

Ayn Rand: Selfishness – Your Way to Individual Triumph

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ABSTRACT

A man's self-interest cannot be determined by blind desires or random whims, feelings, urges, or wishes. His interest must be discovered and achieved by the guidance of rational principles that he chooses for himself. This selfishness is man's way to individual triumph over hardships. It is a virtue. Man must be guided by his own independent judgment. A consistent philosophical frame of reference is provided for those who have become confused by the influence of altruism.

Introduction

Presented as a collection of essays In *The Virtue of Selfishness*, Ayn Rand (1964) brings clarity to topics on ethical issues that were confused by the influence of altruism. She provided readers with a consistent philosophical frame of reference on issues and problems in today's culture such as values, the nature of right and good, rationality, justice, productiveness and benevolence. A man's self-interest could not be determined by blind desires or random whims, feelings, urges, or wishes. Rand (1964) stated that man's interest must be discovered and achieved by the guidance of rational principles that he chooses for himself which resulted in his selfishness as an individual. Man's concern with his own interest was a virtue. This action was considered good. The ethics of altruism enjoined man to renounce his own interests for the sake of others. In accepting the altruistic point of view, man had no moral guidance. The beneficiary of one's actions would be anybody other than oneself. If man's actions benefit himself, it was evil. Altruist's ethics produced the problems that characterized human relationships today: immorality, chronic injustice, double standards, insoluble conflicts and contradictions.

Selfishness must be redeemed by asserting man's right to a moral existence such as a moral code to guide the course and fulfillment of his own life. Ayn Rand's (1964) essays on "*The Objectivist Ethics*" (1961), "*Mental Health versus Mysticism and Self Sacrifice*" (1963), "*The Ethics of Emergencies*"(1963), "*The Conflicts of Man's Interests*" (1962), "*The Psychology of Pleasure*" (1964), "*Don't Life Require Compromise?*" (1962) and "*The Nature of Government*" (1963) (Rand, 1964) provided a code of values to guide human choices and actions. With moral guidance, selfishness is a virtue and becomes one's way to individual triumph over life's hardships.

Purpose of the Article

The purpose of this article is to discuss the virtue of selfishness in seven areas on ethical issues: "*The Objectivist Ethics*" (1961), "*Mental Health versus Mysticism and Self Sacrifice*" (1963), "*The Ethics of Emergencies*"(1963), "*The Conflicts of Man's Interests*" (1962), "*The Psychology of Pleasure*" (1964), "*Don't Life Require Compromise?*" (1962) and "*The Nature of Government*" (1963) (Rand, 1964). Discovery of man's code of values and actions bring clarity to topics that were confused by the influence of altruism. Thus, a rational man is guided by his thinking (a process of reason) not by his feelings and desires. Self-sacrifice is rejected. The ultimate moral value of man is his concern for his own well being which leads him to experience a healthy, purposeful and fulfilling life.

The Objectivist Ethics

Man's way of life calls for him to discover what is right or wrong or good or evil for him. He has to choose what values that guide his life. How he gains knowledge to design a course of action is up to him. He has a will to choose what he wants to do with his life. The right choices are his life line. The wrong choices will cause him to perish. He will either sink or swim, progress or regress to a lower level of living; maybe even destruction. Man reasons within himself to do what he was purposed to do in his lifetime. He makes choices with the knowledge he has acquired, which is based on what he values, not on what he perceives. If he values life, then he will make right decisions in faith. The choices he makes extends his life. He is the beneficiary of his own actions and must act for his own rational self-interest (Rand, 1964).

On the other hand, the ethics of altruism enjoined man to renounce his own interests for the sake of others. In accepting the altruistic point of view, man had no moral guidance. The beneficiary of one's actions would be anybody other than oneself. Ayn Rand's philosophy was "the concept of man as a heroic being, with his own happiness as the moral purpose of his life, with productive achievement as his noblest activity, and reason as his only absolute" ("Objectivism (Ayn Rand)," n.d.). A glimpse of the life of Mother Teresa revealed the philosophy of Ayn Rand. Mother Teresa was an Albanian Roman Catholic nun with Indian citizenship, founded the Missionaries of Charity in Kolkata (Calcutta), India in 1950. She lived and worked among the poor, sick, orphaned, and dying for over 45 years, while guiding the Missionaries of Charity's expansion, first throughout India, and then in other countries. She had high self-esteem, a belief in God and the love of Christ that enabled her to her hear (as she termed), the "call within the call". She made a rational decision to follow a specific calling to fulfill a specific work. She stated that to fail to carry out her duties would have been to break the faith ("Mother Teresa," n.d.). She found her purpose in life and discovered her own way to happiness. Definitely, she was seen as a heroic being, who reasoned to make right decisions in faith, achieving and fulfilling her purpose, which was evident to everyone who her. It was her noble activity, graciousness, efficacy, love and devotion that made her an extraordinary ethical leader who discovered her purpose which resulted in a phenomenal and successful life.

