Episode 1554: Gene Epstein Suggests These Books Influenced His Intellectual Development

Guest: Gene Epstein

WOODS: All right, let's talk books. We're going to talk books today. And you've sent me a list that we can't possibly get to, so what we're going to do is we're going to talk about a handful of these. These are books that influenced your intellectual development.

EPSTEIN: That's correct, yes.

WOODS: And we're going to put on the show notes page the whole list, even the ones we don't get to here. So everybody who's curious about what are all the Epstein books that he wanted to talk about, they will all be listed and linked at TomWoods.com/1554 if you'd like to look at them. So I think I'm not going to do *The Case Against Education* by Bryan Kaplan, only because you've talked about it on the show before, because I did an episode with Bryan on it, and then I did an episode with you on it. So I think we'll just refer people to that in the list of episodes you've done with me.

EPSTEIN: Yeah.

WOODS: And then the Noam Chomsky book we've covered a bit in the past.

EPSTEIN: We've got it pretty much covered, yeah.

WOODS: And *Man, Economy, and State* and *For a New Liberty* and *Economic Controversies*. So that actually helps me a little bit.

EPSTEIN: Okay.

WOODS: But here are a couple of books I actually don't know about.

EPSTEIN: All right.

WOODS: I don't know who Robert Paul Wolff is, but he wrote books called *In Defense of Anarchism* and *The Poverty of Liberalism*. I am very interested to hear about those books.

EPSTEIN: Okay. Well, yeah, this was early in my development. As you know I labeled it, Tom, books important to my intellectual development, and, of course, that could mean that many of your audience who've read Michael Huemer, who've read David Friedman, and of course, obviously Murray Rothbard, the three great ancap people, then maybe *In Defense of Anarchism*, which is a relatively short book, is not going to be so important to them. But so maybe this is mostly about me. But I think that these books are probably worth picking up.

In Defense of Anarchism is really just sort of an essay-length book, in which Wolff, who is to this day — I think he's still alive — a left-leaning socialist. So once again, when I talked about Chomsky and talk about a Wolff, I'm talking about what I was able to learn from the socialists who do still hate the state. And I think that it's certainly true of Chomsky, and maybe even arguably true of Wolff. They hate the state even though they're a little confused about the state, insofar as they still advocate for conventional socialism.

But *In Defense of Anarchism* is a book in which he simply talks in very stark terms about the subject of autonomy, how important individual autonomy is, and then discusses the various solutions to it via the state, and then sort of reluctantly concludes that there was no way to avoid that. If you truly believe in individual autonomy, and individual autonomy not only means rights, but from Wolff's standpoint, it always also means responsibilities. And, of course, an obvious analogy — I don't think that will fit into that particular analogy, but clearly,

when the Nazis were hung at Nuremberg, the fact that they were following orders was not a sufficient defense, that if they committed crimes against humanity even when the state was telling them to do so and they were just following orders, in that sense being obedient citizens, that was still a crime for which they could be punished. And therefore, autonomy then means not just that we have rights, but that we also have responsibilities to be true to our own sense of morality.

And where that I guess still lingers with me is that his argument convinced to me that we're in a quandary. And in fact, Wolff, who maybe doesn't quite hate the state, he admitted that he was in a quandary, in a dilemma. But the quandary is a good one for many of us who still flirt with minarchism, because the quandary is simply that we recognize that we are philosophical anarchists, that we might comply with certain government requests that we don't like, that we don't think are great, just to go along because we think they're trivial. But then when government, as government was going to ask me — government was going to draft me to fight in the Vietnam War — then my autonomy, my sense of moral responsibility was such that I had to say no. I could have left the country. I could have committed civil disobedience in different ways. I was simply ready to go to prison if they caught up with me. How I managed to dodge the draft is another story in itself.

