

## **Lest we Forget: Exploring Ayn Rand's *Virtues of Selfishness* (1964)**

**David M. Palmer**

**PhD Student in Educational Leadership**

Whitlowe R. Green College of Education

Prairie View A&M University

Prairie View, Texas

**Administrative Assistant**

College of Engineering Graduate Affairs and Research

**William Allan Kritsonis, PhD**

**Professor and Faculty Mentor**

PhD Program in Educational Leadership

Whitlowe R. Green College of Education

Prairie View A&M University

Prairie View, Texas

Member of the Texas A&M University System

**Visiting Lecturer (2005)**

Oxford Round Table

University of Oxford, Oxford England

**Distinguished Alumnus (2004)**

Central Washington University

College of Education and Professional Studies

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### **ABSTRACT**

**In Ayn Rand's *The Virtues of Selfishness* (1964), there's cogent insight into her vastly philosophical mind and assertions on morality, rationality, life, values, ethics and her fortified ideology on Objectivism. Rand's epistemology, metaphysics and psychological understanding of people may be misunderstood when measured against modern day philosophy but her prepositions are interesting. The immensity of philosophy requires knowing through the realms of meaning. When knowing is fundamentally objective and balanced it can withstand the test of time.**

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## Introduction

All acts of meaning come from the pure desire to know, think, believe, reason, or formulate through words or symbols. In that case when you formulate a “theory” it will be void of ambiguity, biased complexities, gaping holes, loose ends, and leftover problems and will be able to withstand sound substantive inquiry. This article will attempt to present a reasonable analytical view on morality, rationality, value, life, ethics and objectivism as put forward by Ayn Rand’s *The Virtues of Selfishness* (1964). An epistemological and metaphysical example is used to clarify, support and justify her arguments and is intended to stir intellectual thought.

## Purpose of the Article

The purpose of this article is to analyze Ayn Rand’s ideology on morality, rationality, value, life, ethics and objectivism from her book: *The Virtues of Selfishness* (1964). The article will provide balance dispassionate views that underscore the sensible philosophies in her arguments, while stimulating independent critical and intellectual thought so that both are taken as a goldmine for ideas rather than a solid doctrine.

## Epistemological and Metaphysical Reasoning

Given Rand's epistemological standpoint that includes the convictions that – human beings are able to know reality *and* that knowledge is simply the correct recognition of facts – I would propose that the ranks of these two pieces of arguments are entwined with one another with a known awareness that they are dissimilar although it does not pop out at you. It could be though that this is suitable because epistemological considerations will have no eventual independence from what is correct metaphysically.

Because the arguments concerned here are different, and the issues are laid out somewhat intricately, the process of knowledge should culminate in judgment and consequently objectivity, but, there has to be a given. The standard for objectivity is the pure forward push of the strong conviction in us. Where there is a knowledge process there is beginning and ending. From cognition to understanding to affirmation ,who you are deep within will always count although meaning often goes beyond the sum of experiences that help to make you who you are. Ardent Ayn Rand fans might not agree with me here.

The metaphysical argument aims to illustrate that *valuing* depends in fact on life as *impermanent survival*. As a result of this dependence, it is only living things that face the option of extinction. I would respectfully argue that although goals may be means to an end, it is logically impossible for all goals to be means to an end. There must be some goal which is an end in itself, to be pursued for its own sake rather than for the sake of anything further to which

it may contribute.

That goal, for any exact organism, is its own life, preserved and sustained in and through the organism's actions insofar as those actions are successful. And because this is an ultimate goal, it sets the standard in terms of which all other goals are to be evaluated. Here Rand's (1964) Objectivist epistemology does hold out reasonable credible promise and does establish that meticulous analysis will prove the truth of any moral and just propositions.

In paraphrasing, Rand (1964) summarized that the metaphysical part of ethics involves discovering explicitly whether moral values are eternal truths that exist in a spirit-like realm or simply human conventions. Here, Rand's psychological understanding of people could be misunderstood when measured against modern philosophy because in addition, she regards ethics as "the province of the irrational" (Rand, 1964, p 28). Rational man's conscience bothers him when he has wronged another so moral values are in fact eternal truths that exist in a spirit-like realm. Of the many salient issues raised by Rand's is the claim that moral obligation is hypothetical in character. Rand affirm the impossibility of rational moral judgments, thus showing a tendency toward rationalism which I think is useful in impacting people to think about whom they are and their power to do right although it does not come out forcefully in her epistemology.

