

A Question of Faith: Ayn Rand's Objectivist View vs. the Teachings of Jesus Christ

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ABSTRACT

Faith can be defined as the trust in God and in His promises as made through Jesus Christ and the scriptures by which humans are justified or saved. Many people are taught that without religion there would be no morality in the world. In contrast, Ayn Rand's philosophy of objectivism sharply contrasts the emotional and often subjective nature of Christianity with that of reason, objectivity, and free thought. This in turn leads to a question of faith.

Introduction

Ayn Rand introduced the world to her philosophy of objectivism that is in its truest form a systematic, integrated view of existence—often called “a philosophy of life.” To Rand, secular philosophy is a matter of life and death. Rand’s work is framed around her views as an atheist and her strong resistance to religion; seeing virtually no merit in any of the religious teachings and practices experienced by Christians around the world. In the *Virtues of Selfishness* (Rand, 1961), Rand provokes a profound divide between the moral foundations of our society and that of providing answers to the philosophical questions Christians have relied on faith and the teachings of Christ to answer.

Purpose of the Article

The purpose of this article is to contrast the views and ideas of Ayn Rand with the teaching of Jesus Christ, using foundational scriptures and Rand’s unique philosophy of objectivism. This article will review the morality of religion versus the focus on the individual human life which Rand represents as the salvation for future generations of humanity. The article will also identify the distinction between the ideas around faith that are included in *The Virtues of Selfishness* (Rand, 1961) to that of biblical scriptures which have been the underpinning of the Christian faith around the world.

The Concept of God: The Foundation for Living

Many Christians have been taught that human beings are born into sin and are worthy of nothing but death and damnation. But because of God’s love for us he sent Christ to be the bearer of our sins. The teachings and preaching’s that most Christians have heard for generations depict Jesus’ cruel torture and crucifixion – as penalties that all Christians deserve for projected sins and misgivings. To steer clear of hell Christian’s must acknowledge Christ’s sacrifice and live their lives according to biblical principles. In our secular society many individuals live with an awareness of three central themes that serve as the foundation of Christianity: sin, sacrifice and suffering.

In Mel Gibson’s film “The Passion of the Christ,” (Gibson, 2004), we see an example of this representation as Jesus passively submits to vicious torture and death, even forgiving his tormenters. Many Christians view Jesus’ sacrifice as a moral model that all should live by. This message underpins how Jesus forfeited his life to save Christian sinners and the notion that we are all responsible for the problems of the world, thus we each should sacrifice ourselves for the good of others.

In Rand's view this is an immoral lesson. Morality of life in her opinion requires the pursuit of gratification and fulfillment in oneself; not self-abnegation and acquiescing in the role of a sacrificial casualty (Rand, 1961). Gibson's film demonstrates the depths of despair and depravity to which humans can descend, and prompts profound reflection (Gibson, 2004). From the Randian viewpoint only an ethical code of personal accountability not original sin can circumvent the dangers of moral relativism and bigotry and ensure both personal happiness and a free society. By Rand's standard, morality requires that we criticize and judge others and ourselves; both their actions and our own by principles of justice and not tender moral absolution for the most atrocious crimes and criminals (Thomas, 2002).

Due to this sharp contrast in views most people generally fall into one of three categories throughout their walk called life: believers, intellectualizers, and atheists. The predominant route followed by most citizens in the western world is believers where faith is promoted through organized religion and religious practices. Intellectualizers are much more secretive and often lend themselves to meditation, doctrines, occult philosophies and some level of rational thought. The fastest growing types of spiritual mysticism today surround the areas of: metaphysics, physics, prophets, and astrology. Finally, atheists much like Rand generally have the smallest following that is grounded in no belief in God. In *The Virtues of Selfishness* (Rand, 1961), Rand speaks to a total virtue of rationality whereby there is a constant recognition and acceptance of reason as one's only source of knowledge. The study of epistemology concerns itself with what constitutes knowledge and how we arrive at that knowledge, which closely ties to Rand's philosophy. Rand stresses the need to be committed to the principle that all of one's convictions, values, goals, desires and actions must be based on, derived from, chosen and validated by a process of thought through the application of logic (Rand, 1961).

