

An Introduction to the Philosophy of Objectivism

Ayn Rand as a Case Study

مدخل إلى الفلسفة الموضوعية: آين راند أمودجا

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Abstract

Ayn Rand (1905-1982) created the philosophy of rational individualism, which she called Objectivism. Rand asserted that there is no greater end than men's fulfilling their own happiness. The latter cannot be achieved by arbitrary whims. Happiness requires a rational process and respect for the facts of reality, that is meeting human needs and nature. Objectivism holds that human beings must strive to achieve happiness through hard work and productivity to live an independent and fulfilling life.

Keywords: Ayn Rand ; Rationality ; Happiness ; Objectivism

المخلص

أنشأت آين راند (1905-1982) فلسفة الفردية العقلانية، والتي أسمتها الفلسفة الموضوعية. أكد راند أنه لا توجد غاية أعظم من تحقيق المرء لسعادته. لا يمكن تحقيق هذه الأخيرة من خلال نزوات تعسفية. عند راند، تتطلب السعادة عملية عقلانية واحترام حقائق الواقع، أي تلبية احتياجات الإنسان والطبيعة. ترى الموضوعية أن البشر يجب أن يسعوا لتحقيق السعادة من خلال العمل الجاد والإنتاجية ليعيشوا حياة مستقلة ومرضية. الكلمات المفتاحية: العقلانية؛ السعادة؛ الموضوعية؛ آين راند.

1- Introduction

Ayn Rand, born Zinovievna Rosenbaum, was born in St. Petersburg in Russia in 1905, and died in New York in 1982. While in the U.S.A, Rand began her career as a novelist, her themes revolved around capitalism and individualism, which earned her popularity among liberal young Americans in the mid twentieth century. Rand established a new philosophy in her novels, fiction and non-fiction alike, she was largely interested in philosophical principles, which affect the actual existence of man, his happiness and highest values. For Rand, philosophy is not an occult theme but a daily force modeling individual lives and human history. (<https://theobjectivestandard.com/what-is-objectivism/>Ayn Rand Institute, aynrand.org/) Rand believed that men must have some view of the sort of world they aspire to live in, and of how best to understand and deal with it, and of what to aim at in life. Formally, Rand dubbed her philosophy "Objectivism", but informally she called it "a philosophy for living on earth." (<https://theobjectivestandard.com/what-is-objectivism/>Ayn Rand Institute, aynrand.org/) In this paper we shall shed some lights on the most important themes that shaped Rand's philosophy, in what way it was practical? How far it has gone in terms of its moral stance? And what are some of its limitations?

2.Methods

In this paper, we tried to highlight the practicability sides of Ayn Rand's thoughts, as she dubbed her philosophy as one of life. In this endeavor, we have relied on 'A Companion to Ayn Rand', which was edited by Gotthelf and Salmieri (2016),with additional articles written by her long-time student and disciple Nathaniel Branden. Yet, unlike other studies, we tried to critically approach some of her thoughts, such as her veneration of reason, the denigration of religious morality, and the glorification of the virtues of selfishness, certainly in her novels, such as *Atlas Shrugged*,2005

2. Results

Despite her inspiring and ambitious philosophy, Rand failed to confess that reason is limited and might be fallible, that is why people need morality as imperfect and fallible beings. Rand also failed to reckon the amount of happiness that one might gain through altruism, selflessness, and the pursuit of a life of service to humane or good causes, as stoicism and other philosophies teach.

Rand presented no clear-cut evidence for her claim that religious morality represents all evil on earth, and that its followers fail to achieve their highest potentials and ends. Thus, Rand failed to posit that

religious spirituality can be psychologically, socially, and culturally beneficial and constructive to peoples' well-being and happiness as some philosophies suggest.

In addition, Rand sought to build a type of liberalism that meets the ambitions and dreams of the achievers, prodigious, and genius. Yet, she insisted that the less intelligent and unproductive have no rights, and therefore access, to the revenues of the creative wealthiest.

Hence, Rand advocated a radical liberalism, whereby the working class and less privileged have no access to a genuine welfare state. Her philosophy might prove to be practical, a philosophy perhaps for life, but there are myriad of issues that need further elaborations, analyses, and inquiries.

