

Knowledge, Wisdom, and Wealth



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“One Improved Unit” is an original column appearing sporadically on Thursday 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 live in a great age. Despite all the problems in the world, the present era has so much knowledge, wisdom, and wealth from which I can benefit to my heart’s content, and benefit I have. At 30 years old, here’s what I’ve gained, and how it’s helped me. A quick note, this is not all that I have gained, just that which I value the most.

Knowledge

There’s certainly too much knowledge, wisdom, and wealth that I’ve acquired (and some lost) to list here, so I’ll keep to broad categorizations. Knowledge and wisdom are obtained in two ways: experience and study. I have thirty years of life experience and have learned a great deal about how to exist and to achieve my desired ends. But experience only goes so far. Study has been an important part of my life the past ten years, and enough to make up for the preceding twenty where my priorities were elsewhere. I view science and philosophy as the two parent categories for every other area of knowledge and wisdom, and they definitely inform each other. Here I will tackle the sciences, and philosophy in the next section.

Psychology

I was fifteen when I was introduced to a bit of psychology on personality called *Human Dynamics*. My boss, Sue, mentored me on the different personality dynamics discovered by psychologist Sandra Seagal. “Each personality dynamic is characterized by fundamentally different inner processes in the way they inherently learn, assimilate information, relate, communicate, approach tasks, problem solve, contribute to others, respond to stress and trauma, and maintain health and wellness.” The knowledge that I obtained then has entered my mind at least once every day since. Every person I meet is automatically evaluated by my mind and their personality dynamic determined. *Human Dynamics* has been helpful to me in two ways, a) understanding why I think the way I think and handle situations that way I do, and b) understanding why other people think the way they think

and handle situations the way they do. Both my children and I share the same personality dynamic, labeled “emotional subjective (physical)”, while my wife is “physical emotional”. To learn more about what these are, check out their website and the book by now-deceased Dr. Sandra Seagal.

Praxeology

Ludwig von Mises (b.1881) pioneered the science of human action, called “praxeology” (originally coined by Alfred Espinas in 1890, but later developed by Mises). I was first introduced to praxeology after my study of economics because a praxeological approach to economics is methodologically different than otherwise. Mises argued that groups don’t act, only individuals act, and so economic analysis must begin with what he called the action axiom. This axiom states that all human action is the purposeful utilization of means over a period of time in order to achieve desired ends, which is always the removal of some felt uneasiness about the state of affairs in the individual’s world. The individual feels uneasy about any number of things – hunger, thirst, boredom, not knowing something, wanting something fixed or changed, *et cetera* – and so he acts to remove his feeling of uneasiness. Before one can understand how an economy works, one must first understand why the individuals that comprise an economy do the things they do. This understanding begins with the action axiom, and is logically constructed from there. Praxeology, then, is necessarily parent to economics in the hierarchy of social science.

Economics

My first introduction to economics was through a black economist’s op-ed on how the minimum wage hurts black teenagers as a group the most. Had it been written by a white economist, my more foolish younger self may have dismissed any arguments made as racism. Rather, because the writer was black, I was able to focus on his economics and understand his position. That economist is Walter Williams. I quickly read his op-ed archives on his faculty page at George Mason University, where he was chairman of the economics department. Then I discovered a good friend of his, another black economist, Thomas Sowell. Sowell’s *Basic Economics* was the first study on economics that I made. I was riveted, and turned toward free market theory. Studying the free market lead me toward discovering the Austrian School of economics, and with it, praxeology. Never again will I fall prey to poor economic reasoning and political platitudes made in the hopes that society remain economically ignorant. I consider economics one of the most important areas of study for every human being, and absolutely necessary if you want to have an opinion on economic or political matters. I agree with Murray Rothbard who wrote, “It is no crime to be ignorant of economics, which is, after all, a specialized discipline and one that most people consider to be a ‘dismal science.’ But it is totally irresponsible to have a loud and vociferous opinion on economic subjects while remaining in this state of ignorance.”