Faith: The Assurance of the Unseen

Oswald Chambers once said, "A life of faith means never knowing where you are being led. But it does mean loving and knowing the One who is leading" (Chambers, 2000). This quote is a true representation of how most Christians view their road in life and their opportunity for salvation. Faith is something Christ taught—that is why the Bible calls it "the doctrine of *Christ*." For those who chose to follow this walk in life, belief and faith become the underpinning of their existence for those who choose to follow this walk in life. It is through this belief that the Kingdom of God becomes available. Faith in its purest form is based on emotions. Those who oppose this notion often point out does not distinguish between reality and non-reality. It is through this avenue that many find their values and ethics, and find strength to weather insurmountable odds and challenges in life. The study of axiology surrounds itself with what one values or the rules of proper conduct (Kritsonis, 2002). Christians often struggle with axiology as they believe a higher being should be left to judge, reward, and or punish those here on earth. The objectivist's criticism of faith is the inherent fear of retribution when one seeks answers outside of the unknown and the desire to solve problems without dependence upon God. Critics site the idea that some Christians have no idea how to solve problems without praying—begging for God to alleviate their pain, to find and sustain love for them, create wealth for them, and to find jobs for them. Rand sees this as the rejection of what she terms mysticism- any claim

to some non-sensory, non-rational, non-definable, supernatural source of knowledge (Rand, 1961).

Ayn Rand's Opposition to Faith: the Nature of Reality

In religion, the highest value is obedience to the will of God, while objectivist's view the highest value as individual human life. Contrary to the notion that God will support and guide one through the toils of life via prayer, supplication and faith, Rand emphasizes the need for rationality and reason to be the moral virtues one should possess. Objectivists also openly oppose an invisible God and Rand stresses the metaphysical world in which we live as solid and grounded by facts and reality which is tangible. Rand views religion as intangible whimsical laws not subject to the ways in which we obtain knowledge. In *The Virtues of Selfishness* Nathaniel Branden (as cited in Rand, 1961) supports the views Rand expresses around the notion of faith as he states, "Faith is the commitment of one's consciousness to beliefs for which one has no sensory evidence or rational proof. A mystic is a man who treats his feelings as tools of cognition. Faith is the equation of feeling with knowledge" (p. 41). Branden frames his views on faith as a suspension of one's sight and one's judgment. "When one lives a life of faith he or she must be willing to live the unintelligible through a trancelike illusion of understanding." One as Braden views it, "Represses critical faculty and drowns out questions that often rise in protest." To compound that view, John Galt, in *Atlas Shrugged* (Rand, 1957), identifies faith as an alleged shortcut to knowledge that short circuits and destroys the mind.

Service to Others: The Nature of Morality

Rand once said, "I have come here to say that I do not recognize anyone's right to one minute of my life. The world is perishing from an orgy of self-sacrifice" (Adrian Bible Students, 2008). In sharp contrast, Jesus said, "When you give to the poor, don't let anyone know what you are doing. Your giving should be done in secret. Your father can see what is done in secret, and he will reward you" (Matt. 6: 3-4, Amplified Bible). Rand's self-centered views are contrary to everything that Jesus Christ and his followers have lived by for generations. Christian teachings are grounded in the belief that mankind has a natural obligation to others through reasonable service. While the Apostle Paul advocated the need for Christians to work and not be a burden on their fellow man, the need to reach out to others in need and to sacrifice is a dominating factor of Christianity. Rand in her divergent thinking said, "The man who speaks of sacrifice, speaks of slaves and masters, intends to be the master" (Rand, 1961, p. 28). The Objectivist ethics conceitedly advocates and upholds coherent self-interest and that individual good does not require human sacrifices and cannot be achieved by the sacrifice of a person for someone else.

Selfishness and Faith: Flaw or Virtue

Ayn Rand believed that selfishness is not a character flaw, but a virtue. She advanced the thought that human beings are logically driven to be egocentric and selfish. Rand believed that man's only responsibility is to himself and that being motivated by greed is quite virtuous. Henry David Thoreau once wrote, "The smallest seed of faith is better than the largest fruit of happiness" (Thoreau, 2000). Based on the Randian view faith is not natural to the modern mind. The human mind is rational while faith is viewed as irrational. The mind is seen as logical, while faith is seen as illogical. From the Christian perspective, the mind is doubtful while faith remains doubt-free. In the world in which we live, we've become fixated on uncertainty more than the unbridled possibility of what can be. We are so focused on reality that we often miss the wisdom of the natural spirit mind.

Faith in the world in which we live has all but been lost to the relegated stock we put into our fact-finding reality. Through that we lose a deeper truth. Could faith be the only way to supersede the human limitations of reality? Could faith be the only way to move beyond the human ego and deny its hold on our reality? An unknown sage once said, "God does not ask about our ability, but our availability." Are we available to believe in something higher than our own ego-centered mind? Are we available to suspend doubt and disbelief and live in utter positivity? Aesthetics speaks to identifying what beauty is, and the foundation by which judgment is based.

