

[Do markets corrupt?](#) [1]

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Certainly, some seem to think so. That all this naked materialism, this incessant competition for the daily necessities of life darken, even blacken, our souls. However, consider the [alternatives](#) [3]:

First, if the market corrupts, the various negations of the market corrupt absolutely. Look at fascism. And look at that other hatred of the market that preceded and followed it: communism. I doubt that anyone would posit communism as the fulfilment of character and soul for its victims or agents. Second, if these corruptions must be ranked, it is patently obvious that the communist or the fascist corruption through the negation of the market is significantly deeper, deadlier and more irreparable than the first. That was obvious for fascism from the start and it eventually became obvious for communism too.

The truth is of course that markets aren't the way in which we compete with each other. Not, at least, in the sense we do under either communism or facism, where we are competing for the set amount of political power over our fellows. Rather, markets are the way in which we cooperate with each other.

Finally, a third corollary: because the free market develops the qualities of taking initiative and making decisions, because it places individuals into relationships with each other, because it is a regime that makes sense only if its subjects relate to one another, the free market remains a factor promoting socialisation, a means of connecting human beings, even of creating fraternity or, in any case, mutual recognition. Hence, it is the opposite of corruption. We should read Emmanuel Levinas on the question of money. He argued that, far from isolating and atomising individuals, money is, in fact, the medium of their interchange. And so it is necessary to conclude that there are good uses for the market, since it is one of the means that human beings have found to resist the all-out war of everyone against everyone else, diagnosed first by Hobbes and then by Freud.

Quite so, markets are (and money simply facilitates) voluntary exchange, something which is at heart simply cooperation with those around you and those further away. Markets are many things of course, they are price discovery mechanisms, they are distribution mechanisms, but their basis is simply humans dealing with each other on a daily basis. And what could be corrupting to the soul about that?

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