Biology

I've been on the paleo diet and incorporating elements of primal living for over two years now. Evolutionary science is a fascinating area of study for me. Understanding we are still hunter-gatherers biologically gives me important information on what I should and should not be eating and doing for optimal health now and when I'm helping to raise grandchildren and great grandchildren. I want to avoid avoidable mismatch diseases and help make my body usable as long as possible. I don't want to be limited in what I can do and miss out on all the wonderful moments that activity as an older person can bring. Learning more about what my body needs via evolutionary science has made living easier. There's still much to learn and much to apply and turn into habit, however.

Anthropology

While I was learning about paleo dieting and primal living, I was also learning more about how children were raised throughout our evolutionary past. As it turns out, they were raised without violence and disrespect, and given the freedom to play all day long. This coincided nicely with my change from violent parenting and sending my kids to school. There's a lot of takeaways from the field of anthropology as it concerns our needs as *h. sapiens*. It's been a fascinating field of study for me and I hope to continue it.

Wisdom

As important as knowledge is, it's useless if not applied properly. Wisdom is learning the proper application of the knowledge we have, beginning with what we know about ourselves. We all have needs and wants and desire to remove the uneasiness we feel when they aren't being met. If we are to be successful in removing our unease, we must learn and apply the proper means. Philosophy is how we learn wisdom. Here're the branches of philosophy that have been most helpful to me.

Logic

I'm not a trained scholar nor logician, which is why I shy away from "conviction" and try to practice both humility and skepticism towards the arguments I encounter. Making a formal study of logic has so far not been a priority, but I do read up on logical fallacy as often as I can and am familiar with quite a few, some more than others. *Ad hominem* is one of the more obvious fallacies but by no means the most insidious. Many a logical fallacy are found in the defense of statism and foolish economic policy, such as *appeal to emotion* ("you must hate the poor!"). The skill to recognize and smash them is one I develop almost daily.

Politics

I've learned two bits of wisdom as it concerns politics: 1) politics is both the business of

deciding how best to benefit at the expense of others, and how best to keep those others believing they have any real power to change anything in the realm of politics, and 2) the state is both an illegitimate authority in our lives, and an extremely dangerous institution. The former keeps me from wasting my time participating in politics and the latter from doing anything especially onerous to attract the wrong kind of attention from the state. I write, I podcast, I discuss, and most importantly, I dissent, but I won't do any of these things to the extent that the state's so-far-invisible gun becomes frighteningly visible. Does that mean I'm a coward? Perhaps, but I'm a coward with higher values than opposing the state until death do me part, values like life, what liberty I have, and my family. They and those are first and foremost. Death by state can't even compare.

Metaphysics

What a fascinating question it is to wonder about whether we're just a collection of dust or something more, with a higher purpose, with somewhere to go when this collection of dust returns to where it came from. Alas, fascinating, but at the moment I find myself apathetic to whether or not there's a God, or gods, or what will become of me in the hereafter. I hope there's more. That could be nice, particularly if it's an existence free from malady and the state of brokenness I, or we currently find ourselves in. To run and not get weary, to think and not get demotivated in one's pursuits because their brain chemicals might not be quite balanced properly, which may or may not have been a result of trauma suffered as a child. How amazing would that be? In any event, logic tells me that only an irrational god would obligate me to seek him and his ways in this life without informing me so, and an irrational god is not likely to exist in a rational universe. If he does and he is, then fuck the universe and fuck him. So I feel perfectly content to wait and see on this most fascinating of questions.

Ethics

I value society, community, fraternity, cooperation, the division of labor, and all of the benefits that I receive because of them. Therefore, it would be foolish of me to not make ethics an area of study. These things can't survive immoral behavior, practices, and institutions. Hurting others, like my kids, wife, and the rest of society, engaging in crime, and supporting criminal institutions like the state is immoral and would make me an enemy of what I claim to value. I remain unconvinced that the initiation of coercion toward anyone is anything but a social evil. For now, while my values are what they are, I'll practice the philosophy of voluntarism, because it would be wrong not to.

