

*Why has capitalism yielded so much peace? And what does this have to do with Ayn Rand?*

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Capitalism's foundation is built on voluntary exchange (trade) between competing or collaborating parties. It is described negatively as a system of greed for the nature of this trade: each party barter with the intention of maximizing their own gain. Self-interest, or rational selfishness, fuels capitalism, as it serves as the base for these interactions. The philosophy of objectivism, created by Ayn Rand, chooses to base its principles on the objective natures of reality and human organisms: it argues that values and morality arise from the necessity of making choices in order to live, and therefore an ethical framework designed to sustain and advance one's own life is moral. Rand argues that the types of choices one should make in order to sustain their life are *rational* choices, since rational thought is the only mode of consciousness in which active consideration is given to what will maximize one's own flourishing — everything else leaves one's own life up to whim, chance and outside influence otherwise. Rational selfishness, or promoting one's own interests and life through a course of action decided by reason, was virtuous to Rand. As a result, Rand absolutely loved capitalism, saying in her book *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal* that "capitalism is not merely the best of all possible systems. It is the only system that can make freedom, justice, progress, and man's rational self-interest possible."

National progress and growth are commonly associated with altruist ethics: when one contributes to society with the innovation of a product of some kind, that contribution is typically branded or viewed as the prioritization of others over one's own interests. As a result of this perception, many believe that the self-interested individuals Rand praises are the not the producers of today, but simple brutes, people who trample and kill everyone in their way, and only altruistic individuals can innovate for the sake of others. However, it makes far more sense to understand these monumental producers as rationally selfish, instead of altruistic. Rand, who believes altruism is evil, does not define her rational selfishness as a perfectly polar opposite to altruism: altruism is defined by self-sacrifice, whereas rational selfishness is defined by surviving and thriving (not killing others, which would be the polar opposite to self-sacrifice). Altruism, to Rand, is the active and continuous killing of oneself for others, whereas rational selfishness is simply doing what is necessary to keep oneself alive and flourish — which absolutely does not mean killing everyone. The logic of wanting to survive and further one's own life is also quite innate, as fundamentally humans are just organisms seeking to live. This fundamental incentive and alignment with human nature creates an intriguing parallel between altruist ethics and communism: just like the value of one's own labor is expropriated and redistributed to others by a communist government, the direction of one's own interests is expropriated and redistributed towards others by an altruist ethical framework. Just like how one is disincentivized to work under communism, one is disincentivized to have any goals under an altruist ethical framework (because altruism would require their goals be centered around others, which goes against simple human nature), leading to the loss of selfhood and motivation, moral guilt, and the complete erosion of flourishing. Deep down, we already know this: the only real way we can continue to live our lives is by being selfish at some point in our work.

Rand is just telling us we may as well embrace that selfishness — and actually, what she discovered, and what the Western World of today implicitly proves, is that rational selfishness brings far more cohesion, peace and prosperity than we'd expect.

What is truly spectacular about objectivist ethics and rational selfishness is that in cases other than the absolute extreme of emergencies (for which ethics shouldn't be designed anyways, as they'll be used far more frequently in typical daily life), it is in one's own interests to keep other people alive. Not only that, but it is in one's own interests to work with them, and contribute to their prosperity — because in exchange for that collaboration and prosperity, we can make a lot of money ourselves. Capitalism is the ultimate proof of this fact, as it is a system completely in line with objectivist ethics, and one that remains peaceful wherever it has been implemented; the reason capitalist societies have not descended into anarchy is that we've all figured out that we can individually have more by collectively working together. Capitalism allows individuals to grow to riches not by stealing, but by creating wealth for others: large corporations are not made through theft (however loudly the Marxists may accuse them of it), but rather creation of valuable products that markets demand, yielding an improvement in the living standards of all levels — owners of corporations can make incredible amounts of money as a reward for their exceptional innovation, risk-taking and coordination, employees get jobs and decent salaries, and customers receive products that make their lives easier and more conducive to flourishing. Growth, in this way, is fueled by self-interest, not altruism. What about growth fueled by altruism? That is, communist growth? Well, there isn't usually much growth, and not for long, because just like the ethical exhaustion altruism yields, the incentive to work under communism is ground away, because no individual can fundamentally prioritize others for long without losing the desire to do anything themselves. This is the ultimate proof of Rand's take on philosophy: that ethics is objective, and it is objectively selfish. The nature of reality and one's own living state proves that an altruist system of ethics, where the lives of others must be prioritized above one's own, is deeply immoral, and this immorality is why altruism cannot be sustained.

