

## EXPOSITION OF AYN RAND'S LAISSEZ-FAIRE CAPITALISM AS A RATIONAL AND MORAL IMPERATIVE

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### ABSTRACT

Ayn Rand's laissez-faire capitalism is a politico-economic system as against socialism, communism, and even mixed economy. It presupposes the existence of a free market, abolition of government interference in the process of production and the absence of the use of force in the proceedings of economy. Consequently, for an efficient appraisal and resolution of the theme in question, this scholarly work adopted the analytic and critical methods of study, to traverse Ayn Rand's laissez-faire capitalism as an indispensable necessity for the world's economy, and the global standard of living. The analytic method was used to break down key terms, thus deconstructing and correcting misconceptions. The critical method was employed in the evaluation and practical application of the findings during the course of exposition. The significance of this work, therefore, is evident in the following areas: From the point of view that it exposes the concept of capitalism to the general populace, ridding it off from its age long misconceptions and bias. In the sense that it strips other economic system bare, thereby exposing their hidden evils and unsuspecting shoddy façade to unsuspecting citizens. It gains significance from its resolution of the age-long 'ability' versus 'need' controversy, giving moral and rational perspectives to researchers.

**KEYWORDS:** Exposition; Capitalism; Rational; Moral and Imperative

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### INTRODUCTION

In reviewing Ayn Rand's capitalism, Shikha Dalmia in her essay, "Where Ayn Rand Went Wrong," zeroes in on Rand's concept of a free trade. She extols Rand's notion of divesting man from all the yoke of collectivism and thus, creating the conducive social, political and moral conditions suitable for man to live a happy life, reap the fruits of his labour, and not be made a sacrificial lamb to be sacrificed on the altar of society. In her words: "For people like myself, laboring under the twin tyrannies of tradition and socialism when I first read Rand in my native India, this is heady, empowering stuff. It supplies you with the moral and intellectual ammunition to stand up to those claiming to own a piece of you--family, community and state--and take control of your own destiny"(Dalmia; 2019).

Dalmia goes further to say that unlike other scholars like Adam Smith who had long propagated capitalism as the most secure foundation for a rational society because of the lots of social benefits it offers, Rand went a step ahead to not only use that as justification for capitalism but also insisted that capitalism in return frees man and fertilizes the atmosphere

for the achievement of his highest potentials, thus giving it an individualistic, as well as moral defence.

Still on the frequency of the moral basis for capitalism, Patrick Stephens in his article, “The Morality of Capitalism” begins by upholding capitalism’s enthronement and rebuking the economic argument against it because of the prosperity it has brought to the West in contrast to the impoverishment which socialism effected in the East(Patrick; 2010).

Moving to the issue of morality, he opines that unlike scholars like D’Souza and Wendel Berry who believed that capitalism, though being the best, economic wise, had the shortcoming of creating cultural divide - increase in divorce rates, the vulgarization of art and culture, and the general loss of values - and as such lacks the moral depth which socialism and feudalism have; because it (capitalism) gives rise and civilizes envy and greed whereas virtue is found in renunciation, self-restraint and self-sacrifice, Ayn Rand resolved this ambivalence by justifying freedom and self-interest as a moral imperatives as against altruism by proposing a moral system grounded on the power of reason thus bringing in the moral status of the pursuit of value (Patrick; 2019).

Similarly, Yaron Brook and Don Watkins in their essay, “Ayn Rand Rewrote the Story of Capitalism to Show that it is a Necessary Good,” went historically to figure out the cause of capitalism’s bad image and how Ayn Rand resolved the controversy(Brook & Watkins; 2019).

Worse still, according to Brook and Watkins, the supposed capitalism’s defenders also bought this view, conceding that capitalism is inherently immoral, only maintaining that it is a necessary evil; for even though it exploits the needy and rewards the greedy, it works, while socialism does not. Hence, while capitalism should be regulated, it should only be done minimally. However, Brook and Watkins aver that it was Ayn Rand who rejected this view of necessary evil, holding rather that capitalism was a necessary good. According to them, this was possible for her because unlike others, she did not just jump into the question of what politico-economic system to be adopted but first of all, went philosophically to investigate the type of actions individual humans have to take if they are to prosper. And with this, she came to three conclusions: “We have to think. We have to produce. We have to deal with others on mutually beneficial terms” (Brook & Watkins; 2019). Following from this, Brook and Watkins continue, Rand got to the implication that since knowledge, thinking and rational action are attributes of the individual, since the choice to implement his rational faculty depends on the choice of the individual, those who think must be left free to pursue their independent course without the interference of those who chose not to; for freedom remains a sacrosanct requirement of man’s mind. And it is only through capitalism – complete, unregulated, uncontrolled laissez-faire capitalism that the above can be achieved, since it is a system that protects man’s right to think, produce and trade voluntarily without the injection of physical force. Moving ahead, Brook and Watkins also aver that Rand also established the moral superiority of capitalism from a historical perspective by comparing Soviet Russia to the United States, East Germany to West Germany, and China to Hong Kong, then coming to the obvious reality that government control tramples the individual’s ability to live whereas freedom opens up infinite roads. They maintain that capitalism: “... is not a system in which the helpless “needy” are exploited by the immoral “greedy.” .... Capitalism is a system in which each individual is free to flourish and prosper and deal harmoniously with others (Brook & Watkins; 2019).