### Morality

Rand's (1964) fundamental law of morality is that one is never justified in *initiating* the use of force against others. Morality is a system of values to direct man's choices and dealings that determine the rationale and the course of his life. Moral duty does arise where goods for others, which may or may not overlap goods for the self, are concerned. Moral duty consists of respect for the autonomy of others, which means allowing the free exercise of the innocent, competent will of others in regard to their own interests. Although some academics and skeptics think that Rand's *Virtue of Selfishness* (1964) doesn't answer many of life's important questions, she in fact does. Example- What is the proper form of moral judgment? Morality is a code of values that tells a man how he should act to protect and promote his life. Since morality is so critically important, moral judgment takes on a life-or-death value. Renowned philosophers I think would concur.

Aristotle (384-322 BC) emphasized the role of habit in conduct. It is commonly thought that virtues, as put forward by Aristotle, are habits and that the good life is a life of mindless routine. Virtue manifests itself in action. According to Aristotle, an action counts as virtuous when one holds oneself in a stable equilibrium of the spirit, in order to choose the action knowingly and for its own sake. This stable equilibrium of the soul is what constitutes character (Sachs, 2006).

For Aristotle, moral virtue is the only practical road to effective action. What the person of good character loves with right desire and thinks of as an end with the right reason must first be perceived as beautiful. The virtuous person sees truly and judges rightly. Since beautiful things appear as they truly are only to a person of good character. It is only in the middle ground

between habits of acting and principles of action that the soul can allow right desire and right reason to make their appearance, as the direct and natural response of a free human being to the sight of the beautiful. Morality, as defined by your conscience and intellectual honesty, completely balances this argument but Rand simply and expertly puts it another way: “Man productive achievements are his noblest activity and reason his only absolute” (Rand, 1964, p. 27). Ethics should train one to act reasonable in accord with virtue that is beautiful - it is a process, from youth to adult that reforms your basic character to one that can learn practical virtue.

### Values and Life

Epistemologically, the concept of value is genetically dependent upon and derived from the precursor concept of life. To speak of value as apart from life is worse than a contradiction in terms. It is only the concept of *Life* that makes the concept of *Value* possible. An eventual value is the final goal or end to which all lesser goals are the means and it sets the standard by which all lesser goals are evaluated. An organism’s life is its measure of value: that which furthers its existence is the good, that which endangers it is the evil.

With an ultimate goal or end, there can be goals or means: a series of means going off into an endless sequence toward an unreal end is a metaphysical and epistemological possibility. It is only an ultimate goal, an end in itself that makes the existence of values possible. Metaphysically, *life* is the only phenomenon that is an end in itself: a value gained and kept by a constant process of action, an argument also implied, is possibly ambiguous in Rand’s ideology.

Rand (1964) holds that it is the specific nature or identity of a living being which determines which ends or values are proper for it. “That which is required for man’s survival *qua man* is the standard of value for a human being” (Rand, 1964, p. 26). It is this standard which determines what is good or bad for a human being. That which his survival requires is set by his nature and is not open to his choice. What *is* open to his choice is only whether he will discover it or not, whether he will choose right goals and *values* or not. What the proper values or ends for a human being are is not open to choice. This is another salient point and the dynamics of choice and value are easily misrepresented.

I don’t think she is saying that choice itself determine the end and standard by which choices are judged. Neither is she saying that that choice is the cause of the ultimate value of life in absolute, but rather attaining and maintaining a conceptual focus regarding the world, that the life which is proper to a man is attained.

Rand develops her case that human life is normatively pregnant, as it were, meaning that it is bound up, through and through, with an ordinary dimension. Rand argues the concept of value is tied intimately to the concept of life, so when something is a living being there is no escaping certain normative considerations about such a being. In the lives of human beings this normative component and transformed into an ethical or moral one such that not only is it possible to consider whether a human beings is doing well or badly but also whether it is acting responsibly by doing well or badly.