But I'm only saying it's a very purely stated and beautifully put argument that should at least put us all in a quandary and render us all who believe in autonomy basically a philosophical anarchism that we cannot deny — which I'm trying to remember, but I think that when you interviewed Michael Huemer, he was almost backing away pragmatically a little bit from his actual proposals, but insisting in the same sense that there's no way to avoid what I would call philosophic anarchy. So that's *In Defense of Anarchism*.

The Poverty of Liberalism was also important for me and only because of one chapter. Early on in my development, when I was in my 20s, he talked about the value of community, and he put it in a very sort of pure, beautiful way. He's a philosopher; he put it in a way — he claims to be a Kantian, and I don't know quite what that is all about because I'm not learned enough.

But what he said, essentially, was that there is a kind of a value beyond our sense of individuality, the value that most of us place on what he referred to as states of reciprocal awareness between people. And he begins I think sort of artfully like a clever philosopher on states of reciprocal awareness that are actually negative, that the master and servant or the master and the, so to speak, slave — let's say just say the master and servant — or the boss and the employee. The boss wants the employee to know I'm boss and wants the employee to know that he knows, and the employee to know that he knows that he knows. And as Robert Paul Wolff said, if you can acknowledge the sort of nasty cases of reciprocal awareness that people want between each other, then you can acknowledge, as well, the positive ties that we all seek. And so it turned me at least philosophically into being hyper aware of the fact that we all seek community. So that's pretty much it.

And I don't know if I've impressed anybody to pick that up. Robin Paul Wolff then went on to appallingly do some kind of a weird defense of Marxian labor theory of value. How he was able to do that, I don't know. I looked at the book. It seemed like a real crazy conniption. The assumptions he made were ridiculous, but so he was out of his depth when he did that one. But these are two I think beautiful statements of both autonomy and community and the value that I think most of us see in both of these things.

WOODS: All right, well, I'm intrigued now. Just what I need, Gene, just what I need: more books to read.

EPSTEIN: [laughing] More books to read. Yeah, the chapter's relatively short. He writes beautifully, and *In Defense of Anarchism* is kind of an essay-length book.

WOODS: Let's skip ahead to Thomas Sowell, because I actually did — I love him.

EPSTEIN: Yeah.

WOODS: I did a whole episode on his book — oh, doggone it.

EPSTEIN: Yeah, no, I know which one you're referring to.

WOODS: All right, I'm an old man, and I am just going to go find —

EPSTEIN: His most recent. Well, yeah, no, indeed. And of course, you had me on to talk about him, and of course, I think you said that you want to have him on your show. I've written him a couple of times awhile back when I was at *Barron's*, asking him if he would do book reviews for me, and he politely declined. Although in fact, he does talk to a few people. Perhaps you know Jason Riley. I mentioned Jason's book *Please Stop Helping Us*. Jason is a self-styled conservative, but Jason is really a protege of Thomas Sowell's and has met with him a great deal. Jason is doing a book on Thomas Sowell, and Jason actually spent a couple of hours interviewing me, talking to me about what I thought he should emphasize in that book about Thomas Sowell. It's apparently not going to be a full-scale biography, but it's mostly going to be a sort of intellectual biography.

WOODS: Okay, all right.

EPSTEIN: So I look forward to that.

WOODS: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. So the book I was thinking of was *A Conflict of Visions*.

EPSTEIN: Yeah, yeah.

WOODS: Michael Malice and I did an episode on that book.

EPSTEIN: Oh, that one? Okay, you're not even remembering, Tom, you did a solo on the title I'm going to not remember, but it was a book basically that attacked the issue of disparate outcomes.

WOODS: Yes, that's right. That's right. And I got a review copy of that book. When you're talking, I'll go research what the heck the name of that book was. But I got a review copy in advance of what looked like an appearance of Sowell on the show. His people sent me that book for free, so I got at least that, and then it just never was able to happen. So that's why it turned out to be a solo episode, Gene, because I thought it would be an episode with Sowell.

EPSTEIN: Oh, well, Sowell, he was born in 1930, so next year he's turning 90, and that book was written a couple of years ago, so it's pretty much of an achievement that he was able to write such a book in an advanced age, and an inspiration.