The freedom and libertarian tolerance of today is far better understood through the lens of self-interest rather than altruism, and far more easily embraced by such an understanding. The abolition of slavery in the US, for example, was not the result of a "moral plight" of the American People. It was actually simple economics: slave owners of the North realized that the dire conditions enslaved people lived in were not conducive to their flourishing, and therefore slaves did not work as hard as employees, making slave owners less money than if they were employers. As Adam Smith states in *The Wealth of Nations*, "the experience of all ages and nations, I believe, demonstrates that the work done by free men comes cheaper in the end than that performed by slaves." This is borne out by history: by 1860, the free-labor North far outpaced the slave South in industrial output, proving that wage labor generated greater prosperity than coerced labor ever could. It was in the incentive of the slave owners to raise the living standards of slaves themselves, and they did so by freeing their slaves, paying them a wage, and allowing them to sort out their lives themselves. In the Civil War, this significantly higher level of economic development in the free North was

key to the North's victory: they had more people, better travel and communication systems, more financial resources, and higher industrial capacity. Overall, freedom of the poor or lower classes is in the incentive of the upper classes, despite how passionately some claim it isn't. Even libertarian tolerance is in the incentive of corporations: corporate leaders understand that the more value they engage with, the more they will grow, and by cutting themselves off from certain groups of people (i.e. discriminating against them) they risk missing out on growth opportunities, whether missing a stellar employee or rich customer. It is a common libertarian position that the US Civil Rights Act should be repealed, because it only serves to infringe upon people's freedoms and reinforces something that we're much better off deriving ourselves: nondiscrimination will always come, regardless of force, because *nondiscrimination is profitable*. In fact, the US Civil Rights Act is an altruist take on nondiscrimination — it forces us, through ethical redistribution, to not discriminate against others for their own sake, and not for ours, instead of letting us selfishly come to the conclusion that we are better off by not discriminating. Repealing such an act would not change a majority of discrimination policies, and we know this because there are global powers that never got a civil rights act, and still have significant nondiscrimination: namely, Japan. There are plenty of restaurants, for example, that only serve Japanese individuals, and there is a decent level of systemic discrimination in the country, but there are also plenty of other businesses and opportunities foreigners have, because it would be highly irrational to not capture the larger market beyond the Japanese. It is in one's incentive to not discriminate. The clear unsustainability of forced nondiscrimination by the government — that is, altruist nondiscrimination — is visible in all kinds of US employers today, who have to wear masks in pretending they tolerate all individuals. Why not let these bigoted business owners fail as the result of their irrational business practices, instead of forcing them to wear such a mask? We will all be far better off, in a freer and more tolerant world, if we allow these businesses to discriminate, and therefore lose.

Capitalism has yielded so much peace because it has shown us the beautiful results of rational selfishness. In maximizing our own individual gain, we still desire the freedom of others, the tolerance of others, and the flourishing of others — because we can gain far more by growing freely together than by killing and extracting from each other. Altruism, that forces us to not trade with others but to serve them, is unsustainable, and is the seductive immoral framework that poisons society and paves the way for capitalism to be overturned. To live in a truly moral, peaceful manner, one must embrace their own rational selfishness, and take pride in working to maximize their own flourishing — that is, it is your highest moral achievement to get rich and get comfortable.