

Ayn Rand (1905-1982)

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Learning Objectives

- Define Objectivism, Value and Virtue
- Identify the major works of Ayn Rand
- Discuss the principles of Objectivist Ethics
 - Why we need a code of ethics
 - How we determine value
 - Consciousness as the means of survival
 - Choice to think or not think
 - Three cardinal values and three virtues
 - Principle of Trade
 - Benefits of human society
 - The Political Principle

Works

- *Fountainhead* (1943)
- *Atlas Shrugged* (1957)
- *The Objectivist Ethics* (1961)

Definitions

- Objectivism – As a philosophy. One of several doctrines holding that all reality is objective and external to the mind and that knowledge is reliably based on observed objects and events. (American Heritage Dictionary)
- Metaphysical – that which pertains to reality, to the nature of things, to existence (Rand's Usage)



The Objectivist Ethics

http://www.aynrand.org/site/PageServer?pagename=ari_ayn_rand_the_objectivist_ethics

John Galt – *Atlas Shrugged*

“Through centuries of scourges and disasters, brought about by your code of morality, you have cried that your code had been broken, that the scourges were punishment for breaking it, that men were too weak and too selfish to spill all the blood it required. You damned man, you damned existence, you damned this earth, but never dared to questions your code....You went on crying that your code was noble, but human nature was not good enough to practice it. And no one rose to ask the question: Good? – by what standard?

John Galt – *Atlas Shrugged*

“You wanted to know John Galt’s identity. I am the man who has asked that question”

“Yes, this is an age of moral crisis....Your moral code has reached its climax, the blind alley at the end of its course. And if you wish to go on living, what you now need is not to return to morality.... But to discover it”

Morality

- **Morality**
 - Code of values to guide man's choices and actions
 - As a science ethics deals with discovering and defining such a code
- **Poses the question**

“Why does man need ethics?”

Philosophers & Ethics

- No philosopher has given a rational, objectively demonstrable, scientific answer to why we need ethics
 - Aristotle did not regard ethics as an exact science
- Most philosophers took existence of ethics for granted
- Declared that ethics is outside the power of reason

Ethics

- Mystics “Will of God” as a justification – as the standard of good and the validation of ethics
- Justification on *social grounds* – substituting *society* for the “Will of God”



“There is only one fundamental alternative in the universe: existence or nonexistence – and it pertains to a single class of entities: to living organisms. The existence of inanimate matter is unconditional, the existence of life is not: it depends on a specific course of action. Matter is indestructible, it changes its forms, but it cannot cease to exist. It is only a living organism that faces a constant alternative: the issue of life or death. Life is a process of self-sustaining and self-generated action. If an organism fails in that action, it dies; its chemical elements remain, but its life goes out of existence. It is only the concept of ‘Life’ that makes the concept of ‘Value’ possible. It is only to a living entity that things can be good or evil.” John Galt (*Atlas Shrugged*)

Value

That which for which one acts to gain and/or keep

- **Only a living entity:**
 - **Can have goals or can originate them**
 - **Has the capacity for self-generated, goal-directed action**
- **An organism's life depends on**
 - **The material or fuel which it needs from outside**
 - **The action of its own body to use the fuel properly**
- **“An organism's life is its standard of *value*: that which furthers its life is the *good*, that which threatens it is the *evil*.” (the *Objectivist Ethics*)**

Humans Discover Value

- By means of the physical sensations of *pleasure or pain*
 - Sensations first step in the realm of evaluation
 - Capacity to experience pleasure or pain is innate in a man's body
- The pleasure-pain mechanism- the guardian of the organism's life
 - Pleasure – pursuing the right course of action
 - Pain – pursuing the wrong course of action

Consciousness Basis of Survival

- Simpler organism can survive in their environment - but cannot *obtain* that food
- Higher organisms require a range of actions proportionate to the range of their consciousness
 - The lower of the conscious species possess only the faculty of sensation
 - Higher organisms possess the faculty of retaining sensations

Consciousness

- An animal is able to learn certain skills to deal with specific situation: hunting or hiding –teach these to their young
- Man requires the guidance of conceptual values derived from conceptual knowledge

