

On Selfishness II

I recently listened to the Soho Forum debate on the virtues of selfishness between libertarian Gene Epstein and Randian objectivist Yaron Brook. It seemed at first to be centered around semantics, but I must refrain from classifying it that way. It was my impression that Epstein believes the word “selfishness” is too morally tainted in both historical and contemporary usage to be useful to free market enthusiasts, while Brook believes the word can and must be redeemed as a counter to the morally bankrupt idea of “selflessness”. I believe that both debaters were correct. So what’s the solution? While I can’t say for certain, perhaps the solution lies somewhere around using the word as an attention grabber, than backpedaling in order to clarify your audience or discussion partner’s understanding of the concept before proceeding to make the point that self-interested action, *not* at the expense of others, in the context of markets is beneficial both to yourself and to society-at-large. Methinks that oughta do it. What do you think? And that’s today’s two cents.