WOODS: Oh, yeah. And let me say that being on *The Tom Woods Show* may not be his top priority, and what puts me in mind of maybe one of my favorite lines ever uttered on *The Tom Woods Show*, and it was uttered by, of all people, Pat Buchanan. A couple years ago, I was asking him about his analysis of why doesn't Trump do this or that and it seems strategically he ought to do this. And he started off by saying, "Well, let me just insert a caveat here, because after all, Donald Trump is in the White House, and I'm talking on The Tom Woods Show." [laughing] I thought that was great.

EPSTEIN: [laughing] That was good. Very appropriate. That taught you humility, Tom, and it anticipates my philosophical rant that's going to come up in a couple of days. All very true. And indeed, however, Thomas Sowell has been so prolific, although I think that, by the way, part of the secret of Sowell's success is that he keeps mentioning — I'm not going to remember the names that are almost becoming famous. One of them is, I know it's an Asian name of a woman, these two research assistants who seem to be full-time, and that's part of the strength of his writing, that he's so filled with very apt narratives and examples. I mean, his books read like sort of dense Balzacian novels, of just the reality of the world. *Basic Economics* is really an attempt, largely quite successful, to sort of make points about the

fundamentals of economics by telling a series of narrative examples. And that's one of the main things that makes his writing so lively.

WOODS: Yes.

EPSTEIN: But then again, he has these two research assistants whom he's constantly profusely thanking. They probably really mine a great deal for him. That gives a lot of power to his books.

WOODS: Yeah, no doubt, no doubt. Now, *A Conflict of Visions* was one of the ones that over the years people had urged me to read, because I'd already read some Sowell books, and people said you've got to read *A Conflict of Visions*. And then the other one that I've been sort of badgered to read over the years is one of the ones you include in your list, which is *Knowledge and Decisions*. So what's the idea there? Is it a Hayekian book, or is there another level in that?

EPSTEIN: It's Hayekian, yeah. And indeed, there too, I labeled it intellectual development. I, however, find there's a kind of a book that I like to read when I just want to relax and feel a certain amount of joy, a book that sort of enlightens me in a sort of delightful way. Certain heavier tomes I save for during the day when I've had a cup of coffee, but almost anything by Sowell is so readable, that I could pick up *Knowledge and Decisions*.

And indeed, as you say, it's essentially a very imaginative — and that's probably before he took on those research assistants, so it shows how much he could come up with examples — of the basic Hayekian idea that — the first sentence begins, "Information is everywhere, but knowledge is rare." And essentially, it's about how knowledge is important in the free market. And it's a series of chapters in which he discusses it from different standpoints.

The only example that comes to mind is just the communication in free market of the idea of the Holiday Inn, of the idea that when you're on the road driving across the country, the branding has special value in the marketplace. The branding is such that you know the Holiday Inn is not going to be the Ritz. You know that it's not going to be high-end, but you also know that it's not going to be a fleabag. And so branding in an economy in which people are traveling all the time is very important, because it conveys a certain kind of quality that you can rely on. And of course, when they put it together, the Holiday Inns, they make sure that they stick to certain standards that keep validating the fact that they keep to the brand.

And also, by the way, the thread that I wrote at the top of my email, "Do You Hate the State?" I think that — of course, "Do You Hate the State?" was an essay by Murray Rothbard, and it sort of pushes the envelope, because you and I might say, well, David Friedman doesn't really hate the state, and that was, of course, Murray's argument, but then some might say no, no, maybe David does hate the state. So it's guesswork. It's kind of feel. But I think it was a very important point. I think that Thomas Sowell, for all his supposed to conservatism, and with respect to foreign policy certainly he was neoconservative, I think that in so many ways, there is a passion that hates the state. And that's what it comes to.

