



IS FREEDOM SELFISH? A DEBATE

**CHRIS R. TAME
AND MICHAEL IVENS**



INTRODUCTION

In 1979 Bachman and Turner published *The Case For Private Enterprise*. With an introduction by Sir Keith (now Lord) Joseph, the book contained essays by such leading advocates of the free market as Lord (Ralph) Harris of the Institute of Economic Affairs, Lord d'Lisle of the Freedom Association, Harry Welton of the Economic League, Michael Ivens of Aims of Industry, and Teresa Gorman and Professor Harry Ferns of the Association of Self Employed People. However, it was the lead essay in the collection, "The Moral Case For Private Enterprise", by LA Secretary Chris R. Tame (reprinted as Philosophical Notes No. 1) that aroused the most attention. "The most interesting and provocative essay in (the) volume", declared Philip Vander Elst in *The Free Nation*, "is undoubtedly that by Chris Tame."

It was in the light of this attention that Michael Ivens, Director of Aims of Industry, challenged Chris Tame to a discussion in the pages of *The Free Nation*. That debate is reprinted below together with the subsequent correspondence it provoked.

MICHAEL IVENS:

I have read your contribution to the new book *The Case for Private Enterprise*. I think it is very stimulating, but there is one thing that worries me about it, as we are both very much on the same side in the defence of capitalism and freedom. I am puzzled by your title "The Moral Case for Private Enterprise". It seems to me that you are basically making the *amoral* case for capitalism. It seems to me that you are arguing with that tiresome woman, Ayn Rand, that the argument for capitalism is applied selfishness. And so you castigate the left and the fascists not for their big sins — but for taking an interest in moral and social motives.

I find this old fashioned. Ayn Rand always seems to me a debased Nietzschean. But more important, it springs from a lack of understanding of capitalists. Their motives vary enormously; certainly they differ from academic defenders of the market economy — but generally earn less! So, although it is unreasonable to expect all capitalists to behave morally, I do not believe you can dissociate capitalism entirely from morality.

I think your stance would not strike chords of sympathy, for example, with many of the members of the Freedom Association, whose concern with the defence of freedom does not include a belief in the philosophy of selfishness.

CHRIS TAME:

Firstly, let me state that the brevity of the essay prevented me from exploring a vast number of aspects of the moral case for private enterprise. My argument was not intended to be exhaustive. However, I must disagree vehemently with your paradoxical characterisation of my moral case as "amoral".

I do indeed follow the general argument of the American philosopher, novelist Ayn Rand (whom incidentally it is quite incorrect to equate with Nietzsche. The latter was a thoroughly ambiguous philosopher wavering between many positions, some of which were indeed amoralist). I think you fall into the collectivist trap of accepting collectivist moral standards which is why you are unable to see the cogency and indeed the ethical nature of the ethical philosophy I am advocating. I am well aware that the prevailing ethical and religious traditions equate morality with actions benefiting others and not self. But it is precisely this which I reject. And I reject it in the name of morality of rational selfishness or ethical egoism.

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Chris R. Tame is Founder and Secretary of the LA. His essays have appeared in such journals as *The Jewish Journal of Sociology*, *Economic Affairs*, *Science and Public Policy*, *Wertfrei*, *The Journal of Social, Economic and Political Studies* amongst others and in a number of books. He edited *A Bibliography of Freedom* for The Centre for Policy Studies and has delivered papers to academic conferences and universities in Britain, the USA and Poland. He frequently appears on television and radio.

Michael Ivens has been Director of Aims of Industry since 1971 and Director of the Foundation for Business Responsibilities since 1966. He is also a founder and member of the Management Committee of the Freedom Association. He has edited or written such books as *The Practice of Industrial Communication*, *The Case For Capitalism*, *Case Studies in Management*, *Industry and Values* and *Pioneers of Freedom and Enterprise*. He writes frequently in the press and is also a successful poet.

Director: Dr Chris R. Tame

Editorial Director: Brian Micklethwait

Webmaster: Dr Sean Gabb

FOR LIFE, LIBERTY AND PROPERTY

The position I advocate in my essay is that the individual is the rightful owner of his/her self, exists for his/her self, and is the rightful beneficiary of his/her actions. This does not mean, of course, that it is right to behave coercively, or without regard for others, for this begs precisely the question of what is in the individual's interest.

But unless one accepts the axiom of self ownership, of ethical egoism, that individuals exist for their own sake, one can only accept the morality of slavery — that individuals exist to serve others, or some mythical abstract collectivist good. The actual current motivation of particular capitalists and businessmen is, of course, irrelevant to my point — I am concerned with how they should be motivated, not how they are at present.