3. Discussion

3.1. Ayn Rand, a Philosophical Background

The early appearance of Rand's analyses and critiques of the early systematic philosophies can be easily discerned. She saw Aristotle as the precursor of the developments of the fourteenth to the nineteenth centuries that had infiltrated the European mainstream thought through the work of Thomas Aquinas. Readers of Rand may notice that she ignores Averroes, whose works inspired Aquinas, Maimonides, and others, to only designate those she believes have introduced Aristotle to the Western tradition.

Rand admits that Aristotle's philosophy was not totally perfect, but nevertheless she thought that it incorporated the crucial elements of rationality and epistemology. She stated that the world we are aware of is real, and dense with identical entities, which we can grasp through sensory experience that eventually leads to objective knowledge of universals." (Gottlieb and Salmieri , 2016, pp. 6-19.) Rand notes that "Aristotle's stress on observation, logics and causality brought about a renaissance in Art and the scientific revolution." (Gottlieb and Salmieri , 2016, pp. 6-19) Thus, a sense of respect for reason and a mounting enjoyment of life propelled people to appreciate the freedom that happiness and reason require. For Rand, John Locke had outlined the rights that "define and ratify this freedom, those rights, which the declaration of Independence had perfectly reflected. (Gottlieb and Salmieri, 2016, pp 4-19.) .

Hence Rand believed that the period bore the dream of attaining an ideal community, which would steadfastly uphold individual rights, yet, for Rand, this ideal was not achieved. She maintained that the upshots of Aristotle's wisdom had engulfed men's lives, yet its practical effects were lost. According to Rand, philosophy since the age of modernity had been lurking back to Plato's

absolutism. Hence, the unparalleled progress of the nineteenth century, the scientific achievements, and the fulfilled lives had been abandoned without intellectual assessment and rigor investigation. Rand, ultimately believed that Aristotle's philosophy was no more pervasive as it used to be, despite the fact that its aura was still reigning. (Gotthelf and Salmieri, 2016, pp 4-19)

Rand blames most of modern philosophers, of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, mainly unwittingly, for causing the fall into mysticism and retrogression. She held that Kant's philosophy was an attack on rationality. Kant's epistemological skepticism weakens human beings' trust in reason, and his ethics favors morality against self-interest. Rand thought that post-Kantian philosophy was hardly different, and believed that persistent Kantian philosophy undermined the aesthetic and social and economic achievements of the nineteenth centuries from being fully pursued and defended. (Gotthelf and Salmieri, 2016, pp 4-19)

Moreover, for Rand, Capitalism was retrogressing, with rampant dictatorship gaining pace in Europe. Although the descent in America was slow, according to Rand, because it had embraced what she dubbed "Aristotelian sense of life", but she maintained that the US was also gradually sleep-walking toward the same direction. To remedy the situation, Rand believes that the role of Objectivism, as a philosophy, is to avert this trend; people needed Aristotelianism's sense of life to "expose the fallacies of Kant and claim back the achievements of the nineteenth century." (Gotthelf and Salmieri, 2016, pp 4-19) This leads us to ask: what is Objectivism in Rand's philosophy that she brought forward to dismantle the solid pillars of modern philosophy, which she thought run against men's ambitions and life?

3.2. Objectivism as a Way of Life

Rand saw that Objectivism, as a philosophy, is a way of life ".(Biddle, 2014) The reason being that its every rule is taken from the facts humans observe and establish as reality and the proven demands of human happiness.

As a method, Rand's Objectivism comprises an attitude towards the essence of reality, of men's tools of knowledge, of humans' innate qualities, and proper ways of existence, practical morality and art. Rand developed her philosophy in her many fiction and nonfiction books, the most prominent of which were, *Atlas Shrugged*, *Philosophy: Who Needs it*, *The Virtue of Selfishness*, and other works. (Biddle, 2014.)

Indeed, Rand believed that men should build up their own system of morality, which transcends any religious, metaphysical, or any other transcendental authority. Following, is a recap of how she saw the meaning of valuing as the basis for living a meaningful life that constituted the building block of her objectivist philosophy.