Metaphysically, ethics is what is real for man or man's reality. It is a path he can follow for living. What man thinks about is who he actually is. "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Proverbs 23:7, Gideons International Holy Bible). Man reasons within himself daily on whether to make right decisions. If he consciously chooses not to make right decisions, then he is bound for destruction. If man finds his purpose in life, has high self-esteem, believes in himself, has a value system, and finds works that he enjoys; then life is worth living. Man can succeed in life, but he must discover his own way to success and happiness. Similar to Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs 1954 model, once man has found his purpose, he is able to become self actualized where he realizes his personal potential and thereby experience self-fulfillment, personal growth and peak experiences ("Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs," 1954). In meeting his self-actualized

needs, he can meet his transcendence needs by helping other people. He will value his life and the life of others.

Mental Health versus Mysticism and Self Sacrifice

According to Nathaniel Branden, a man who has self-esteem has a healthy mind and is fully conscious of what it takes to focus and live a healthy life (Rand, 1964). He is able to reason and make sense of the world in which he lives. Man gains pride in his effort to achieve knowledge and work. He is able to adjust to changes in life through acquired knowledge and staying focused on what is real in his value system. He is able to act in line with his value system. What he values, takes precedence over any sudden irrational move. Anything less would leave him spiraling into dread and doom. When fear or depression sets in, then man's thoughts are unhealthy and his self-esteem is low. His knowledge is limited and he relies on his feelings. Irrational behavior begins to manifest when man does not reason or think.

Man is a rational being and the way he comprehend things is in a hierarchical manner (Rand, 1964). He values some things more than others. He perceives things, thinks about them and then acts on what he thinks. His steps are ordered. Perception, cognition, and control of one's action signify a healthy functioning mind guided by logic. The opposite of self-esteem is mysticism and self-sacrifice. Mysticism deals with the irrational, unknowable, even demons and ghosts (Rand, 1964). Man as an irrational being has interests that clash with other people and with his own reality. When one does not have any control over his perceptions and thoughts, there is mental illness and a distorted axiology. One begins to value things that are destructive to him. He is in a chronic state of self-sacrifice – always giving and on a road to self-destruction. So, there is only one reality and man has to perceive it with a healthy mind, self-esteem, pride in his work and effort to achieve a life worth living.

The Ethics of Emergencies

No matter what type of emergency one is faced with, it is temporary. The response to any emergency is to survive. The trouble emergencies bring is for a while. Man's primary goal is to combat the disaster. It can be an emergency such as flood, earthquake, fire or shipwreck. It is metaphysically possible for unforeseeable disasters to strike (Rand, 1964). One should volunteer to help strangers only in an emergency, but not at the expense of his own life. One should always act in accordance with his value system. He should never sacrifice a greater value to a lesser one (Rand, 1964). Any action a man undertakes for the benefit of those he loves is not a sacrifice. It is something he values. The act is one of integrity and loyalty to one's convictions and values is a must. Any help given to someone in trouble should be based on whether the

person's welfare is incorporated in to one's rational hierarchy of values (Rand, 1964). For example, if a rational man helps his family when trouble, unemployment, sickness, or any natural disaster happens, then it is something that he values. He values his family. He will help family members, but not to the point of compromising his own health. He values his own health first, and then he seeks to aid others. His selfishness is a virtue.

The "Conflicts" of Men's Interests

There are no conflicts of interest among rational men according to the Objectivist view of man's nature. Reality, context, responsibility and effort are interrelated when considering a rational man's view of his own interests. Man's interests depend on what goals he pursues. His desires are dependent on what he values. His values are dependent on how he thinks. He will not get what he desires unless he applies effort to fulfill those desires (Rand, 1964). His thoughts on fulfilling his desires must be in context of how he thinks about everything else in his life. He must accept full responsibility for his actions; whether he succeeds or whether he fails.