Then discussing on why the supposed defenders cannot relate capitalism’s true story, they concluded that it was “because they hold many of the same basic ideas as capitalism’s critics”(Brook & Watkins; 2019). One being that individuals are basically helpless, only needing the aid of a higher authority, if they are to succeed. Then another, that individuals’ interests necessarily conflicts such that what is profitable to one is likely to harm another, leading

consequently to disaster. And from these two standpoints, they reach to the third, which judges capitalism as immoral: “the idea that our primary moral duty is to be selfless”(Brook & Watkins; 2019). So while the dominant philosophy was that “the individual could not and should not be fully free to pursue his own happiness and that capitalism, therefore, was at best a necessary evil”(Brook & Watkins; 2019). Brook and Watkins maintain with Rand that such anti-capitalist concept only springs from the same error of ignoring and denying the mind. They insist that “There is no reason on earth why each individual should not seek to make the most of his own life, without victimizing others or becoming a victim himself”(Brook & Watkins; 2019).

In furtherance, Edward Hudgins in his article, “Ayn Rand’s Stamp on American Culture,” posits that Rand’s Objectivism has generally received profound admiration. According to him, while other thinkers recognized the destructive nature of government in entrepreneurialism, nay social prosperity and the wealth-creating power of free individuals, “they missed the fundamental moral foundation and justification of freedom”(Hudgins; 2011), until Rand published her novels, *Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*. In the former, she elucidated that “individualism in the soul produces happiness in life, even when external success is elusive”(Hudgins; 2011), while “putting the ideas and needs of others first – collectivism in the soul – does not produce the holy contentment that religions promise, it produces only emptiness and self-loathing”(Hudgins; 2011). Then in the latter, she celebrated the productive achievements of businessmen regarding them as giants who hold the world on their shoulders. More still, pronounced them heroes not “because they altruistically held the world on their shoulders” (Hudgins; 2011), but specifically “because they loved and were committed to *their own work*”(Hudgins; 2011), and that their commitment to commercial work was “a manifestation of the very best that lies within human beings” (Hudgins; 2011). Talking about capitalism proper, Hudgins noted that while other proponents of laissez-faire capitalism avoided its moral justification, but based their acceptance of it on purely utilitarian grounds, it was Rand who gave it a moral backup by her philosophy of personal freedom, individual rights to life, liberty and property. He insists, “She and only she, integrated rationality, self-interest, political freedom, and capitalism into a comprehensive, secular world-view” (Hudgins; 2011).

In his article, “A Critique of Ayn Rand’s Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal,” Peter Nouhan discusses the objectivist theory, which postulates that the definition of “good” must anchor on the evaluation of the facts of reality – according to a rational standard of value, as the platform for Rand’s proposal of capitalism. He also states that the subjectivist theory, which holds “good” as a concept in man’s consciousness, independent of reality, is the backdrop of dictatorship, according to Rand. Following from this background, Nouhan assesses Rand to be correct about her conclusions that the world of present is devoid of ideology, political principal or philosophy to navigate the intellectual leadership, but rather the infusion of fear, that government may use physical force only as retaliation against those who initiate it, and that the most significant cause of economic stagnation is the involvement of government in business by ways of occupational licensing, excessive taxation and regulation and government protected monopolies (Nouhan; 2018).

In his paper, “A Critique of Ayn Rand’s Theory of Rights,” Matt Zwolinski channels his thoughts on three major issues: “First, the relationship between rights as liberties and rights and claims; second, the Objectivist claim that the mind is the ultimate source of all values and its relation to the justification of property rights, and third, the nature and justification within Objectivism of the non-aggression principle”(Zwolinski; 2019).