There's an essay by Sowell, by the way, in which he — perhaps I've mentioned this before or you're familiar with it. It's the idea that he said that if government has to cut back on its expenditure, suppose that the local government has a statue to Benedict Arnold in the park or it's running the libraries. Which do you think the government is going to shut down first in order to save money, the Benedict Arnold statue or the library? He said they're going to shut down the library. They're not going to shut down access to the statue or access to the park where you can see the statue, because obviously what they want to do, their tactic is to make you feel — that's what politicians are going to do. They want to make you feel that they're denying you something that you can really use, and they're going to keep providing you with things that are even obnoxious that you don't want to use at all. And of course, that was written by somebody who I think hates the state.

WOODS: Well, in the number seven on your list of books, where you've got three books by Sowell, you then have Jason Riley's book *Please Stop Helping Us*. And so you include that with Sowell, although you then skip to number nine in your list, so maybe Riley was implicit —

EPSTEIN: Oh my God.

WOODS: Yeah, so who knows?

EPSTEIN: I suppose I can't count, Tom.

WOODS: So tell me, I mean, is this going to be a book about how affirmative action doesn't help blacks? What's the idea there?

EPSTEIN: Well, yeah. Yeah, absolutely. No, indeed, you sound like you diminished it, Tom, and I guess the only point I want to make —

WOODS: No, sorry. It's just, I mean, it is a valuable point, and in fact, it was a point that I thought was made very effectively at the Soho Forum, as a matter of fact, by somebody who appears on this list, so we will actually get to that in a couple of minutes.

EPSTEIN: Yes, well, I think it ties in with Sowell's very bold book, *The Economics and Politics of Race*. And certainly, the fact that Sowell's African American and Jason Riley is as well makes it easier for them to risk being politically incorrect. The white guy Charles Murray, I guess — is he on this list? I guess I didn't put him on the list. Oh, there he is. He is on the list. He got into more trouble making this point, but Sowell, in *The Economics and Politics of Race*, he was absolutely — great book to read, by the way — uncompromising in making the point about disparate outcomes, making the point that there was an uncanny series of patterns with respect to nationality, race, and ethnicity with respect to various groups.

Of course, his point about the Jews and the Chinese was fairly typical. Or no, actually, let me take his least politically correct point. He made a point about the Mexicans and the Japanese. And he said that if you take the Mexicans who live in California, the Japanese who live in California, prejudice against them certainly since World War II, over the decades was about the same. And then on top of that, the Japanese were put in internment camps during World War II and stripped of their property, and only their parents years later were given some of it back. But they were clearly a very dislocated group. That's one comparison. And then he pointed out how is it that currently the Japanese in California have a higher material standard of living than the average non-Japanese in California, but the Mexicans have a lower standard of living? How is that the case? And then he compared Mexico with Japan. Mexico, a country rich in natural resources, Japan bereft of natural resources, how is it the Japanese's standard of living in Japan is much higher than in Mexico?

So we have those two comparisons, rather nasty kind of thing to say, and what is he saying? Obviously, he's saying, I'm not saying that Mexicans are not decent people, as good as anybody else. Obviously nobody's going to accuse him of that. He said, but there are cultural differences that stare you in the face. There are cultural differences about economic success that stare you in the face, and that it's silly to deny these facts, especially since the affirmative action people are telling us that we should look for equal outcomes. So this rather outrageous statement and outrageous series of analyses came out of Thomas Sowell. He set the standard and the example.

And by the way, when he talked about the Jews, I mean, this is a bit of a revelation to me in *The Economics and Politics of Race*, because of course, he was the one who brought home Gary Becker's point that under capitalism, if any country has any kind of vestige of capitalism, then if given half a chance, the Jews and the Chinese and the Japanese are going to be richer than everybody else, because they're just good at these things. This is deep in their culture. They're hard working, they save money, they're entrepreneurial. So they are going to be richer than the people who oppress them.