The Psychology of Pleasure

Man's values will let him know what pleasures to seek (Rand, 1964). Pleasure entails a sense of self efficacy. Psychologically, pleasure keeps man living and allows him to experience enjoyment in life. Metaphysically, pleasure is the reward of successful actions. A rational, self-confident man is motivated by a love of values and a desire to achieve them. When he achieves something, it is the reward of being with people he likes that brings him pleasure. He has a good outlook on life. The choices that he makes are in line with his value system. His self-esteem is high and he experiences great pleasure. The irrational man, such as a drug addict from a well to do family, that has low self-esteem, feels helpless and inadequate. He feels out of control and operates without a value system. He desperately seeks an escape from reality. If a value system is not in place, his pleasures of escape are from what is real. He seeks pleasure from those he can deceive and manipulate. When a man has genuine efficacy, along with pride in one's work, he can truly find pleasure in his life.

Doesn't Life Require Compromise?

A compromise is an adjustment of conflicting claims by mutual concessions (Rand, 1964). Both parties have something to offer the other, but only at the expense of doing something that is against one's convictions and principles. An irrational thinking person will compromise his morals in order to please another person or people. He will be convicted that what he has compromised was not what he believed in his heart. A rational person would want to have a good conscious and learns that being faithful to one's beliefs is an absolute. When he has compromised his value system, he feels terrible and because he has a conscious, he learns quickly that he must right the wrong or stick to his convictions in the future. Anything less would be a betrayal to oneself. Life does not require compromise for the rational, healthy, functioning mind. It becomes an absolute that nothing can be comprised unless one is on a downhill spiral path to self-destruction.

Man's Rights

In a capitalist society, individual rights are upheld and protected (Rand, 1964). When man's rights are upheld, his freedom, right to his own life, liberty, property and pursuit of his own happiness are possible. A moral society is evident and protects man from deliberate harm and betrayal by government. In order for man to live a productive life, he needs freedom, to work and be in pursuit of his desires. Otherwise, he is irrational and will be used by others for their benefit.

The Nature of Government

Government should protect man's rights and combat the evils which men can cause to one another. Ayn Rand stated that government entities such as the police, armed services and the courts should protect man from physical violence. Man has a right to his own life, liberty, property and pursuit of his own happiness as referred to in the U.S. constitution. The police protect men from criminals. The armed services protect man from foreign invaders. The law courts settle disputes among men. Today's view of government is one where the government is the violator of man's rights. A lack of checks and balances has led to the government being the violator. It is not guarding freedom, but instilling uncertainty and fear into the lives of its citizens. Citizens are faced with foreclosures, stock market crash, loss of pensions, and lack of appropriate healthcare. Today, government has been free to rob its citizens with high gas prices and incredible debt. Today, citizens experience the agony of not being a true human. Government should serve as the instrument of objectivity in human relationships. It

should operate with checks and balances so that it citizens can have a chance to pursue their individual rights to live one's life, with a right to liberty, acquire property and consistently pursue his happiness (Rand, 1964).

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, by the metaphysical nature of man and of existence, man has to maintain his life by his own effort. The purpose of this article is to discuss the virtue of selfishness on ethical issues such as: "*The Objectivist Ethics*" (1961), "*Mental Health versus Mysticism and Self Sacrifice*" (1963), "*The Ethics of Emergencies*"(1963), "*The Conflicts of Man's Interests*" (1962), "*The Psychology of Pleasure*" (1964), "*Don't Life Require Compromise?*" (1962) and "*The Nature of Government*" (1963) (Rand, 1964). Discovery of man's code of values and actions bring clarity to topics that were confused by the influence of altruism. Thus, a rational man is guided by his thinking (a process of reason) not by his feelings and desires. Self-sacrifice is rejected. The ultimate moral value of man is his concern for his own well being, which leads him to experience a healthy, purposeful and fulfilling life.

The values he needs, such as wealth or knowledge, are not given to him automatically, as a gift of nature, but have to be discovered and achieved by his own thinking and work. One's sole obligation toward others is to maintain a social system that leaves man free to achieve, gain and keep his values. The moral purpose of a man's life is the achievement of his own happiness. This does not mean that others are indifferent to him. It means that one does not resolve himself to alleviate the suffering of others. Any help rendered is being generous. Man's values and goals are the motivating factors in his life. A successful life is descriptive of a man with high self-esteem, who has discovered his purpose in life and takes pride in his work. It is only when man values selfishness and sees it as a virtue that he truly rises to the occasion of self actualization and transcendence. In meeting his self-actualized needs, he realizes his personal potential and thereby experience self-fulfillment, personal growth and peak experiences. He can meet his transcendence needs by helping other people fulfill their desires. He will value his life and the life of others. Ayn Rand's philosophy can be summed up by the realization man can live his life to the fullest. When he does, selfishness has become a virtue to him. It is then that selfishness will be his way to individual triumph over life's hardships. The end result is a life worth living.

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Formatted by Dr. Mary Alice Kritsonis, National Research and Manuscript Preparation
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