Beginning with the first, Zwolinski highlights what he refers to as Rand’s synoptic statement: “If man is to live on earth, it is *right* for him to use his mind, it is *right* to act on his own free judgement, it is *right* to work for his values and to

keep the product of his work. If life on earth is his purpose, he has a *right* to live as a rational being: nature forbids him the irrational"(Zwolinski; 2019). He then postulates that she used the word, "right" in two different ways, which an unsuspecting reader may not detect, and thus, juggle the two different meanings, only to end up in a faulty logic. According to him, the first three uses of the word, "right" as shown above were in the "deontic status" meaning that an action is either permissible or obligatory. But in the fourth usage, she was "not merely saying that it *is* right for man to live as a rational being. She is saying that man *has* a right to live as a rational being. And these are two very different claims"(Zwolinski; 2019). From this, Zwolinski moves on to state that this second usage of "right" by Rand presupposes a claim on other people, which consequently means that others have a corresponding obligation. Whereas we know that in Rand's egoistic philosophy, no man is to impose an obligation on others, "for if egoism is correct, then your life is a value to you, but not necessarily any value to me"(Zwolinski; 2019). Thus, moving away from Rand's point of view, Zwolinski states:

"So, instead of saying that A has a right to life because A's life is valuable to A, we say that B has an obligation to respect A's right to life because doing so is in some way valuable to B *himself*"(Zwolinski; 2019).

As to the second point, Zwolinski agrees with Rand that "man's mind is the fundamental source of values that sustain his life"(Zwolinski; 2019), and that material stuffs by themselves are useless unless when acted upon by the mind through deliberate, rational, productive action, just like crude oil was once a pollutant, and not a value.

However, while Rand basing her argument on this, arrives at her justification for property rights: for if natural resources have no value in themselves, then individuals who claim exclusive property rights over them are not depriving others of anything of value. Zwolinski sways a little, stating that Rand was stretching the implications too far and that the argument could even be turned the other way round. He says: "All the valuers in the world cannot produce value without some object to value. Therefore, without the natural resource of land (or some other suitable substitute), 100% of the value that we find in agriculture today would not exist. Therefore, 100% of that value is due to land!"(Zwolinski; 2019). From this, Zwolinski only wanted to posit that: Even if we accept Rand's idea that natural resources have no *intrinsic* value in themselves, we must nevertheless recognize that they are a *necessary component* in the production of value. And so when we take those natural resources and put a fence around them, we are depriving others of something important. We are depriving non-owners of the liberty they once possessed to use that resource in their *own* productive activities(Zwolinski; 2019).

Then coming to the third – the nonaggression principle, which means that physical force should be ejected from human relationship, Zwolinski avers that contrary to other proponents, Rand accepted this as an ethical principle, founded in more fundamental philosophical considerations about human nature and the nature of value, and not just a political one; stating that the violation of man's rights tantamount to compel him to act against his own judgement, or to expropriate his values: and the only one means to achieve this is the implementation of physical force. Nevertheless, Zwolinski's contention begins from the question of what Rand really regards as force. Whether she meant the "moralized approach," defining force in relation to an underlying theory of rights or the "nonmoralized approach" defining force in a manner that has no necessary relation to rights or other moral terms, Zwolinski observes, there are bound to still be some troubles (Zwolinski; 2019).

On another plane, David Gordon in his article, "Ayn Rand's Political Philosophy," focuses on the seeming similarity between Rand's political philosophy and libertarianism. He posits that while they may look similar, the striking

difference lies in the fact that libertarians lack proper philosophical foundation, hence not grounding their non-aggression principle in normative ethics. Thus, the rise of Murray Rothbard's anarchism for Rothbard held that political philosophy was autonomous. While on the other hand, Rand's approach to philosophy was holistic, getting her own principle of non-initiation of force from an ethical background – the wholesome truth that man, unlike other animals, need to use reason in order to survive; and the concept of value stems from life, which is the objective determinant between good or bad (Gordon; 2019).

Furthermore, Harriet Rubin in his essay, "Ayn Rand's Literature of Capitalism" focuses more on her masterpiece, *Atlas Shrugged* and the impact it has had on people, especially business executives. He regards the book as a masterpiece which brings out the best in people, provoking and spurring them into productivity. (Rubin; 2019).

From the foregoing, it becomes palpable that several thinkers have discussed, appraised and criticized the thoughts of Ayn Rand's laissez-capitalism ranging from the moral point of view to the rational point of view and otherwise. This notwithstanding, these thinkers have been inadequate in expressing the real thoughts of Rand and the implications which she tried to outline. Also, very little was evaluated as regards the pragmatic aspect of her propositions. It is therefore these observed lapses that the researcher hopes to address in this paper.

## CAPITALISM

Capitalism, according to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 8<sup>th</sup> Ed., is "an economic and political system in which a country's trade and industry are controlled by private owners for profit, rather than by the state" (Hornby; 2010). But Rand begins her discourse on this by treating what she regarded as a faulty definition of capitalism and its success by the Encyclopaedia Britannica. While the Britannica holds that social surplus (surplus wealth), was what promoted capitalism against other systems, without defining the mentioned term, Rand in fact, states that there is nothing like it, since all wealth is created by someone, and as such belongs to someone and that the significant characteristics that caused the growth of capitalism was "freedom" – a concept which the Britannica never mentioned.