And then the tragic part of his vision, which I think in a way he didn't clarify enough, the tragic part of his vision was to say that while the progressives think that races like the Jews, like the Japanese, like the Chinese who are oppressed, are never going to get on top economically, they always do. But does that do them any good in the final analysis? Well, the Chinese were obviously pariah in Malaysia for owning most of the businesses. The Jews clearly became pariah in Germany and in much of Europe for being as successful as they were, and the Japanese also became under suspicion for no good reason in California. So that's the tragic element in Sowell's vision.

And Jason Riley picked up on this, but it's not just about affirmative action. Jason Riley is a dark-skinned black, and he has throughout his life experienced racial profiling, so his personal stories are quite striking. He went to University of Buffalo, and he lived off campus I think for the last three years, and he drove to school every morning. And en route, he was stopped by the cops twice a week, just because he's a black kid driving a car. And he started to take alternative routes in order to avoid the cops. When he moved to New York City, he said that he was dealt with some suspicion in restaurants.

But then he tells a personal story that he worked in a convenience store while working his way through college, and he was on the lookout for pilferers, for people who'd steal from the store. And he said, I found myself racially profiling people who looked like me, he said, because I found that people who looked like me were the people who were more likely than anybody else to pilfer something from the store. And then he says boldly, he said, look, even middle-class male blacks, if they're walking on the street and they see a bunch of disreputable black teenagers coming their way, they too will cross the street. So he sort of boldly says that, I cross the street too. I'm not affronting the individuality of these kids who look disreputable. Am I really insulting them personally? I'm just taking the precaution that anybody has to take in this society.

So he writes about this with no resentment at all. And by the way, I had Jason as a one-on-one in Junto, the quasi-debating society I used to run, and Jason told us a story that evening. With a laugh, he said he was in Brooks Brothers looking for ties to buy that morning, and the saleswoman is following him around wherever he goes, just sort of keeping an eye on him. And he was laughing about that. And I said, "Jason, you're respectable looking guy." But I think what Jason knows is he's very dark skinned, and he's a young-looking guy. "I'm just suspicion." So again, Jason is quite a tonic and has the same courage and boldness that Thomas Sowell does, talking about these very difficult issues.

WOODS: All right, let's move to a book that maybe you didn't expect me to mention because it's not quite as hardcore as the other books, but I'm intrigued when you say that this is a — the way you portrayed it when you were introducing Peter in the affirmative action, namely the book *Why Government Fails So Often and How It Can Do Better*, you said this is a book that can work with your moderate friends. It can be a gateway drug to libertarianism.

EPSTEIN: Oh, yes.

WOODS: So I haven't read it, and I'm curious to know, what is it about this book, what's the nature of his argument that might appeal to the non-ideologically committed person?

EPSTEIN: Well, I did a review of it. I hadn't met Peter before I reviewed it. And of course, I call it a gateway drug to libertarianism only because Peter is — of course, having had a couple of dinners with him, I know him well, by now — he's sort of in a personal dilemma, because he voted for Obama both times and no doubt voted for Hillary, and so he sort of holds on to his Democrat-with-a-capital-D kind of attitude. And yet he is so honest empirically, that when he decided to do a book about the things that began to stare him in the face — by the way, he's a professor of law emeritus from Yale, but he takes a huge interest in empirical issues. And he began to see so many ways in which government fails us, that he felt called upon to do a book about it.

And so what's my simple point? My simple point is only that you're going to read a book by a guy who's a Democrat with a capital D, and yet he acknowledges public choice theory — although, by the way, he actually does a beautiful job in discussing it, because he allows for all the exceptions, that the idea that it's irrational for us to vote, as indeed it is irrational for us to take any trouble to vote, because how is our one vote going to make a difference and all the rest of it? And he says, well, but people frequently do act irrationally. They do go to the to the — more than you'd think are rational to be, clearly go to the polls to vote. And so he sees a lot of exceptions, but he points out, look, in the end, public choice theory is quite valid. People will not take the time and rationally not take the time to really follow the issues. And so he grants all that, and then he brings you through a series of horror stories about the crazy bureaucracies.