Moreover, it seems to me implicit in your argument that you exclude legitimate concern for others (e.g. family, relations, friends) or a concern with the general social consequences of particular actions or course of action from the real of individuals' rational self interest. The selfish person does not live without friends or family or an interest in the social environment which concerns him or the effects of his behaviour upon that environment.

MICHAEL IVENS:

I spend a lot of my life arguing for freedom and free enterprise; what worries me about your philosophy of ethical egoism is that it is an arid doctrine to try and convert the spiritually ambitious.

My moral case for capitalism is not primarily the motive of the capitalist. My position is a kind of inverted Marxism. I believe that a creative diffused ownership is necessary for the freedoms in a modern industrial society.

I believe also that capitalism provides the opportunity for creativeness and for prosperity.

I do not think it is unfair to classify Ayn Rand with Nietzsche - except to Nietzsche! They are both anti-Christian, but Nietzsche's talents, writing ability, motives and high sense of tragedy, make him tower over the American lady.

I am sure we agree in rejecting the illogical argument that because capitalists are sometimes greedy, stupid, insensitive to values, etc., that you have to reject free enterprise. Capitalism is not a substitute religion and its practitioners will always vary in motives and behaviour. But this is not to say that they should not be concerned with the moral and social impact of their decisions. Running a highly profitable opium business is undesirable not only because it is illegal, but because of its social effects.

It is interesting to have an argument on economics which is philosophical at base. That is sadly rare these days. The arguments for freedom have tended recently to be left to the economists.

So let me agree with you that a person is his or her rightful owner. But no man or woman — or even a capitalist — is an island. His duties are to himself and *also* to others. I think it is not only old fashioned 19th century ego-hedonism to see a concern with other people as always selfish at base: it is also wrong. The appeal of capitalism to me is that it is essential to provide the opportunity for things even more important than capitalism.

CHRIS TAME:

Far from being spiritually arid, the ethical egoistic philosophy I am advocating has inspired, and is inspiring hundreds of thousands of young people as well as a growing body of fiction, drama, poetry and music. This is hardly arid! (Needless to say, I think Ayn Rand an infinitely superior philosopher and wordsmith to Nietzsche.) I certainly agree with your "inverted Marxism". An economic interpretation of history/economic "determinism" was a vital part of classical literature and libertarian thought. In fact, it influenced Marx, who then proceeded to get it all wrong and convert it into dialectical historical materialism.

That the free market economy provides a framework whereby everyone can work for any personal destiny and live by any moral code (as long as it is not coercive) is precisely the egoistic reason for supporting it. It is the logical consequence of the ethical egoist self-ownership axiom. The individual is the rightful judge of his own interests and has the right to pursue any non-violent course of action he desires.

Again, you seem to equate any concern with others or with the consequence of particular actions with altruism, and self-interest in narrowly financial or monetary terms. To deal with your example: although an individual might make more financial profit from, say, catering to the consumer demands of opium addicts, I do not think it would be in his self-interest to pursue that financial profit at the expense of his other concerns. For a vital part of self interest is one's psychological state and self esteem. Catering to the worst in humanity (i.e. reality evading, self destructive addictions, etc.) is not particularly enhancing to one's self esteem. (Whereas providing washing machines, steel mills, tape records, lavatories, etc., most definitely is.)

Of course, I should add that I believe individuals should be free both to be addicts and to supply addicts with drugs. Freedom is the right to be self destructive and morally obnoxious or it is not freedom. Neither is it in the interest of the individual to help create a social environment characterised by such reality evading, non-productive behaviour as drug addiction.

Incidentally, the philosophical approach I am advocating bears little or no resemblance to nineteenth century doctrines. Its closest intellectual relative is the Aristotelian Thomistic stream of thought with its concepts of "virtue as self directed art".

MICHAEL IVENS:

Well, we agree about Marx. He was many centuries away from being the first to see economic determinants of society. The Arabic historian Ibn Khaldun did it a long, long time before him.

But let me finish on a disagreement. Just as these days there is a psychological 'taboo on tenderness' so I believe many libertarians have been frightened to death early on by the word 'altruism'. Fortunately they do not act as they preach. Paradoxically some of my best 'selfish' libertarian friends behave like altruists. I am fond of them for their oddness! But I suppose we all choose our targets for example and admiration. Mine goes, these days, to men like Sinyavsky who have discovered a synthesis of freedom and charity under Gulag conditions. They have an inspiration which is sadly lacking in the ethical egoist philosophy.

And here is the heart of my objection to defending capitalism with ethical egoism. It will not appeal to many capitalists — and even less to non-capitalists. The great philosophies and religions transcend economic systems. ‘Randism’ mixes up the two things — like Marxism — and wants to destroy what it terms the old religious ‘mythologies’ and substitute rational selfishness (or selfish rationalism. This is a profoundly naive view of human nature and the inadequacy is so dangerous that, as Jung has shown, it releases dark forces in opposition. It fails to understand that a tension between reason, emotion and belief and a tension between the aims of the self and an awareness of others is at the heart of man’s development.

