Altruism is not authoritarianism; anti-altruism will lead to cruelty

To the Editor:

In response to Mark Hunter's letter ['"Deny the mind, deny life,' Nov. 1], Mr. Hunter should explain in much more detail exactly how "altruism... in ethics and politics... is responsible for... nothing to prove that it is not true.

Altruism — concern for others — is no way responsible for the brutal authoritarianism of Hitler or any other dictator. Hitler himself denied the right to conscientious objection and total conformity, as well as complete disregard for the lives of other people. His government murdered and murdered millions of people — Jews, homosexuals, Catholics, etc. There was nothing altruistic about this; it was downright selfish.

The true altruists were those few who, despite the risk to their own lives, helped fugitives to escape from their gaols. How did this lead to authoritarianism?

Sure, authoritarian governments may think of slogans to justify their behavior, in the same way that they use liberty and capitalism. The fact that an idea is abused to promote cruelty and authoritarianism does not make it immoral to anyone who is not responsible, not the ideals.

It is obvious that characteristics of authoritarianism is not altruism. It is the acceptance or tolerance of harm in order to prevent more harm. One can see this all over the political arena: People neglecting atrocities committed by Leftist groups or governments, even while they declare their intention to prevent people defectsing or actually stop supporting Rightist adversaries — behavior denouncing opposition to them.

It is obviously altruistic to suppress harm when one is not a potential victim himself. The altruists' chief Objetivistic philosophy necessarily denounces the opposition to harm, and demands that people disregard and accept harm, and they have no right to appeal to the anti-harm instinct of the potential victim. When one remedies the supposed harm of the other, one is to prevent harm to himself. When one remedies the supposed harm of the supposed victim, one is to prevent harm to others.

No, Mr. Hunter. Altruism does not lead to authoritarianism or cruelty. Anti-altruism does.

John Morrison G

Questioning is appropriate

To the Editor:

A response to the letter by Behrouz Vafa, that appeared in the letter ['Ashdown Debate Ineffective,' Nov. 15]. The letter concerned the Institute colloquium on apartheid on Wednesday, Nov. 6, where the topic of discussion was The Ineffectiveness, Illegalities, and Immorality of Absolute Divestment. The object of Vafa's letter was to criticize the way the audience conducted the discussion period. In particular, three statements by members of the audience were singled out as reflecting lack of discipline and discourtesy to the invited guests.

I will attempt to show that two of the statements were definitely justified and to the point. I will also try to answer the four questions posed by Vafa concerning the third statement, which he apparently considered odious and terribly out of place. Finally, I will respond to the concluding statement that some of us are unqualified to advocate the deserved rights of the majority of South Africans.

I will start with the second statement because this statement summarized my view: "This whole discussion about education is just ridiculous." The discussion of America educating the black South Africans, so that they can obtain "a comprehensive understanding of the nuts and bolts of their (our) social, political and economic structures," and to disabuse them of the concept of apartheid, was, I think, discouraging and ridiculous. What gave you the authority and the right to educate the South Africans? You have no right to even open the South Africans' eyes, the right to imagine that it is capable of educating them about their institutions? One does not need education to understand that the one thing that counts now for black South Africa is the removal of the white South African government by any means possible.

The Black South Africans do not want your education to understand that the one thing that counts now for black South Africa is the removal of the white South African government by any means possible. They want you to quit by upholding the racist regime that is killing their children. The idea that those poor blacks need to be educated so that they can learn to rule themselves is insane. And coming from someone like Professor Schotland, who thinks that the most important impact of divestment is that MIT will lose five million dollars a year, the idea is not only ridiculous, it is embarrassing. This brings me to the next statement, which was made by someone in the audience, about which Vafa was evidently displeased and concerned which he posed several questions to. The statement was: "Sure, I don't think you really care about the black South Africans." Vafa asked: "What's a anti-altruist judgement about a guest to quickly with so little information?" To this I say Professor Schotland may or may not be fully informed of the conditions of black South Africans and the forces of the system of apartheid, but he spent practically all of his allotted time discussing the legal ramifications of ending the holocaust. In particular, he did not respond to the statement that MIT would stand to lose by divesting.

I must take exception to the implication expressed in the guest column by Daniel W. Phogy: "We are responsible for our careless years of frustration at the police station, in the country court house, and among friends. I am of the view that very few women make false accusations, and the few that do might hardly stand a chance against the formidable obstacles encountered in the legal system. The real public problem is that most women who are victimized fail to come forward or fail to follow through, and the assaulted continues to walk free.

I know that Boston Sexual Assault Unit has ongoing investigations of all kinds of rape: deserted boyfriends, girlfriend/assaulted girlfriends, raped committed by a stranger, and attempted rape. I also know that in their investigations, they mention that victims are often emptied, or with a handful of evidence and unwilling victims and witnesses. It is a well-known fact that most rapists have a bad habit — the raped does not rape once and never again, but repeats his attacks, often in an identical manner, over and over. His chances of being caught are slim; his chances of being prosecuted are even slimmer.

All women have the right to walk where they want, when they want, and drink when they want. Reality has taken that right away from me and many others. It is easy to say that it is a "careless decision" to drunk on a date or in a bar in the city, but a significant number of rapes occur in broad daylight, in public places, and between people who know each other. The most enraged fact is that almost everyone knows about the gross incompetence.

As far as I'm concerned, at this point in time, it is important for the legal system to help rape victims come forward. Rape is rape whether it occurs on a date or in an alley, and it is a problem that no one wants to think about, much less talk about. If the current trend is toward openness in rape prosecutions, perhaps more rapists and attempted rapists will be caught and punished.

Now, it's surely ridiculous, but infuriating.

Sure, authoritarian governments may think of slogans to justify their behavior, in the same way that they use liberty and capitalism. The fact that an idea is abused to promote cruelty and authoritarianism does not make it immoral to anyone who is not responsible, not the ideals.

It is obvious that characteristics of authoritarianism is not altruism. It is the acceptance or tolerance of harm in order to prevent more harm. One can see this all over the political arena: People neglecting atrocities committed by Leftist groups or governments, even while they declare their intention to prevent people defectsing or actually stop supporting Rightist adversaries — behavior denouncing opposition to them.

It is obviously altruistic to suppress harm when one is not a potential victim himself. The altruists' chief Objetivistic philosophy necessarily denounces the opposition to harm, and demands that people disregard and accept harm, and they have no right to appeal to the anti-harm instinct of the potential victim. When one remedies the supposed harm of the other, one is to prevent harm to himself. When one remedies the supposed harm of the supposed victim, one is to prevent harm to others.

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John Morrison G

To the Editor:

The impression that most of us students have is that Professor Schotland, what mattered was not that it was wrong to uphold his view, but that it was impractical to do the right thing because we would suffer from it. As a member of the audience suggested, it was little discussing the issue of slavery from the viewpoint of how much the slave-owners would lose from having to pay wages for the labor of the newly-freed slaves. From his talk, it would be only fair to conclude that Professor Schotland really did not care about the black South Africans, but was primarily concerned about the emotional repercussions that divestment would cause for those who dis- vised.

Vafa further asked, "Is (the student who made the statement) in a position to convey his judge- ment? He was a guest invited to speak by the MIT ad- ministration. His opinions on this issue, as is the position held by MIT, is odious. Speaking for the majority of the students at MIT, I hope the speaker had every right to express the outrage and disgust shared by us all, at the fact that MIT, while claiming to be a place where students ac- cess to the right to express their views and to hold them to be a place where students ac- cording to him, if he had been able to vote, he was, and had had a hard time at the