According to Rand, this controversy of "social surplus" is only but one example of what she termed, the "tribal premise" that underlines the political economy – a premise that unfortunately, both the enemies and champions of capitalism hold together. Thus, giving the former an inner consistency while divesting the latter of any moral argument (Rand; 1966). Hence, for a proper understanding of capitalism, this tribal premise, the concept of "common good" that leads to double standard – where one observes a shoemaker and easily concludes that he is working in order to make a living, but as political economists, on the tribal premise, declares that his purpose (and duty) is to provide society with shoes - must be first of all questioned (Rand; 1966). To question this tribal premise, Rand asserts that we must have to first identify man's nature. She states:

Man cannot survive, as animals do, by the guidance of mere precepts... He cannot provide for his simplest physical needs without a process of thought. He needs a process of thought to discover how to plant and grow his food or how to make weapons for hunting. His precepts might lead him to a cave, if one is available but to build the simplest shelter, he needs a process of thought. No precepts and no "instincts" will tell him how to light a fire, how to weave cloth, how to forge tools, how to make an airplane, how to perform an appendectomy, how to produce an electric light bulb or an electronic tube or a cyclotron or a box of matches. Yet his life depends on such knowledge and only a volitional act of his consciousness, a process of thought, can provide it (Rand; 1966).

Following from this, Rand asserts production to be the application of reason to the problem of survival. Hence, if some men choose not to think, they could only survive by imitating or looting the goods produced or discovered by others, but those goods first have to be produced by those who chose to think. And since knowledge, thought and rational action are properties of the individual, with a choice to use them or not, man's survival presupposes that those who choose to think be free of those who choose not to. This "social acceptance of man's rational nature – of the connection between his survival and his use of reason – is the concept of individual rights"(Rand; 1966), which is the foundation of all other rights, comprising property right. Rand posits that man owns his own mind, life, work and product, and not the property of the tribe, to be disposed of him in any way it pleases. Rand upholds the inalienability of man's right, decrying that she "could not understand how any man could be so brutalized as to claim the right to dispose of the lives of others, nor how any man could be so lacking in self-esteem as to grant others the right to dispose of his life"(Rand; 1936). She maintains that:

The right to life is the source of all rights – and the right to property is their only implementation. That, "without property rights, no other rights are possible. Since man has to sustain his life by his own effort, the man who has no right to the product of his effort has no means to sustain his life. The man who produces while others dispose of his product is a slave (Rand; 1964).

Thus, to the question of if man is free, Rand opines that it is only capitalism that says "Yes," and that that is the crucial dichotomy between capitalism and collectivism.

## **JUSTIFICATION OF CAPITALISM**

Coming to the "practical" justification of capitalism, Rand states that it "does not lie in the collectivist claim that it effects the best allocation of natural resources"(Rand; 1966), instead, neither man nor his mind, without which raw materials will only remain useless is a natural resources; while the moral justification "does not lie in the altruist claim that it represents the best way to achieve the common good," but "in the fact that it is the only system consonant with man's rational nature, that it protects man's survival qua man, and that its ruling principle is: justice"(Rand; 1966).

## **COMMON GOOD AND PUBLIC**

For Rand, the term, "common good" has no meaning of its own unless neither used as the addition of the good of individual men nor is there any entity as "the public." When the term is regarded as an independent existence superior to individual men, it demeans individuals to the role of sacrificial animals. And even in cases where it is seen as the good of the majority, it still does not justify it morally, since the violation of the rights of individuals (minority) is in essence, the violation of all rights, subjugating the people under the rule of any gang that assumes the status of "voice of the society," ruling by brute force until it is overthrown by another gang that comes to claim the same status. Rand adds that any claim attributed to "the public interest" in conflict with private interest only means that some men are to be sacrificed on the altar of the interests and wishes of others. And worse, the concept is so undefinable that its use is arbitrarily left upon the ability of any gang to claim that "it is the public" and hold the claim at the point of a gun – physical force(Rand; 1964). But if this is so, why do people accept it? Rand answers that it is only owing to the philosophical theories on the nature of moral values: the intrinsic theory, the subjective theory and the objective theory. As the first holds that some actions have inherent good in them, not minding their repercussions, thus divesting good from beneficiaries and paving way for despots, the second holds that good is not connected to reality, but only under the appraisal of one's whims and feelings.