CHRIS TAME:

Ethical egoists indeed set large store upon, to use your own parenthetical example, tenderness and eradication of many socially induced brutalisms. Ethical egoist psychologists like Dr. Nathaniel Branden, one of Ms. Rand’s disciples, are deeply concerned with encouraging sensitivity and the full human potential. Once more, you seem to equate natural human values and interests with altruism, the collectivist doctrine that individuals should exist for the sake of others or for some mythical collective.

Dear Sir,

It was unfair of you in your issue of 22 June to pit Michael Ivens against so clear a thinker as Chris Tame.

In Michael Ivens’ comments on Ayn Rand and on the relationship between freedom and selfishness it seems to me that he cannot have read even the first page of her book *The Virtue of Selfishness* in which she describes quite clearly that she means genuine self-interest.

As Chris Tame repeatedly points out, the alternative, altruism, in which there is unthinking denial of self because of instructed feelings of guilt, most certainly does not lead to a compassionate society. Michael Ivens by describing his moral case for Capitalism as a “kind of inverted Marxism” seems to misunderstand the nature of both Capitalism and Marxism. He might benefit from reading Ayn Rand’s *Capitalism the Unknown Ideal* which surely he cannot have read already.

She would be the first to look for criticism of her view - how else would any one of us progress in our intellectual and emotional development? However, when Michael Ivens refers to her as “that tiresome woman” and her philosophy as “Randism” then she has little that she could learn from him. Anyone familiar with her work and her philosophy of objectivism would know how much she despises Nietzsche.

For Michael Ivens to describe Ayn Rand as “a debased Nietzschean” shows that the director of AIMS is in this instance very wide of the mark. However, I’m sure that Chris Tame will be able to recommend him where to buy the material with which to brush up on his homework before he next blossoms into print.

Dr. Robert Lefever, London SW7.

Dear Sir,

The fact that one writer despises another (as Dr. Lefever says that Ayn Rand does Nietzsche), does not alter the fact of similarities, and Rand and Nietzsche’s hatred of semitic and Christian influences puts them in some extremely dangerous company. To take one cautionary example: the German writer, Gottfried Benn, occupied a very temporary camp with Hitler because of his delight that Hitler rejected altruism and other Christian aberrations!

Michael Ivens, London WC1

Dear Sir,

Recent issues of the *Free Nation* have revealed a depressing ignorance of Ayn Rand’s works on the part of those criticising them.

Michael Ivens’ efforts (June 22) have already been commented on in this column.

Now Philip Vander Elst’s review of Chris Tame’s essay in *The Case For Private Enterprise* (July 20) attributes to Rand a philosophy that makes no moral distinction between a St. Francis of Assisi and a Hitler and, as per Dr. Lefever’s comments on Michael Ivens, also appears to be in ignorance of even the introduction to *The Virtue of Selfishness*.

Obviously, your letters page is no place for a detailed debate on Rand - yet equally, the need for such debate is self-evident, and the *Free Nation* is surely a suitable location. Even if you merely give Chris Tame reasonable right of reply, which he certainly deserves, it might encourage more direct contact with Rand’s works — enabling assessments to be made on more factual bases than that currently displayed in your pages.

Peter Cundall, London NW1.

Dear Sir,

I was horrified by Michael Ivens’ appalling errors about Ayn Rand in the last issue of *Free Nation*, where he states that “Rand and Nietzsche’s hatred of semitic and Christian influences puts them in some extremely dangerous company.”

It would appear that Michael is as almost totally unfamiliar with Nietzsche as he is with Ayn Rand. Nietzsche was actually pro-Jewish, an admirer of the Jewish people whom he considered superior (in contrast to the Germans, whom he despised!)

Similarly, Ms. Rand does not hate “semitic ... influences” — an allegation never previously made against her by even her worst enemies. She does, of course, reject the Jewish religion — in the same way she rejects the religions of Indians, Zulus, Chinese, Japanese and every other race or nationality under the sun. To imply that her atheism in some way stems from, or is akin to, anti-semitism is a total misunderstanding of the truth. The only “company” Ms. Rand’s position would put her in is that of rationalist intellectuals, and most Jewish ones.

Morover, apart from religion, it is evident that Ms. Rand is an admirer of such “semitic ... influences” as the Jewish people’s vigorous tradition of self-help and initiative, its love of learning, its intellectual and artistic achievements and its capitalist enterprise.

However, Michael's statements are rendered almost totally bizarre and ridiculous by the rather simple fact that Ms. Rand is herself Jewish — as are virtually all her major intellectual and academic followers!

Michael's comments about Ms. Rand are particularly irresponsible, when one remembers that our socialist opponents are constantly, and hypocritically, trying to associate supporters of capitalism with anti-semitism.