Objectivism holds that things are what they are, independent of one's knowledge or wishes. Objectivism rejects both the view that reality is some supernatural realm inaccessible to reason or that everyone has their own subjective reality. Objectivism holds that every individual is an end to himself-which means that each individual should be selfish, live by their own mind and for their own happiness, neither sacrificing themselves to others nor sacrificing others for them. Objectivism rejects the view that an individual's moral worth is determined by his altruistic service to society, the needy, the nation, or some deity (Ayn Rand Institute, n.d).

Is Christianity a Dictatorship: Lessons Without Imperatives?

Critics of the teachings of Jesus state that one of the greatest challenges found in biblical morality is the fact that its precepts are asserted without reason. Many Christians would likely affirm their belief in the sovereignty of God. That God is sovereign or in control, is a fact that most Christians would not argue. Sovereignty is a divine attribute of God that has been universally acknowledged by historic Christianity. Christians take comfort in this fact and often encourage others through their own experiences with trials and tribulations. This does not mean that all Christians mean the same thing when they say God is sovereign. For that reason Christianity is often not categorized as moral theory, which is bound by the principle of reality.

Rand (1961) said, "The religious view of existence teaches the damnation of life and the worship of death" (p. 18). Rand proposes two objections to the existence of God. First, belief in God degrades man by positioning something "higher" or more "perfect." Belief in God as she

believed is anti-man. Second, there is no proof of the existence of God. (Parille, n.d.). Rand contends that reason is the faculty which identifies and integrates the material provided by man's senses. Reason integrates man's perceptions by means of forming abstractions or conceptions, thus raising man's knowledge from the perceptual level that he shares with animals, to the conceptual level which he alone can reach. The method which reason employs in this process is logic—and logic is the art of non-contradictory identification (Rand, 1961).

A Code of Values: Metaphysics and Christianity

Ayn Rand believed nature to be commanded, must be obeyed. The lessons surrounding metaphysics deals with the notion that the world is a real place ruled by natural laws. In stark contrast the notion of Christianity is viewed as a dominion where magic and miracles can occur without explanation. Objectivists hold that we live in a concrete world of facts while religion teaches that the world is subject to the whims of impenetrable beings that are not subject to any laws other than their own desires. Metaphysics deals with the recognition that things really exist. Randians of course believe that all things exist and due to this existence all things are tangible.

A Code of Values: Epistemology and Christianity

Epistemology is the study of how we acquire knowledge (Kritsonis, 2002). Randians believe knowledge is acquired through a process of while Christians believe that in some cases knowledge can be obtained by heavenly messenger or divine inspiration. Rand and others of similar opinions believe we must have the ability to recognize reality and process those perceptions through cognitive reason. It is through that level of reasoning that new knowledge is gained. Objectivism holds that the capability to rationalize is indispensable to our attainment of knowledge. Without that source of reason we leave ourselves open to the manipulations and deceptions of others. Religion in contrast teaches us to not rely on our ability to reason (Prov. 3:5). Religion gives us an opportunity to rely on outside forces that are not in the realm of reality (i.e. God, clergy). In religion one often gains knowledge by heavenly inspiration or the inspiration of others with similar beliefs.

A Code of Values: Ethics and Christianity

The code of values we use to steer our choices and actions are known as ethics or morality. It is this morality that guides and determines the course of our lives whether you are Christian or otherwise. In religion, morality is based on the will of God. In Objectivism, the

standard of good and evil are based on man's life. Objectivists view man as a precious entity as he exists and his ability to reason. These circumstances are of worth because man lives and has the ability to make choices. In *The Virtues of Selfishness* (Rand, 1961), Rand outlines her belief that man has an ability that places him above all other living entities in our sphere of existence. Unlike other animals who survive solely on instinct, man must discover the things he needs to survive. Man must work to obtain the things he needs to survive (food, shelter) and man must use reason to discover how to best obtain those needs. Man controls his environment by the use of reason or man chooses to not use reason and dies as a slave to his environment.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, "The Passion of the Christ" (Gibson, 2004), showed Jesus' anguish and suffering as he faces death with resilience and strength. Most civilized human beings would feel a sense of sympathy and pity for a blameless man who is tormented and killed in front of many witnesses. Each of us will at some point in our time on earth, experience suffering and anguish in our lives be it by chance or by design. Everyone should live their lives with a clearly defined plan and expect to achieve values and goals through preparation and hard work. That Christians believe is an expectation of reality.

In Rand's viewpoint Christians or those who choose to live non-spiritually must recognize that within the world in which we live there will always be the things we can't tie to reality and our own understanding (Rand, 1961). The world in which we live reflects a bottomless separation concerning the moral fundamentals of our society and will always remain a question of faith in God versus faith in oneself and reality.

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