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# Exploring “The Moral Foundations of Capitalism”... at Stanford?

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by Autumn Carter



Ayn Rand, Author of The Fountainhead and Atlas Shrugged

The academic quarter is winding down and finals are gearing up. Indeed, I’m supposed to be writing a research paper as I type these words. But that’s beside the point.

This quarter, I took one of the best classes I’ve taken in my 8 quarters here at Stanford. “The Moral Foundations of Capitalism,” an Ethics in Society course, was featured in campus [news](#), mired in a bit of controversy, and filled beyond capacity within days of its enrollment opening.

What was all the hubbub about? Capitalism. For those who see Capitalism as an evil, the course was a contradiction in itself. Capitalism could never be moral, and *forget* about it being grounded in morals. And for those who see Capitalism as right and good, the course was a rare offering at Stanford University. How often did we hear “Capitalism has failed!” championed and spat into our faces with Barack Obama’s 2008 ascension to his presidential throne?

Well, today is my last day of the course. I learned so much history, so much philosophy, and so much about myself. The course’s cornerstone was Ayn Rand’s *Atlas Shrugged*. Rand, an Objectivist, championed Capitalism as a social system that leaves man free to use his mind to reason and determine what is best for his own life. It allows man to live a full life because he make his own choices about what, how much, and with whom he exchanges. True Capitalism never uses force and coercion to deprive man of what is his — his physical property, his talent, his ability, his approval, his love.

Right now, the Cato Institute is [featuring](#) Rand along with Isabel Paterson and Rose Wilder Lane for their contributions to the revival of classical liberalism, and Capitalism in particular. Of the women, Jim Powell writes,

Each was an original thinker in her own right. But each also made a mark as a great popularizer of liberal ideas. A few beleaguered liberal economists had argued, with great force, that no planned economy could match the productive efficiency of a capitalist system. Yet these economic arguments, despite their technical force, were unable to match the power of the utopian socialist vision to capture the popular imagination. These three — Lane and Paterson almost entirely bereft of formal education, Rand writing fiction in an adopted tongue — did just that.

Check out the Cato piece because it offers a great introduction to these women. And check out this class if it’s offered next year. Unlike most of my classes here at Stanford, it will be one I will not forget.

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