

Introducing Objectivism

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Objectivism “on one foot”

At a sales conference at Random House, preceding the publication of *Atlas Shrugged*, one of the book salesmen asked me whether I could present the essence of my philosophy while standing on one foot. I did, as follows:

1. *Metaphysics*: Objective Reality
2. *Epistemology*: Reason
3. *Ethics*: Self-interest
4. *Politics*: Capitalism

If you want this translated into simple language, it would read: 1. "Nature, to be commanded, must be obeyed" or "Wishing won't make it so." 2. "You can't eat your cake and have it, too." 3. "Man is an end in himself." 4. "Give me liberty or give me death."

If you held these concepts with total consistency, as the base of your convictions, you would have a full philosophical system to guide the course of your life. But to hold them with total consistency—to understand, to define, to prove and to apply them—requires volumes of thought. Which is why philosophy cannot be discussed while standing on one foot—nor while standing on two feet on both sides of every fence. This last is the predominant philosophical position today, particularly in the field of politics.

In the space of a column, I can give only the briefest summary of my position, as a frame-of-reference for all my future columns.

Reality, reason, self-interest, capitalism

My philosophy, Objectivism, holds that:

Reality exists as an objective absolute—facts are facts, independent of man's feelings, wishes, hopes or fears.

Reason (the faculty which identifies and integrates the material provided by man's senses) is man's only means of perceiving reality, his only source of knowledge, his only guide to action, and his basic means of survival.

Man—every man—is an end in himself, not the means to the ends of others. He must exist for his own sake, neither sacrificing himself to others nor sacrificing others to himself. The pursuit of his own *rational* self-interest and of his own happiness is the highest moral purpose of his life.

The ideal political-economic system is laissez-faire capitalism. It is a system where men deal with one another, not as victims and executioners, nor as masters and slaves, but as *traders*, by free, voluntary exchange to mutual benefit. It is a system where no man may obtain any values from others by resorting to physical force, and *no man may initiate the use of physical force against others*. The government acts only as a policeman that protects man's rights; it uses physical force *only* in retaliation and *only* against those who initiate its use, such as criminals or foreign invaders. In a system of full capitalism, there should

be (but, historically, has not yet been) a complete separation of state and economics, in the same way and for the same reasons as the separation of state and church.

Capitalism was the system originated in the United States. Its success, its progress, its achievements are unprecedented in human history. America's political philosophy was based on man's right to his own life, to his own liberty, to the pursuit of his own happiness, which means: on man's right to exist for his own sake. That was America's *implicit* moral code, but it had not been formulated explicitly. This was the flaw in her intellectual armor, which is now destroying her.

America and capitalism are perishing for lack of a moral base.

The destroyer is the morality of altruism.

Altruism vs. capitalism

Altruism holds that man has no right to exist for his own sake, that service to others is the only moral justification of his existence, and that self-sacrifice is his highest moral duty. The political expression of altruism is collectivism or *statism*, which holds that man's life and work belong to the state—to the society, to the group, the gang, the race, the nation—and that the state may dispose of him in any way it pleases for the sake of whatever it deems to be its own tribal, collective good.

"From her start, America was torn by the clash of her political system with the altruist morality. Capitalism and altruism are incompatible; they cannot coexist in the same man or in the same society. Today, the conflict has reached its ultimate climax; the choice is clear-cut: either a new morality of rational self-interest, with its consequences of freedom, justice, progress and man's happiness on earth—or the primordial morality of altruism, with its consequences of slavery, brute force, stagnant terror and sacrificial furnaces." (*For the New Intellectual*)

You may observe the practical results of altruism and statism all around us in today's world—such as the slave-labor camps of Soviet Russia, where twenty-one million political prisoners work on the construction of government projects and die of *planned* malnutrition, human life being cheaper than food—or the gas chambers and mass slaughter of Nazi Germany—or the terror and starvation of Red China—or the hysteria of Cuba where the government offers men for sale—or the wall of East Berlin where human beings leap from roofs or crawl through sewers in order to escape, while guards shoot at fleeing *children*.

Observe these atrocities, then ask yourself whether any of it would be possible if men had not accepted the idea that man is a sacrificial animal to be immolated for the sake of the "public good." Read the speeches of those countries' political leaders and ask yourself what arguments would be left to them if the word "sacrifice" were not regarded as a moral ideal, but as the anti-human evil which it is.

And *then*, listen to the speeches of our present [Kennedy] Administration—and ask yourself the same question.

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