

David Collum  
Betty R. Miller Professor of Chemistry and Chemical Biology  
Cornell University

"The Austrian worldview is like a brain worm that has infected large swathes of our financial industry..."

--Noah Smith--

That is the opening salvo of a BloombergView piece written by Professor Noah Smith entitled, *Austrian Economists, 9/11 Truthers and Brain Worms*. [<http://www.bloombergtview.com/articles/2014-07-02/austrian-economists-9-11-truthers-and-brain-worms>] I've read many of your blogs and disagreed with much of what you say, but you are a pro, and I am an unranked amateur. I never found your blogs so disagreeable as this one. My response was immediate and visceral. I wrote the editor (James Greiff) and suggested you apologize, and he suggested I write a rebuttle. I did, he sat on it, so here it archived in the deepest recesses of the web.

You (Noah) suggest Austrians are "off their rockers." As a victim of this infestation working with only basal levels of cranial function, I have mustered a few thoughts. (As you noted, Austrians do not actually have ideas or thoughts but rather "catechisms" elicited by a lurking anti-semitism.) Austrian economics is a large tent covering a range of views, but we all seem to agree that prices of goods, services, and capital should be set by market forces (rather than committees of central bankers) and that credit-based booms invariably lead to busts as the excessive credit is unwound. Apparently, "when the Austrian brain-worm invades, [we] start believing things like...the Federal Reserve money-printing is a government plot to boost big banks". Indeed, us nutjobs call it "too big to fail". You say we are victims of "gold-flogging sites like Zerohedge", mindlessly endorsing "gold [as] central to the Austrian worldview." You assure us that gold is not an inflation hedge, noting that "gold returns actually had more to do with foreign central-bank purchases." My worm-addled, Zerohedge-indoctrinated brain wonders why central banks are buying and repatriating so much gold.

I could continue with a point-by-point rebuttal, but not really because I disagreed with essentially every sentence. We could bang heads for hours. (I will concede, however, that you are *not* "a corrupt spokesman for big banks and government overlords" and that "moon-landing hoaxers" are a bit kooky.) I thought of simply tallying the manifold straw man arguments, misquotes of luminaries, omitted contradicting quotes of those same luminaries, internal contradictions, and, my favorite, the ad hominem attacks. A careful read of your blog and the over 300 comments (so far) document many of these concerns.

Instead, as one academic to another, I will offer some advice. As you gain in years and are granted that protective cloak of tenure, watch for shades of gray seeping into your world. When you typed the very first line of your blog—the line I opened with—a little voice in your head should have warned you that

"large swathes of the financial industry" may demand a little more thought and a lot more humility. I conclude with some wisdom from an ancient truther:

*An educated mind can entertain a thought without accepting it.*

—Aristotle—