However, the objective theory holds that good are neither things in themselves, nor judgements of one's whims, but "an evaluation of the facts of reality by man's consciousness according to a rational standard of value"(Rand; 1966). By implication, whatever that is good must be able to answer the questions: "Of value to whom and for what?"(Rand; 1966). And capitalism remains the only politico-economic system that is founded on the objective theory of value, which is inherently incompatible with rule by force. For emphasis, Rand asserts that "an attempt to achieve the good by force is like an attempt to provide a man with a picture gallery at the price of cutting out his eyes"(Rand; 1966).

## **THE FREE MARKET**

Going further, Rand regards the free market as the social application of the objective theory of value, since it always asks the question: value to whom? To reiterate, she writes:

By "philosophical objective," I mean a value estimated from the standpoint of the best possible to man, i.e., by the criterion of the most rational mind possessing the greatest knowledge, in a given category, in a given period, and in a defined context (nothing can be estimated in an undefined context), (Rand; 1966).

Hence, on a free market, the purveyor of the best product at the cheapest price always wins the greatest financial rewards in that sphere, making the free market a continuous process where the best is constantly expected of every man. In cognizance to the tribal mentality's claim that the free market is both unfair to both the genius and average man (Rand; 1966).

Adding to the above, Rand states that capitalism has brought man an unquantifiable progress within so short a period, and what's more? By non-sacrificial means! Whereas, "altruism seeks to rob intelligence of its rewards, by asserting that the moral duty of the competent is to serve the incompetent and sacrifice themselves to anyone's need"(Rand; 1966). Again, Rand continues with his argument that we must know that when businessmen make profits on a free market, without the aid of either the government or force (for capitalism here is laissez-faire, without any government control), they have created new wealth, and have not robbed it off from those who had not created it. But why did capitalism collapse despite its supposed benefits in the country? Rand maintains that it was because the system has continued to suffer lack of proper definition of itself. Thus, even its said defenders supported government controls, forfeiting its primary concept of laissez-faireism, sequel to this, pure capitalism has never really occurred (but several mixed economy), and since one control always leads to another, the system was bound to collapse owing to the statist influences; yet it was the free capitalist influence that was accused(Rand; 1966).

## **CAUSES OF WAR**

Rand states categorically, that men are still afraid of the possibility of war because consciously or unconsciously, they still hold to the view that,

"It is right or practical or necessary for men to achieve their goals by means of physical force (by initiating the use of force against other men) and that some sort of "good" can justify it"(Rand; 1966).

Similarly, one finds the shameful occasion of movements calling for abolition of wars among nations, yet being quiet to dictatorships – by implication, they are against the use of force on one nation (armed adversary) by another, but not against that of the citizens (unarmed adversaries) by the government. Capitalism is the only system that is necessarily opposed to war, Rand insists, for it is founded on individual rights, and every person tries to protect his property. In a

statist system where everything belongs to the state, an individual has no incentive to strive for peace – he has no economic interest to protect. An individual in a capitalist system knows that trade does not thrive on war. But in fact, the actual profiteers of war (consequently, promote it) are men with political pull in mixed or statist economies, because by it, they acquire fortunes which they could never have had in a free market (Rand; 1966). Little wonder why, historically, it was capitalism that granted the world the longest period of peace (from the end of Napoleonic wars in 1815 – to World War I in 1914) (Rand; 1966).

## **BIG BUSINESS**

Using America as a case study, Rand bemoans the unfair treatment being meted on big businessmen (whom she called “Persecuted Minority”) by the government – unjust because it is for their virtues, not their vices that they are punished. Underscoring the severe injustice and discriminatory attitude against big businessmen, she states:

Today’s “liberals” recognize the workers’ (the majority’s) right to their livelihood (their wages), but deny the businessmen’s (the minority’s) right to their livelihood (their profits). If workers struggle for higher wages, this is hailed as “social gains;” if businessmen struggle for higher profits, this is damned as “selfish greed.”...Every movement that seeks to enslave a country, every dictatorship or potential dictatorship, needs some minority group as a scapegoat which it can blame for the nation’s troubles and use as a justification of its own demands for dictatorial powers. In Soviet Russia, the scapegoat was the bourgeoisie; in Nazi Germany, it was the Jewish people; in America, it is the businessmen (Rand; 1966).

To address this odious treatment, Rand moves to state that a government of a free country can only serve as an agency which safeguards individuals’ rights, hence, has no right to the use of physical violence against any citizen, unless in self-defence for a citizen. In consequence, the government is only required to protect men from criminals through the police, against foreign invaders by means of the military, and to protect their property and contracts from breach by force or fraud, as well as settle disputes by means of the law courts (Rand; 1966). Contrary to the charge of exploitation given to businessmen, Rand accentuates that in a free market, men can only grow rich by ability - by offering the best values at the lowest possible prices than others can; that the wealth of a trader comes from the free voluntary choice of his customers who by their own judgement, recognize his goods as of more value to them.