On the matters of value life and rationality Rand believes everyone should always do whatever is valuable for him and promotes his own life and can live only if he is rational which

implies that everyone should be absolutely rational. She deals with the agent-relative significance. - It is possible for some things to be simply good, but some things can be good for you but not for me. Rand bases her ethics on the agent-relative position, and her assertions have truth-seeking philosophical supporting arguments. Rand often says that many individual are aiming at self-ruin. This is self-evident. She explains that reason is our basic tool of continued existence. I entirely agree with this point, the lack of reason is part of man's self-ruin because he lacks confidence, knowledge, esteem and in general objectivity.

Self-esteem is a necessary component of a true objectivist. According to Campbell and Fodis (2003), there is a deeper understanding of self-esteem as it pertains to objectivism. Genuine self-esteem has two dimensions of self-evaluation: one is competent to deal with life's essential challenges (self-efficacy) and an evaluation that one is worthy of happiness (self-worth). Campbell and Fodis (2003) rebutted suggestions from some modern day philosophers that even criminals have high self-esteem. Continuing their argument Campbell and Fodis believe that the standards for adult self-esteem include self-reflective and independent thought. This means that one must take responsibility for one's thoughts, beliefs, values, and actions. One must pursue meaningful life goals and adhere to moral values that are based on reason. These are some of the arguments and opinions that guarantee credibility to Rand's views.

### **Rationality**

"Rational" and "man *qua* man" are Rand's (1964, p. 25-27) punch words. She gives a somewhat strict and decided criterion for their applicability. Thus, suppose someone tries to argue that, on Rand's theory, it would be morally acceptable to steal from people, provided you could get away with it. She could claim that this is not in your interests, because there is always a risk that you might get caught, and it's not worth it. This could hold because no one knows how to calculate this risk, so no one can actually refute this claim.

Clearly, Rand is claiming that in reality there is something which is by its very nature an end in itself, an ultimate value, and this is life. It is the only phenomenon which is an end in itself or ultimate value. Life is *the* end or value which makes all other ends or values possible. It is the ultimate goal of a living thing's actions. Further, since "life" does not exist in the abstract, this means that for any living entity, its life is the ultimate end or value for its actions.

Rand does not claim that the existence of life as the ultimate end, goal, or value is dependent on choice. Life is not a value because we choose it, but rather because of what it is — *metaphysically, life is ... an end in itself: a value gained and kept by a constant process of action.*

### **Concluding Remarks**

In conclusion, Rand's earnestness about philosophy, give credence to the seriousness of the virtue of her system and the role of philosophy in the good life. Her emphasis on reason and

independence put it ahead of many pious moralities or the raging relativism current nowadays. Ayn Rand's philosophy of Objectivism consists of statements that assert her strong beliefs. In reality, there cannot be one hundred percent objectivism across all social systems, political landscapes and cultures because diversity is needed for balance and sustainability.

As the world evolves, Ayn Rand philosophy reaches across old and new paradigms and years to offer solutions original and useful that man cannot but find reason for the pursuit of his own happiness. It is hoped that this unearthing of Rand's - *The virtues of selfishness*, underscore its philosophical worth.

The study of Rand and her works will help leaders to consider their own personal philosophy of life existence, ethics, value and morality. It is important to contemplate different philosophical points of view. It is important for people to use cognitive processing and not let others to convince them of falsehood. Rand believes in selfishness over altruism but is right in one sense that happiness is truly left up to the self and cannot be left in the hands of others to produce.

Epistemologically, the Randian view is that man's intelligence is capable to achieve objectively compelling knowledge of that which exists. Rand explains that to live, men must hold three ruling values – reason, purpose, and self-esteem. These values imply all of the virtues required by a man's life. Rationality, the chief virtue, is the acknowledgment of objective reality, commitment to its awareness, and the acceptance of reason as a man's only judge of values and guide to knowledge and action. Fairness is the expression of man's rationality in his dealings with other men and involves seeking and granting the earned. Caring, friendship, and high regard, as moral tributes, are caused and must be earned. Satisfaction, the total of the preceding virtues, can be thought of as moral ambitiousness.

Rand's detailed treatment of ideas and philosophical paradigms in - *Virtues of Selfishness* is powerful. The axiomatic concepts, is fantastic, intellectually stimulating and exciting. It offers clear perspectives to those who are seeking to be open-minded and objective.

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