Conceptual Knowledge

- Man's sense organs function automatically; the brain integrates his sense data into percepts automatically
- The process of integrating percepts into concepts **is not automatic**
- Reason is the faculty that identifies and integrates the material provided by man's senses – must exercise it by choice
 - Focus his mind to a full, active, purposefully directed awareness of reality
 - Or unfocus and let himself drift in a semiconscious daze

Conceptual Knowledge

- Psychologically, the choice “to think or not” is the choice “to focus or not”
- Existentially the choice “to focus or not” is the choice “to be conscious or not”
- Metaphysically, the choice “to be conscious or not” is the choice of life or death

Thought

- Man has to initiate thought, to sustain it and to bear responsibility for its results has to learn:
 - To tell what is true or false and how to correct his own errors
 - To discover how to validate his concepts, conclusions, knowledge
 - To discover the rules of thought, laws of logic to direct his thinking

Choice

- A being who does not know automatically what is true or false, cannot automatically know what is right or wrong, good for him or evil
 - That which his survival requires is set by his nature – not open to choice
 - His choice is whether he will discover it or not, whether he will choose the right goals and values or not



“What, then are the right goals for a man to pursue? What are the values his survival requires? That is the question to be answered by the science of *ethics*. And *this*, ladies and gentlemen, is why man needs a code of ethics.”

(The Objectivist Ethics)



“Ethics is an objective, metaphysical
necessity of man’s survival – not by the
grace of the supernatural nor of your
neighbors nor of your whims, but by the
grace of reality and the nature of life”

(The Objectivist Ethics)

Objectivist Ethics

- Maintains a man's life as the standard of value – and his own life as the ethical purpose of every individual man
- Method of survival proper to a rational being require: thinking and productive work
- Value is that for which one acts to gain/keep – virtue is the act by which one gains/keeps it

Cardinal Values & Virtues

- Values: Reason, Purpose, Self-Esteem
- Virtue of Rationality – the recognition and acceptance of reason as ones only source of knowledge, value and action
- Virtue of Productiveness - the recognition of the fact that productive work is the process by which man sustains his life
- Virtue of Pride – the recognition that as man is a being of self-made wealth, so he is a being of self made soul

Objectivist Ethics - Social Principle

- Just as life is an end in itself – every living human being is an end in himself –not the means to the ends or the welfare of others
- A man must live for his own sake – neither sacrificing himself to others nor sacrificing others to himself
- The achievement of his own happiness is man's highest moral purpose

Emotional Mechanism

- **Man is born with an emotional mechanism, just as he is born with cognitive mechanism**
 - **Both are “tabula rasa” at birth**
 - **It is man’s cognitive faculty, his mind, that determines the content of both (the mind programs the emotions)**
 - **Man has no choice about his capacity to feel that something is good for him or evil**
 - **What he will consider good or evil depends on his standard of value**

Rational Selfishness

- The Objectivist ethics advocates and upholds rational selfishness
 - Human good does not require human sacrifices and cannot be achieved by the sacrifice of anyone to anyone
 - **Principle of trade** – the only rational ethical principle for all human relationships: personal and social, private and public, spiritual and material – principle of justice

Benefits of Human Society

- Knowledge – every man benefits from the knowledge discovered by others
- Division of Labor – enables a man to devote his effort to a particular field of work and to trade with others who specialize in other fields

Political Principle

- No man may initiate the use of physical force against others
 - Have the right to use physical force only in retaliation and only against those who imitate its use
 - Proper, moral purpose of a government is to protect man's rights
 - Ayn believed that pure, uncontrolled, unregulated laissez-faire capitalism – with separation of state and economics

Summary of Ayn Rand's Philosophy

- Reality exists as an objective absolute – facts are facts, independent of man's feeling
- Reason is man's only means of perceiving reality, his only source of knowledge, his only guide to action, and his basic means of survival
- Man-every man- is an end in himself, not the means to the ends of others. He must exist for his own sake, neither sacrificing himself to other nor sacrificing other to his self. The pursuit of his own rational self-interest and his own happiness is the highest moral purpose of his life
- The ideal political-economic system is *laissez-faire* capitalism.

(http://www.aynrand.org/site/PageServer?pagename=objectivism_intro)