I'll mention only that he zeroes in on Elizabeth Warren, who at one point has said with a straight face that the student loan program was earning a profit. And this is somebody who's supposedly sophisticated. As Peter pointed out, it was earning a profit because of analysis that assumed that the risk of the student loans was similar to the risk of government treasury bonds and bills. That's what she said with a straight face.

And so he brings series of appalling stories about government failure, and then, as I say, in my opinion, ends a little lamely on how it can do better. And I ended my review by saying, really, you're going to be persuaded it can do a lot better by doing far less. That's really what Peter Schuck persuades us of. And when I met him, I said Peter, dearly, "That's what you convinced us of." And Peter, of course, is very tolerant, open-minded guy, and he said, "Well, so be it." He's open-minded about that. But as a gateway drug to libertarianism lend it to your progressive friends, because it is very readable, and hopefully they'll feel they're in good hands, a Democrat with a capital D. He talks about how "it is with great sadness and reluctance that I report on all these things." So that's the point. He's sad and reluctant, but he's very energetic in telling these horror stories.

WOODS: All right, we'll go a little bit over just to include one more book.

EPSTEIN: Okay.

WOODS: You have three books here by Charles Murray, *Losing Ground*, *What It Means to Be a Libertarian*, and *Coming Apart*.

EPSTEIN: Yeah.

WOODS: I'm familiar with all three, but I've read only *Losing Ground*.

EPSTEIN: Oh.

WOODS: And I wrote to him some time ago, because I did have him on the show once, but we didn't talk about *Losing Ground*. And I asked him what he thought of — because apparently there is some social science literature that takes him to task for the thesis of *Losing Ground* that says it's not really so that single motherhood and all that is being encouraged by these government policies and all that, that at the very least, it's data that he needs to take into account for his thesis. So I aid, what's your response to all this, and his answer to me was, I haven't kept up with any of that. That was this entire answer.

EPSTEIN: Did he really say that?

WOODS: Yeah, "I haven't kept up with any of that." So now I don't even know how valid — but on the other hand, when they did the Denver and Seattle income maintenance experiments, and they said you're going to get this certain amount of money regardless, it did have a huge negative effect on marriage and these other metrics, except in Gary, Indiana. So they looked at what was — well, because in Gary, Indiana, people were under the false impression that if they got divorced, they'd lose the money. So I mean, apparently it did have some kind of effect of people's behavior after all. But I was just left kind of wondering what to make of the

situation when he had no answer to what I was asking. So do you want to pick one of these and tell us about —

EPSTEIN: No, no, gosh, I guess I just have to hopefully answer it this way. I had a long dinner with Charles Murray. I followed him — he comes to New York these days not infrequently, and how that he's working on a new book, I'm trying to get him — I think he will be willing to defend the book at the Soho Forum. But I mention that only because he's a complicated person. I put that euphemistically. In a way, he's like Robert Nozick. Robert Nozick, that's *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, he backed away from his own book. Robert Nozick, in a book that he wrote a number of years later after *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* specifically repudiated key elements in his book *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*.

And Charles Murray, who's got a couple of hobbyhorses, when I heard him about two years ago, I raised my hand, and I said to Charles, you've just said something that I'm sitting here, I'm hearing Charles Murray repudiate the thesis of *Coming Apart*. Tom, in *Coming Apart*, it's all about the decline in labor force participation rate of men. It's all about things like specifically the huge increase in disability payments, the revolution in disability payments that has continued to decimate the labor force participation rate of men, 25 to 54. He's been solidly documenting just the overwhelming evidence, and hard to refute that, that obviously government policies do foster dropouts from the labor force.

Losing Ground is pretty solidly argued, and while obviously you mentioned Gary, Indiana, I was all set for you to say, well, it didn't happen there for a good reason. You know, it doesn't always happen, but the idea that the dole makes a difference I think has been overwhelmingly demonstrated by Charles Murray. He deserves credit for having boldly written this book. It was published in 1981, *Losing Ground*, and this was at a time when it was very politically incorrect to say such things. Others have picked up his thesis. Nick Eberstadt, you're probably familiar with him, he's at the American Enterprise Institute. He's picked up on the thesis, written a lot of good things about it, about the decline of work among prime age men. So overwhelmingly, it's the case. And obviously I guess it unsettles progressives to admit to it, but it's undeniable.