Parenting

I couldn't have predicted how important and how life-enhancing my children have become for me. Before I discovered a better way, parenting was a chore. Once I discovered why my

parenting – spankings, time-outs, yelling, disrespecting, schooling – was wrong, I immediately about-faced and went forward with a new resolve to bond with and mentor my children, to witness the people that they were destined by their natures – without artificial trimming, poking, and prodding – to become. I’m quite unconvinced that influence can result from control, so because I want influence over my children – to be a mentor in time of need, *not* to tell them what to believe – I had to let go of control. Now they make their own choices about everything, with or without my guidance. Our relationships are better than ever. We did things better with our second than with our first, and we’ll do things even better with our third, who will arrive any day now. Like any other practice, however, we still have roadblocks to overcome. While my kids have a great relationship most of the time, there are still moments of conflict that I need to learn more about. And learn I will, in this and in every other area of thought, and new areas, that have captivated me throughout my life.

Wealth

Every generation should – so long as they’ve had the requisite level of liberty – be wealthier than the last. My generation is no exception. The wealth that is available to me today is greater than at any other point in the history of mankind. That is breathtaking and truly awesome. Not only do I have access to a wealth of knowledge and wisdom, as already shown, but also to the technology and art that greater knowledge and wisdom has created. Every one of us today stands on the shoulders of those who dared to think differently about how the world works, and how it can work better. The resulting wealth increases everyone’s standard of living and available time for leisure, leading to a more enjoyable life as we spend more time with loved ones and exploring new forms of human creative expression.

Technology

I was born into a world of automobiles, telephones, airplanes, television, and computers. Besides computers, I can’t remember the time that my family didn’t enjoy these technologies. We got our first computer when I was twelve. I immediately taught myself how to use it and soon became the family expert. My siblings followed in suit. Today, I test software for a living. Computers have been one of the greatest passions of my life. My only regret was that I was ever limited in their use. I had many other-imposed obligations that kept me from learning as much as I wanted to about computers. Fast forward. Today we have the Internet, electric cars, smartphones, computers in everything and with amazing power, television shows and movies with amazing special effects, college courses available for free, and experts and celebrities just an email or tweet away. Technology gives power to the lower economic classes that was unavailable and unimaginable to the kings and emperors of the past. And because technology advances like clockwork in so many different fields, we are quick to take what we have as granted, natural components to

existence. Of course, they aren't, but they do make life amazing. I can't even imagine the wonders and miracles that I will be privileged to witness during the remainder of my life. We are all truly wealthy these days.

Fiction

I am constantly reading new books and watching new movies and television series. I don't know what it is, but I can't seem to refrain from getting immersed in fictional worlds and lives, again and again. Technology has made the dissemination of creative fiction easier. From pirated ebooks to Netflix to the dozens of movie theaters within 10 minutes of my house, not a day goes by that I don't take an hour or two to soak in the wild experiences of imaginary others. I find incredible value in fiction. There's so much knowledge and wisdom I've gained sharing a challenging journey with someone and standing by their side through their failures and successes. Reading or watching fiction is like experiencing more than one lifetime and all the wonders that it brings. Indeed, some of the world's greatest wealth can be found in fiction.

Humor

Fiction is one of several avenues of humor. A funny story, real or imagined, or a joke can lift the spirits and turn a crappy day into something more enjoyable. Having time for both a sense of humor and to enjoy the sense of humor of others is a luxury I partake in constantly. I love making my kids laugh and laughing alongside them at a funny video or movie. Enjoying humor together has been a bonding experience for my entire family. We simply love funny things, as most do, and with such easy access to humor via the Internet, we're constantly discovering new humor and sharing it with one another. Humor has also played an important role in my parenting as a tool for overcoming anxiety, sadness, and anger. After the tools of violence were thrown out, play, compassion, and humor filled the void in my parenting toolbox. And everyone is now better off because of it.

Final Thoughts

In acknowledging what I've gained over my life and feeling grateful, it helps to imagine the faces of the philosophers, scientists, economists, thinkers, artists, comedians, story-tellers, inventors, innovators, engineers, and entrepreneurs that have each contributed to making my life better in a million different ways. While they did what they did primarily to remove their own feeling of uneasiness, I and billions of others have greatly benefited from their efforts, again and again. I don't know what contributions I'll have made over the course of my life, but I'm happy having faith that our knowledge, wisdom, and wealth can only get more amazing. What a great time to be alive!

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