Walter Block

Walter Edward Block (born 21 August 1941) is an Austrian School economist and prominent anarcho-capitalist.[1] He is currently Professor of Economics at Loyola University New Orleans and Senior Fellow with the Ludwig von Mises Institute.

Contents [show]

Life

Youth Edit

Block was born in Brooklyn, New York to Abraham Block, a certified public accountant, and Ruth Block, a paralegal, both of whom have said were liberals.[2] He earned his undergraduate degree in Philosophy summa cum laude from Brooklyn College, where he was a member of the varsity swimming team. Block earned his Ph.D. degree in economics from Columbia University and wrote his dissertation on rent control. Template:Citation needed Block, who is of Jewish background, self-identifies as a "devout atheist".[3]

File:Walterblock.jpg

Block’s early thinking life was characterized by egalitarian thought. In an interview by the Austrian Economics Newsletter, Block stated, "In the fifties and sixties, I was just another commie living in Brooklyn."[4] Block credits his "conversion" to libertarianism to personal meetings with Ayn Rand while he was an undergraduate student. Alan Greenspan was in attendance at some of these meetings.[5] As Block describes it, "In 1963, when I was a senior at Brooklyn College, Ayn Rand came there to give a lecture. I attended, along with about 3,000 of my fellow mainly leftish students, in order to boo and hiss her, since she was evil incarnate. Afterward, the president of the group that had invited her to campus announced there was to be a luncheon in her honor, and anyone was welcome to take part, whether or not they agreed with her ideas. Not having had enough booing and hissing at Ayn in her formal lecture, I decided to avail myself of this opportunity to further express my displeasure with her and her views."

Block thereafter attended a luncheon with Rand, Nathaniel Branden, and Leonard Peikoff. After Block's challenging of several luncheon attendees, Branden forged an agreement with Block: "Nathan very graciously offered to come to the other end of the table with me for this purpose, but he imposed two preconditions: first, I would be honor bound not to allow this conversation to lapse with this one meeting, but would continue with it until we had achieved a resolution: either he would convince me of the error of my ways, or I would convince him of his. Second, I would read two books he would later recommend to me (Atlas Shrugged by Ayn Rand and Economics in One Lesson by Henry Hazlitt).[2]

Although Block credits Ayn Rand, Branden, and other Objectivists with his initial interest in laissez faire theory in general, he says of Murray Rothbard that,

"After I met Murray, it took him probably all of 15 minutes to convert me to the same anarcho-capitalist position I have held ever since... In retrospect, before I had met Murray, I was nine tenths of the way toward embracing laissez faire capitalist anarchism; all I needed was a little push in the same direction I had already been going for some time.[2]"

Career

Block now holds the Harold E. With endowed Chair in Economics at Loyola University in New Orleans. From 1979 to 1991, he was the Senior Economist with the Fraser Institute. In addition to his faculty position at Loyola, Block is also a Senior Faculty member of the Ludwig von Mises Institute for Austrian Economics. His most famous work is Defending the Undefendable, of which John Stossel said, "Defending the Undefendable... opened my eyes to the beauties of libertarianism. It explains that so much of what is assumed to be evil--is not."

Lew Rockwell of the Mises Institute said about Walter Block’s active role in modern libertarianism:

Murray Rothbard, in his life, was known as Mr. Libertarian. We can make a solid case that the title now belongs to Walter Block, a student of Rothbard's whose own vita is as thick as a big-city phonebook, and as diverse as Wikipedia. Whether he is writing on economic theory, ethics, political secession, drugs, roads, education, monetary policy, social theory, unions, political language, or anything else, his prose burns with a passion for this single idea: if human problems are to be solved, the solution is to be found by permitting greater liberty.[8]

Political views

Block, along with Robert Nozick, is one of the leading libertarian defenders of voluntary slave contracts, arguing that a slave contract is "a bona fide contract where consideration crosses hands; when it is abrogated, theft occurs". He critiques other libertarians who oppose voluntary slavery as being inconsistent with their shared principles. Block seeks to make "a tiny adjustment" which "strengthens libertarianism by making it more internally consistent." He argues that his position shows "that contract, predicated on private property [can] reach to the furthest realms of human interaction, even to voluntary slave contracts."[7]