## **ANTITRUST LAW**

For Rand, antitrust laws cruelly make a man a criminal once he enters into business (Rand; 1966). Consequently, a businessman has no way to detect any longer if his actions are legal or illegal, but only left under constant threats of losing the whole of his life’s efforts at one instant, since he is at the mercy of which ever bureaucrat that may decide to fall out with him. It becomes only germane that all antitrust laws be abrogated for in fact, “the concept of free competition enforced by law is a grotesque contradiction in terms. It means: forcing people to be free at the point of a gun” (Rand; 1966). As against the argument of “bigness” which some people have used to condemn the free market, Rand stresses how irrational it is, since according to her, it does not put into account the nature, source, or function of the “bigness,” just like it will be absurd to regard a big genius like Edison and a big gangster as Stalin as equal malefactors (Rand; 1966). Again, Rand observes, while the government can only grow big by means of brute force, a business on the other hand only grows big, in a free economy, through productive achievement. As a result, the only action to be taken by the government “to protect free competition is: Laissez-faire! – which, in free translation, means: Hands off!” (Rand; 1966).

## **FREE ENTERPRISE VERSUS MIXED ECONOMY**

Rand observes that all the arguments used by the statist against free enterprise to the adoption of a government-controlled economy, if critically looked into were actually not caused by businessmen or free enterprise but the legislature or the presence of government interventions in business proceedings. Yet, the former took the blames, while the latter found further opportunities to gain more controls and continue their crimes (Rand; 1966).

Rand stresses that when businessmen resort to bribing legislatures, they are not the ones to be called corrupt, for what else could they do when any legislature had the powers to obliterate them at any instance? The blame must go then to government involvement, for the businessmen are only but mere reactors to the problem already caused by them. "They did not pay to get something from the legislature, but only to get the legislature out of their way"(Rand; 1966). It becomes palpable, according to Rand that it is only in a mixed economy that men with lesser abilities can surpass their betters. As a result, business enterprise must be kept free from any government influence, whether on behalf of businessmen or labour unions.

As such, there must be no compromise, even of few government controls, for that is giving up oneself to gradual enslavement, just like there can be no compromise between food and poison for it is only death that will win(Rand; 1964).

## **FREEDOM**

Rand discusses freedom from the concept of reason which is the basic faculty of man. For her, man would be unable to use his faculty of reason without freedom, and this freedom must be viewed from the perspectives of the intellectual, political and economic. She observes: "Reason requires freedom, self-confidence and self-esteem. It requires the right to think and to act on the guidance of one's thinking the right to live by one's own independent judgment. Intellectual freedom cannot exist without political freedom; political freedom cannot exist without economic freedom; a free mind and a free market are corollaries" (Rand; 1961).

To accentuate the subject of discussion, Rand continues: "If one upholds freedom, one must uphold man's individual rights; if one upholds man's individual rights, one must uphold his right to his own life, to his own liberty, to the pursuit of his own happiness which means: one must uphold a political system that guarantees and protects these rights which means: the politico-economic system of capitalism"(Rand; 1966).

## **PRODUCERS AND LOOTERS**

Rand posits that one of the causes of the gross misconception of capitalism is man's inadequacy to differentiate between the earned and the unearned. According to her, it seems so absurd to call businessmen thieves, for that would only mean that they have stolen the wealth from those who have not produced them(Rand; 1961). That it was only possible to call businessmen in a capitalist system slave drivers, exploiters, autocrats and tyrants because we have evaded the difference between freedom and compulsion, reward and terror, pay cheques and guns, trade and force, respectively(Rand; 1961). And worst, Rand emphasizes: "If anyone admired him, it was as one admires a successful bandit. Yet no penny of his wealth had been obtained by force or fraud; he was guilty of nothing, except that he earned his own fortune" (Rand; 1961).

## **SOCIALISM**

According to Merriam-Webster's Advanced Learner's English Dictionary, socialism is "a way of organizing a society in which major industries are owned and controlled by the government rather than by individual people and

companies"(Merriam; 2008). But Rand defines socialism as the “doctrine that man has no right to exist for his own sake, that his life and his work do not belong to him, but belong to society, that the only justification of his existence is his service to society, and that society may dispose of him in any way it pleases for the sake of whatever it deems to be its own tribal, collective good” (Rand; 1961). “The collective, which in relation to every individual, consists of everybody except himself” (Rand; 1964). Rand observes. Rand aligns socialism with the ethics of altruism, which according to her, creates a society that treats man as a sacrificial animal and penalizes one for his virtues, while rewarding others for their vices(Rand; 1964); stating that it penalizes ability for being ability, and success for being success. Worse, “that he is hated for his success, that the moralists of altruism want him to pay financial tributes, not as kindness, but as atonement for the guilt of having succeeded” (Rand; 1961).

