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Sometimes the bad guys do us all a big favor, by openly stating what they stand for after spending years denying it. I recently received exactly this sort of favor from an economist, one Don Boudreaux, at the renowned libertarian Cato Institute, a hotbed of free-trade thinking.

He wrote: “Why should you or I celebrate less an improvement in the welfare of a South Korean than we celebrate a comparable improvement in the welfare of a South Carolinian?” ([original here](#))

That’s it. So finally we have it: after years of telling us that libertarian economics -- deregulate this, deregulate that, believe that the free market is always right -- is best for America, they admit that, in the end, *they just don’t care*.

This philosophy has the perverse virtue of perfect logical consistency: if you don’t care about what’s good for Americans, why not have free trade? I must grant -- and the reader should, too -- that the entire policy of free trade makes perfect sense if one adopts this premise.

The idea of caring equally about the well-being of people all over the world sounds, of course, like a very sweet and humanitarian philosophy. And in a perfect world, maybe it would be. But there are two very big realities that get in the way:

- 1) We live in a world of ruthless economic rivalry, so if Americans aren’t willing to stand up for the economic interests of Americans, we just get rolled by multinational corporations and foreign powers that lack such delicate qualms.
- 2) Libertarianism, for all its pretensions of universalist humanitarianism, is in fact a notoriously selfish philosophy. Someone once defined a libertarian as “an anarchist with a credit card”; they were onto something.

The South Korea Free Trade Agreement, America’s largest free-trade agreement since NAFTA, is back on the front burner. So when the libertarians speak up on this issue, as

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