On February 17, 2006, Block publicly expressed his support for the Free State Project (FSP). He is quoted as saying,
Defending the Unde{}fendable

Walter Block is possibly best known for his 1976 controversial book *Defending the Unde{}fendable*, in which he defends pimps, drug dealers, blackmaillers, corrupt policemen, and loan sharks as "economic heroes".[9]

Friedrich Hayek wrote to Walter Block about this book: "Looking through *Defending the Unde{}fendable* made me feel that I was once more exposed to the shock therapy by which, more than fifty years ago, the late Ludw{}ig von Mises converted me to a consistent free market position. … Some may fi{}nd it too strong a medicine, but it will still do them good even if they hate it. A real understanding of economics demands that one abandons oneself of many dear prejudices and illusions. Popular fallacies in economics frequently express themselves in unfounded prejudices against other occupations, and showing the falsity of these stereotypes you are doing a real services, although you will not make yourself more popular with the majority."[10]

Others, however, argue that Block’s views are an example of what David Hume called “false philosophy” — philosophy that reduces complex matters to an overly-simple rule of conduct, an example of the moral corruption to which libertarianism is prone.[11]

Major contributions

Walter Block’s major contributions belong to the following fields:

Writing

- Libertarianism
- Evictionism (in contrast to abortion)

According to this moral theory, the act of abortion must be conceptually separated into the acts of:

1. the eviction of the fetus from the womb, and
2. the killing of the fetus.

Building on the libertarian stand against trespass and murder, Block supports a right to the first act, but, except in certain circumstances, not the second act.

Walter Block believes the woman may legally abort if the fetus is not viable outside the womb, or

1. the woman has announced to the world her abandonment of the right to custody of the fetus, and
2. no one else has “homesteading” that right by offering to care for the fetus.[12]

Likewise, medical experimenters can treat the fetuses they have in their possession as laboratory “animals”, as is their desire, contingent on one and only one stipulation: that no one else in the world wishes to raise these very young infants on their own. Thus Professor Block claims to offer an alternative to the standard pro-life and pro-choice positions.[13]

Negative homesteading

According to Professor Block’s negative homesteading theory, one can come to own misery[14] — a state of being, or about to be, attacked — which one cannot legitimately pass on to someone else, without his permission. Should one however try to forward this misery onto someone else, this person has the right to defend himself from the “forwarding of misery”. One has, however, not the right to initiate force against someone who only “holds” misery or has just been relieved of one’s misery.[15]

Punishment theory

Professor Walter Block has proposed using revolutionary tribunals to hold trials[16] for former Statists in a free society — which would likely have restitution, and possibly retribution-based elements.

In Professor Block’s view, it is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for guilt (e.g., a violation of libertarian principles) and thus justification for punishment by the libertarian Nuremberg trials, that a person be a state official.[17] For instance, people, who have used eminent domain to help enrich themselves, ought not to be allowed to keep their ill-gotten gains.

Serious attempts to trace property back to original owners would not normally be made. However, in cases where proof could be provided and this could be done, claimants would come forth to state their cases. Most likely, these trials would work via the homesteading of claims by first-comers, perhaps by insurance companies providing private dispute resolution services.

These trials would not be arbitrary, but would be brought by specific claimants, either specific victims, or defense insurance companies trying to improve market standing, and indirectly acting on behalf of many victims. The benefits might be seen in terms of lower premiums, which insurance companies homesteading claims against Statists could afford to offer to gain more customers. Another way that this might work is through outlawry trials. Offering insurance for private protection is a business, and companies cannot afford to insure individuals who are incredibly high risks. Individuals who might be the recipients of much hostility and attempted repossession in a free market — i.e., prominent Statists — would likely have difficulty finding protection agencies willing to protect them. Evidence-based trials could be held at the request of these individuals, in which case their guilt may or may not be proven beyond a reasonable doubt.

Highway privatization

Professor Block believes that government management of roads and highways is not only inefficient but also deadly. “Road socialism” causes the deaths of more than 35,000 people in the United States each year. And although many people blame highway deaths on alcohol, unsafe vehicles, or speeding, Block lays the blame on the government officials who manage the

HALO Board
Ocean privatization

References

See also

Articles

Publications

Edited
14. ↑ Misery, proper, is a feeling of great unhappiness, suffering and/or pain.
16. ↑