Going ahead, Rand points out the faulty altruist-collectivist premise from which socialism is formed such as the issue of the handicapped in a free society and social projects like Medicare. For the former, Rand insists that misfortune is never a mortgage on some others - that help towards the handicapped should only be from a voluntary choice. “The small minority of adults who are unable rather than unwilling to work have to rely on voluntary charity; misfortune is not a claim to slave labour”(Rand; 1966). While the latter, though superficially innocuous, hides a very pertinent question: “At whose expense?” The answer being the enslavement, and therefore destruction of medical science since the professional integrity, career ambitions and the lives of the very men who are to provide the desirable goal will have to be sacrificed(Rand; 1964) . “There is,” after all, “no such thing as a free lunch”(Wikipedia; 2019).

## **AUTOMATION AND PASTORAL EXPERIENCE**

In response to the argument that automation accelerates the number of unemployed workers, Rand insists that, contrary to claims, the introduction of machines inevitably results in increasing the demand for labour as well as in raising the general standard of living, as evident both theoretically and historically. This is so because automation raises the demand for skilled labour in contrast to unskilled labour, encouraging a vast number of workers to learn new skills. But as for those who would not want to learn new skills, the far-sighted ambition of men who want to do better should not be toppled by the reluctance of those who do not want to improve(Rand; 1964).

From the above details, the tenets of Ayn Rand’s laissez-faire capitalism and its attribute as the only rational and moral imperative in the politico-economic sphere; together with its capacity to effect unquantifiable, say limitless political, economic and social developments, among others, become apparently palpable. In the coming chapter, the researcher attempts at applying the dictates of Rand’s laissez-faire capitalism as necessary panacea to the continually corroding and regrettable economy of Nigeria.

## **CRITICAL EVALUATION**

So far, the logical, rational, moral, concretized and thought-provoking nature of Ayn Rand’s laissez-faire capitalism is amazingly remarkable. For many, it is a gadfly, serving the purpose of prodding us into rechecking the backgrounds of our politico-economic systems. But while it has been largely applauded, it has neither been spared the brunt of severe critics.

For one, while Rand holds that self-actualization by way of rational self-interest is necessarily the source of man’s happiness, Shikha Dalmia, citing Adam Smith believes that no matter “how selfish a man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it” (Dalmia; 2019). As such, she accuses Rand of

denigrating the virtues of generosity and benevolence even though they hold sway in Aristotle – the only philosopher to whom Rand acknowledges debt (Dalmia; 2019). Criticizing Rand, Dalmia avers that a philosophy that has no solution for misfortune and distress which are also parts of human conditions can barely succeed in its fight against government intervention in human affairs (Dalmia; 2019).

Rand has also been charged with libertarianism – a political philosophy holding that private morality should not be a state affair. Thus, the actions of drug abusers, prostitutes among others should not be interfered with (Gordon; 2019).

Still more, several scholars believe that Rand's laissez-faire capitalism is divested of morality. Patrick Stephens, while borrowing thoughts from Dinesh D'Souza's 'The Virtue of Prosperity' reiterates: "Capitalism has won the economic war, but it has won the moral view war. Yes, people are wealthier than they ever have been before, but are they happy? Are they moral? ...look at our divorce rates, our illegitimacy rates, our rates of teen suicide and drug addiction. We have come to accept these as normal because we have become used to them. But they are not normal"(Patrick; 2010).

Criticisms have also been levelled against Rand's postulation of the proper role of government. Peter Nouhan asserts that by her limiting government's role only to the protection of citizens from criminal, foreign invaders and breach of property rights and contracts, she "neglects to consider the negative externalities caused by free market failure – the costs that are suffered by a third party as a result of an economic transaction"(Nouhan; 2018). Nouhan gives an example of smokers who never get to bear the health cost they cause those around them while they smoke and the poor who may never get to afford basic healthcare services without government aid (Nouhan; 2018).

Contrary to Rand's advocacy for capitalism, John Bellamy Foster citing George Monbiot maintains otherwise. He insists:

"Less than two decades into the twenty-first century, it is evident that capitalism has failed as a social system. The world is mired in economic stagnation, financialization, and the most extreme inequality in human history, accompanied by mass unemployment and underemployment, precariousness, poverty, hunger, wasted output and lives, and what at this point can only be called a planetary ecological "death spiral"(Monbiot; 2018).

