy became very distasteful to me. It was then that I became a supporter and promoter of free markets. It was also then that I started my Truth blog. I would share and write about the writings of Williams and Sowell. I bought several more of Sowell's books including *Civil Rights: Rhetoric or Reality?*, *The Vision of the Anointed*, and *The Quest for Cosmic Justice*. To date, I own eight of his books, three on economics.

Milton Friedman

Sowell quoted or talked about one of his mentors from time to time, Milton Friedman. I searched him and found some of his writing and speaking. I liked the debates I found of him on Youtube. I bought his book *Free to Choose*. It was "okay." He had some interesting ideas on things like school vouchers (or so I thought at the time). I suppose at this point I was becoming a little bored on the economics front. His debates and interviews on libertarianism had me moving in that direction. I soon discovered the likes of John Stossel, Larry Elder, and Burt Prelutsky. All wrote weekly columns.

Johan Norberg

I don't remember exactly how, perhaps through the Cato Institute, I found Johan Norberg's video on globalization. I superb documentary on "sweatshops" and economic development of past and current third-world countries. Soon after I bought his book titled *In Defense of Global Capitalism* which argued for international free trade and the like.

Henry Hazlitt

Again, I don't remember exactly how, by this time I was reading things on economics and liberty, I discovered Henry Hazlitt, who wrote on both. I also discovered the Mises Institute and began reading their daily articles. I bought Hazlitt's *Economics in One Lesson*. The Mises Institute's edition contained a forward by Walter Block.

Walter Block

Hazlitt lead me to Walter Block and the Austrian School of economics. I read everything I could find by Block on both economics and libertarianism. The Mises Institute supplied it all, and for free. Paper after paper, column after column, I quickly learned of Robert Murphy, Thomas DiLorenzo, Tom Woods, Mark Thornton, Robert Higgs, and every other contemporary Austrian School economist. I devoured all of them (and still do).

Murray Rothbard

You can't read the preceding characters without hearing about the great Murray Rothbard. I printed and read his book *For a New Liberty* and bought several more. Most of what I've read of Rothbard's were on liberty, but enough of it was on economics. I've yet to read his *Man, Economy, & State*, or *Power & Market*. Some day.

Hans-Hermann Hoppe

Now, this is the guy that pushed me, finally, into free market anarchism. My first full Hoppe text was *A Theory of Socialism and Capitalism*. I've read a lot of his other stuff, all of it intellectually rich and logically sound. Studying free market anarchism has lead me to other great thinkers like Roderick Long, John Hasnas, Carl Watner, and Stephan Kinsella.

Final Thoughts

Of course, this is just the economics fork. I mentioned some non-economic influences, but my introduction and advancement in economics is what put me on the path toward understanding and accepting the philosophy of liberty. Markets work when it comes to creating wealth and eliminating poverty. The state does not. It can't. It suffers from knowledge and calculation problems. Like Leonard Read, my faith is in free people. Even if the state were somehow moral, which it's not, I would argue against ever establishing it for economic reasons. If you are currently ignorant of economics, I recommend studying all of the above, starting at the top. You won't ever again look at the world the same.