

[Less theory, more reality](#) [1]

Written by [Max Titmuss](#) [2] | Wednesday 22 August 2012

Picture the scene: you're in a room full of freedom-loving libertarians - the kind of crowd who unfailingly have an answer for everything - and a fundamental question surges forth from your cerebral cortex. 'Just why are freedom and the free-market so good then?' Your question is met with a mixture of sympathy and incredulity. One might think this an unparalleled opportunity to extol the virtues of personal and economic freedom and the strength of the individual. However, the response is often lacklustre. In an almost automaton-like manner, void of inspiring message or conviction, the reply comes back: 'Well, you see, Hayek/Smith/Rothbard wrote about that in his book X. It must be true ? it's all there in black and white!'

A response with decided limitations. In the often bubble-like environs in which an inspiring young, politically-minded person often find themselves in, this approach tends to go off without a hitch. Fellow like-minded people nod sagely and in agreeing tones affirm: 'it's true, you know. Mises did say that'.

This effectiveness, however, tends to diminish rapidly the moment you step outside of the postcode SW1. Were a similar situation to occur in my Midland home town, your Joe Bloggs would give any combination of the following three responses: 'who?', 'eh?', or a dull, cold stare.

But nor is it just about Mr Bloggs. If students, the most likely decision-makers of the future, are to be converted to the cause of freedom and liberty, throwing around names will achieve little. There is no reason to think that the alienation many of us feel when bombarded with the names of the left-wing holy-of-holies is any less alienating than others hearing about those we hold in such high esteem.

What we need are inspiring real-life examples. There are multitudes of these wherever freedom and liberty are allowed to flourish: the men and women whose inventions, made possible through economic liberty and the freedom of capital, directly benefited themselves and society as a whole; the poets, playwrights and painters who created great works of art, unmolested by restrictions on their conscience and granted independent thought. These are our ambassadors ? those who made the watch on your wrist and shoes on your feet.

It is tempting to lapse back into the self-satisfied stance of thinking that we are somehow the enlightened few compared to those who are either too idle, too dim-witted or simply too far-gone to learn about freedom. This is nothing less than a monumental mistake. Many of us bemoan Westminster for being more a political club than a functioning organ of a representative democracy. Whilst not the sole remedy to this grievance, inspiring your man and woman on street of liberty is a crucial first step. Until then, the mental shackles put in place by decades of political misdeeds do not stand a chance of being torn away.

[Deirdre McCloskey wrote [a fine example of 'Factual free-market' advocacy](#) [3] recently. ? ed]

[blog comments powered by Disqus](#) [5]

Source URL: <http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/media-culture/less-theory-more-reality>

Links:

[1] <http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/media-culture/less-theory-more-reality>

[2] <http://www.adamsmith.org/taxonomy/term/5869>

[3] <http://bleedingheartlibertarians.com/2012/06/factual-free-market-fairness/>

[4] http://disqus.com/?ref_noscript

[5] <http://disqus.com>