As for Hitler not being an altruist, I can only refer Michael to the pages of *Mein Kampf* (Paternoster Library edition, London 1933) where he will find the Fuhrer repeatedly denouncing "greed and materialism" (p. 118), "Mammon" and "material selfishness" (p. 167), attacking the Jews for allegedly lacking "the ideal of self-sacrifice" (p. 125), calling for "readiness for self-sacrifice" (pp. 164 & 212) and asserting that "readiness for sacrifice and joy in renunciation" (p. 167).

Chris R. Tame, London WC1.

Dear Sir,

When Michael Ivens writes of Nietzsche's "hatred of semitic and Christian influences" he is perpetuating the National Socialist myth that Nietzsche's writings supported Nazi race theory.

Nietzsche was certainly anti-Christian but he was never anti-semitic although he had plenty of encouragement from Wagner, from his publisher and from his sister who married a leading German anti-semite. But Nietzsche always resisted the poison and in *Beyond Good and Evil* even suggested that "anti-semitic screamers" be expelled from Germany and the Jew assimilated.

In the same book he rejects the theory that the Jews are conspiring to assume the mastery of Europe. Nietzsche had the greatest respect for the intellectual and spiritual genius of the Jewish people while at the same time dissenting profoundly from Jewish values.

Bernard Smith, Gidea Park, Essex.

Dear Sir,

Contrary to Chris Tame's and Bernard Smith's odd allegations, I did not suggest that Ayn Rand or Nietzsche were anti-semitic (race), but anti-Christian (religion). I would not have thought I would have had to spell this out in words of one syllable.

I made no comment on Hitler's altruism or otherwise. I stated that Godfried Benn, who certainly was not anti-semitic in the racial sense, flirted with Hitler because of Hitler's rejection of the great Semitic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Mohammedan).

There are three important points that seem to me to have emerged from this debate. First, that it is a useful discipline actually to read letters before you oppose them. Second, when you disagree with someone it is best not to employ as a tactic the canard that your opponent has not read the people he is talking about. As it happens, I have read pretty well all of Nietzsche and as much of Rand as I can stand.

But the heart of the matter is that we are not going to get very far with a defence of freedom and enterprise with the doctrine of ethical egoism. Ayn Rand's unattractive and superficial

books seem to me to be a positive disadvantage in converting idealistic and generous people to our cause. My case rests.

Michael Ivens, London, WC1.

Dear Sir,

I will leave it to *Free Nation* readers to judge whether I (or they) misunderstood the meaning of Michael Ivens' previous letters (although anyone wanting the text of a point by point refutation of his last letter can obtain one from me). I can only regret that Michael Ivens has adopted a sort of 'guilt by (false) association' tactic.

As for Michael's odd contention that Ms. Rand's works won't convert "idealistic and generous people to our cause", this has already been massively refuted by events. Ayn Rand's books have not only sold millions of copies throughout the world, but have inspired hundreds of thousands of young people. Indeed it is her work which is largely responsible for the burgeoning libertarian movement in America, and which has inspired an impressive and growing number of artists, poets, sculptors, musicians (both classical and popular), as well as philosophers, economists, historians, etc.. Ms. Rand is the new "Marx" of our age — but one whose ideas are destined to sweep those of the old into the dustbin of history.

Ms. Rand's popularity among benevolent and idealistic young people is easy to understand, for hers is a vision of a society without slaves and masters, victims and executioners, where all individuals are moral ends in themselves, entitled to enjoy their life, liberty and property — and not animals to be sacrificed upon the altar of mythical entities or collectivities.

Chris Tame, London, WC1.

Dear Sir,

In his last contribution to the Grand Rand Debate, Michael Ivens states that his case rests. Alas, it seems to be resting on its back, with its legs waving feebly in the air!

Having watched very many of the so-called defenders of freedom do more harm than good over the last decade or so, whether by formulating misconceived doctrines of corporate social responsibility, or co-operation with government, or by conceding key points of defence, I am reminded of Frederic Bastiat's observation that freedom has more to fear from its defenders than from its enemies.

As one of the more skilful advocates of the market, can Mr. Ivens not be aware of the fact that many of the most effective pro-market intellectuals, writers and activists in the United States acknowledge the contribution Rand's work has made to their own perception of the virtues of market order? Given the markedly higher quality, wider range and greater impact of our more numerous U.S. counterparts, Mr. Ivens might care to ponder again on the maxim: "The road to hell is paved with good intentions." The road to serfdom very obviously is: no doubt Mr. Ivens' "idealistic and generous people" will be contributing their share of well-meant paving-stones to its progress over here. And no doubt we will be expected to be grateful to them. For myself, I still prefer the motto: "not with my life you don't".

Tony Hollick, London, WC2.