

# Capitalism and the Common Man

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There are some arguments so illogical that only an intellectual or politician can believe them. One of those arguments is that capitalism benefits the rich more than it benefits the common man. Let's look at it.

The rich have always had access to entertainment—sometimes in the comfort of their palaces and mansions. The rich have never had to experience the drudgery of having to beat out carpets, iron their clothing, or slave over a hot stove all day in order to have a decent dinner; they could afford to hire people. Today, the common man has the power to enjoy much of what only the rich could yesteryear. Capitalism's mass production has made radios and televisions, vacuum cleaners, wash-and-wear clothing, and microwave ovens available and well within the reach of the common man, sparing him the drudgery of the past.

What about those who became wealthy making comforts available to the common man? Henry Ford benefited immensely from mass producing automobiles, but the benefit for the common man, from being able to buy a car, dwarfs anything Ford received. Individual discoverers and companies who produced penicillin, polio, and typhoid vaccines may have become wealthy, but again it was the common man who was the major beneficiary. In more recent times, computers and software products have affected our health, safety, and life quality in ways that dwarf the wealth received by their creators.

Here's a little test. Stand on the corner and watch people walk or drive by. Then, based on their appearances, identify which persons are wealthy. Years ago, it wouldn't have been that hard. The ordinary person wouldn't be dressed as well—surely not wearing designer clothing—nor would they have nice-looking jewelry or be driving by. Compare the income status of today's airline passengers with those of yesterday. You'll find a greater percentage of ordinary people.

That's one of the great benefits of capitalism: It has made it possible for common people to enjoy at least some of what wealthy people enjoy. You say, "Williams, common people don't have access to Rolls Royces and yachts!" You're wrong. Microsoft's Bill Gates is superrich and can afford to ride in a Rolls Royce and go yachting. So can Williams—just not as long. I can rent a Rolls or a yacht for a day, half-day, or an hour.

Capitalism is relatively new in human history. Prior to capitalism, the way people amassed great wealth was by looting, plundering, and enslaving their fellow man. Capitalism made it possible to become wealthy by serving your fellow man. Capitalists seek to find what people want and produce and market it as efficiently as possible.

Here's a question for us: Are people who by their actions create unprecedented convenience, longer life expectancy, and more fun available to the ordinary person—becoming wealthy in the process—deserving of all the scorn and ridicule heaped upon them by intellectuals and politicians? Are the wealthy obliged to "give something back?" For example, what more do the wealthy discoverers and producers of life-saving antibiotics owe us? They've already saved lives and made us healthier.

Despite the miracles of capitalism, it doesn't do well in popularity polls. One of the reasons is that capitalism is always evaluated against the nonexistent Utopias of socialism or communism. Any earthly system pales in comparison to Utopias. But for the ordinary person, capitalism, with all of its warts, is superior to any system yet devised to deal with our everyday needs and desires.