

THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Steve Horwitz's legacy of humane libertarianism

June 29, 2021

Free-market economist Steve Horwitz was not a household name like Milton Friedman or Walter Williams, but the myriad obituaries in the wake of his death to cancer this week at age 57 is a testament to his legacy within the libertarian movement. The Ball State University professor artfully explained how freedom advances humanitarian values.

“He knew the desire to control other people’s lives was ingrained in humans, but that there is another way,” wrote the Cato Institute’s Trevor Burrus. “Maybe people could understand that resorting to force to instantiate your vision of the ‘good’ is not a sign of strength.” Horwitz understood the danger of having warring political tribes perpetually fight over control of the government.

Horwitz’s brand of libertarianism resonates deeply on this editorial board, which is committed to reforms that limit government and protect our liberties rather than “owning” the other side. Like Horwitz, we believe that liberty benefits all human beings and has the most humane outcomes.

The best way to remember Horwitz is to reflect on some of his writing. Here are his thoughts on diversity, from a 2016 column: “In a free society, that productivity is translated into human progress through exchange in the marketplace. Indeed, difference and diversity become a blessing not a curse, as markets enable us to cooperate across our differences.”

Here is Horwitz writing about tariffs: “While you enjoy your French cheese, your Chilean wine, or your Bulgarian pickled mushrooms, consider the invisible network of institutions that make it possible for you to do so, and for your local chef to get them as well. ... When we weaken those institutions and when we place limits on trade, we threaten the livelihoods and well-being of us all.”

And here he encapsulates the nature of government: “If humans aren’t smart enough to run their own lives, why should we believe that there are humans smart enough to run the lives of others?”

We appreciated the way he explained complex economic topics in an easily understandable and compelling manner. He will be missed, but his ideas will endure.