

SELFISHNESS VS. ALTRUISM

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For generations it has been part of our cultural heritage that children be taught the lesson of the Good Samaritan. This has been extended to mean that each of us is under an obligation to each other.

In one word, this attitude may be called "altruism." It is advocated by the church, the state and by the left. So universal is its acceptance that capitalists and other men of private enterprise heed it as valid.

But it has no validity in a natural society as conceived by Henry George. He wrote, "every man seeks to satisfy his desires with the least exertion." All living things have one obligation and that is to look after themselves, otherwise they will perish. Involved in this is a biological obligation to the offspring until the latter reach such an age that permits them to become self-supporting. Only men, with that unique tool, the thinking mind, may choose to enter into obligations with others of his species should it suit him to do so. But the choice rests with the individual. In no circumstances are obligations inherent.

The concept of freedom (freedom of choice) has no place for altruism. A man is not free if he has "un-chosen" obligations and responsibilities to the community in general. Capitalism, or laissez-faire, demands from each according to his ability, to each according to the market price of his contribution. Responsibility for performance rests with the individual himself. The man who does his job well, who is proud of his work and himself, who regards the full market price for his output as his own by right, is a happy man and a desirable citizen.

Altruism is one of the few remaining "sacred cows" in the modern world of rapidly changing conventions. Few dare to attack it. Yet in my opinion it is a huge boulder which blocks our path in the attainment of the implementation of our principles. Whilst this attitude endures, the task of the socialists is made so much easier. Their platform is built entirely on the irrational, anti-natural premise of altruism. Their "good guy," Robin Hood, was the inspiration for the modern bureaucratic state.

We find ourselves in a time in which the socialists are continually making gains. The major political parties of most western countries are either right-wing socialist or left-wing socialist. It is just a question of how much "redistribution of income" is acceptable at the particular time.

I hold then that we will have little effect on the unknowing by waving LVT in front of them. We must be aggressive in attacking the fundamental false premise, altruism. We must be proud that Henry George envisaged a society which safeguarded personal profit - a just society.

I refer the reader to the American philosopher Ayn Rand, and in particular her novel, Atlas Shrugged, for a comprehensive treatment of this viewpoint. In my view, Ayn Rand has done for philosophy what Henry George has done for economics.