Now, I have mixed feelings about Charles. Charles, as you were speaking about him generally, those are the only three books of Charles' that I would recommend, and *Coming Apart* is relatively recent, and which, by the way, what he does is he focuses only on the white population. And he does that because he wants to make it clear that he's not singling out blacks, that the effect of government policies is to discourage work and discourage participation in the workforce. Or he wrote in *Coming Apart*, he said in the 1950s, men, prime age men who didn't work were called bums. They were called street corner men. They were condemned. I mean, he writes uncompromisingly about that, and in *Coming Apart*, it's strictly about whites, where he picks his data, in order to show it's true of working class whites as well.

He defended himself by pointing out in the book, he says there's always the argument, well, they're not given job opportunities. He said, well, look at the 1990s. The unemployment rate was the out of 4%, 3.9%. There was an explosion of employment,. We put it to the test in those days. Of course, we're putting it to the test again today with an unemployment rate of below 4%. And so he vigorously defended himself, but he waxes and wanes and backs away from his own thesis, as he did at that time, because his hobbyhorse is now a guaranteed annual income. And he wrote a book about that. And then his hobbyhorse, as well, where I saw somebody really take him apart is the idea that this time is different. The robots are taking all our jobs. So he's a very mixed bag.

But I also want to recommend *What It Means to Be a Libertarian*. It's libertarian light, but I do think that that too is a book that you might want to recommend to a progressive friend after he reads Peter Schuck, because it's a very good, sort of thoughtful piece about what

libertarianism means to him. He makes a couple of small mistakes about certain aspects of economics, but he gets into some two very good points.

One is an imaginative thought experiment in *What It Means to Be a Libertarian,* in which he talks about how, what if we didn't abolish all regulation at all. We kept the regulatory agencies, but we allowed any business to opt out of regulatory constraints, so long as it put prominently on the label of its products and prominently on the label of all its outlets, "We have decided to be exempt from all government regulation." And then, of course, he said the other businesses that decide to stick with government regulation could say, "We proudly abide by all government regulation." So he says, just let that happen, as long as they advertise that they're opting out, and let the buyer beware, and then see what will happen. And he goes into I think a very persuasive point, that since there are so many dumb and crazy regulations, and since companies want to defend their brand, the regulated businesses will quickly find it almost impossible to compete with the unregulated businesses, the businesses that have opted out. I think it was an imaginative point.

The other point he goes into, which ties in with my affection for the argument for community in *The Poverty of Liberalism*, is his point that we have lost the sense of community precisely because we're not libertarian enough, that government has usurped so many of the powerful community functions, of taking care of the elderly in particular, of running our own communities in particular. We crave community, but we now spend our weekends at the amusement parks rather than possibly recognizing that we do want to take care of grandma and grandpa and make them a part of our lives. And he elaborates on that even further in terms of his own personal love of community and his point that a libertarian society would foster voluntary community rather than discourage it.

So again, he's somebody, I think in those three books, who's left writings that are really worth reading, even though in certain other ways he's abandoned his integrity. The story you just told me really is surprising, that he can even say he's not up with the data when he published a book called *Coming Apart*.

WOODS: All right, so what I'm going to do is link to, as I say — maybe I'll do it separately. I'll have a section on the books we covered here and a section on books that were in your list that we didn't cover. That will all be at TomWoods.com/1554. And we have arrived now, we are on the eve of, if you can believe it, the final day of Gene Epstein Week. And in the final day of Gene Epstein Week, Gene is going to share different pearls of wisdom with us. We'll just put it that way. It's going to put an exclamation mark on Gene Epstein Week, so do not miss that one, and we'll see you tomorrow.