In support to this, he claims that while the intensity of work may have risen under capitalism, its safety and protection have deteriorated. Citing Larry Elliott, Foster also bemoans that capitalism has led to gross inequality in wealth where for instance, the 'one percent' that is, forty two billionaires now control as much wealth as half of the world's population and more specifically that Jeff Bezos, Bill Gates and Warren Buffet possess more wealth than half of the U.S population(Elliott; 2019). Following the works of Engels, Foster also accuses capitalism of having caused severe working systems, arising to grievous health challenges and social disaster – a reflection of Engels' social murder(Engels;2019). Similarly, Foster also berates the violence against women and expropriation of unpaid labour which according to him are ugly hallmarks of capitalism. He puts it this way: "Violence against women and the expropriation of their unpaid labour, as well as the higher level of exploitation of their paid labour, are integral to the way in which power is organized in capitalist society - and how it seeks to divide rather than unify the population. More than a third of women worldwide have experienced physical/sexual violence. Women's bodies, in particular, are objectified, reified, and commodified as part of the normal workings of monopoly-capitalist marketing"(Foster; 2019).

Despite these criticisms, many scholars still hold Rand and her philosophy in high regard, even alluding that her laissez-faire must be given a chance if boosts in the economy are to be experienced.

On this side of the coin, Yan Brook and Don Watkins, while stating categorically that capitalism is a necessary good, stretched further to ascertain Rand as one of capitalism's greatest salesmen, knowing how to tell capitalism's story with every dexterity. Thereby, vehemently refuting the lie that it was capitalists' greed that led to the ruin of the world's economy. By this, Rand exposed, rectified and corrected the thwarted story of how things started to go bad in the world's economic history, while presenting the correct facts and figures about the aforementioned. In essence, Rand's laissez-faire capitalism has been applauded by many scholars as one of the major works that debunked and ridiculed the false allegations levelled against capitalism, and promising light again to the world's already darkened economy (Brook & Watkins; 2019)..

Similarly, Rand tried to uphold the necessity of money as a means of exchange for values rendered and championed the theory of unrestrained production as a condition-sine-qua-non for limitless development and constant progression of people's standard of living. Though faced with so much opposition, Rand's undaunted propagation of her laissez-faire capitalism, however, served to awaken lots of minds in intellectual circles, which consequently led to the reviewing of many of the existing politico-economic theories of her time, especially in the USA. Hence, a great number of scholars uphold that while America prides herself as a country with the world's leading economy, she must acknowledge Rand's overwhelming inputs and contributions. To buttress this fact, Duncan Campbell claims that the result of a survey in 1991 by the American Library of Congress and the Book of the Month Club awarded Rand's fourth novel, *Atlas Shrugged* as the most influential book on Americans after the Bible (Campbell; 2019).

As extension, Ayn Rand's propagation of laissez-faire capitalism with the abolition of force as its prerogative also led extensively to the proper recognition and entrenchment of human rights, nay property rights - as we have it today, especially in the USA. Her philosophy served as formidable front against the evils of collectivism, statism as well as anarchism, especially as pertaining to their principles against free production, the individual rights of citizens and their consequent implications that the citizen is merely a slave to the state or the society (Gotthelf; 2000)

On a more salient note, having discussed Ayn Rand's laissez-faire capitalism, together with its criticism and applause by various scholars, it is germane that we critically perform certain checks and balances on our findings. While some of her theories may seem so lofty and impractical - especially her insistence on the abolition of all and any use of force by the government except in retaliation against those who initiated its use and for protection of citizens from foreign invaders - the reality that the United States of America, the country that has to the greatest extent adopted her theories (for no nation has actually ever practiced laissez-faire capitalism), is the leading economy in the world is enough reason to give her philosophy a chance.

Also, the likelihood that an average citizen would arguably prefer to live in the United States of America than in China are signs that Rand may be after all right about her intensive reservations and vehement apprehension of socialism and communism. From this, one is likely to wholeheartedly agree that laissez-faire capitalism is indeed the only way forward, that is, the only politico-economic system that is fitly cut out for man as a rational and moral being, just as Rand had unapologetically affirmed.

## CONCLUSIONS

The principal purpose and thrust of this work is appraisal of Ayn Rand's laissez-faire capitalism. But more precisely to analyse the following: The Concept of Rand's laissez-faire capitalism; Capitalism versus socialism; The contention between need and ability; The moral and rational implications of capitalism and socialism by Rand. The significance of this work, therefore, is evident in the following areas: From the point of view that it exposes the concept of capitalism to the general populace, ridding it off from its age long misconceptions and bias. In the sense that it strips other economic system bare; thereby exposing their hidden evils and unsuspecting shoddy façade to unsuspecting citizens. It gains significance from its resolution of the age-long 'ability' versus 'need' controversy, giving moral and rational perspectives to researchers.

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