3.3. The Meaning of Valuing and the Objectivity of Values

The meaning of “valuing” as an act undertaken by one’s mental and spiritual activities, is developed in Rand’s fiction and non-fiction works. Rand held that many people seldom make use of the act of valuing, and if they do so only inconsistently. An important feature in Rand’s works, is that some of her heroes are great valuers, hence she strove to demonstrate what it is to value and what would life look like without valuing. (Salmieri, 2016, p13.) Rand, referring to valuing as an act of survival appears in her novel entitled “The Little Street”, in which she depicted some of her heroes as “striving to live every moment” and “refusing to exist as other people do” (Salmieri, A Companion to Ayn Rand, 2016, p14) Against those wanting to live every second, there are those, whom she depicts as ‘anti-life’.

According to Rand (2016), these people do not take things seriously, and there is nothing priceless and sacred to them. There is hardly any thought, piece of creative art, inspiring people that can attract their attention and passion and affect their souls and minds. Instead, she held, these people tend to take things easily and recklessly, because they do not take them seriously or as a necessity. According to Rand, people who does not know how to value, tends to fail in believing in anything, and have not believed continually, and hence cannot be loyal to any principle or thought. That is why they are irrational and fail to link things they experience together. Salmieri, A Companion to Ayn Rand, 2016, p16) Consequently, she held that this kind of existence is an irrational mess of desires, strivings, and emotions that cannot exist together.

For Rand (2016), valuing is a logical course of action that aims at achieving the principal goal, which is fulfilling what would serve the primary value, that is living a significant life, and rationally achieving all those objectives through a scheme of reflection and experience, and a recourse to reason. People must be consistent in pursuing their values, because if a person is forced into contradictory or opposite directions, they cannot devote themselves completely to anyone of them.

The necessity for integrity, that is the congruence between one’s values and actions, was clearly important for Rand, as she emphasized in her novel the Little Street the hypocrisy of the non-valuing

characters, and hence of ordinary people in general. Only a person who is continuously and actively pursuing values, may experience the engulfing desires that Rand links to living. She saw that the role of reason lays not merely in fulfilling one's desires and working out the means to achieve them, but also the process of generating those desires. Rand held that, a perfect, clear understanding also means a feeling. It is not enough to realise a thing is true. The realization must be plain to the extent that one perceives it. Because men react on senses, not on ideas. That is why, Rand held, every idea should be incorporated in our feelings, that is our inherent traits.

The meaning of pursuing a value and acting on intense emotions are consistently found in her novels. She indicates the very sense and differentiation between living and existing, as shown in the saying of her heroine character, Kira Argounova, who stresses that she is not alive because she merely eats and chew food. (Salmieri, *A Companion to Ayn Rand*, 2016, p45). Rather, she emphasizes that she was alive and identifies what she seeks from her life...and for her, someone who acknowledges what they seek from life, is ultimately life itself.

Rand (2016), clearly, linked Kira's character with living, as she aimed to achieve her highest value that is pursuing a hard career, wanting to be an engineer. As Kira made her resolution, while a child, she was quiet and reverent, and viewed her future as sacred. She was helped by other values she had been pursuing, like enjoying operas and ballets which she watched with "solemn reverence". Eventually, Kira's attitudes towards life, to which she had dedicated her career and lived to the full, and which she would not turn her back now by giving up her values, the very life she could avail all her energy, by consistently carrying on and keeping the pace up, such "life undefeated", she said, "existed and could exist."

Readers note that it is remarkable that Rand chooses religious words such as "reverence" to depict Kira's attitude toward life. It is also important to note that she deliberately resorts to such words to emphasize that there is nothing more sacred than achieving one's life, and that adapting religious (or 'impractically obsolete') values weakens one's capacity to value. Hence, she depicts "Morals (as linked to religion) as being the ultimate cause of all posturing. The total destruction of man by instilling in him values that run against his inner instincts; those very ideals he has to adopt to the detriment of his objectives, even if they are naturally loathsome and repugnant to him. When he cannot question them, he starts questioning himself. Hence, he goes about feeling inferior, transgressor, worthless, and does not look forward to higher things, as he reckons that the highest is

out of reach. That is why, according to Rand, morality and religious ideologies are humanity's absolute sins. (Salmieri, A Companion to Ayn Rand, 2016, p48.)

By rejecting religious morality, Rand fails, however, to conceive the immorality that stems from placing life as the supreme end and ideal, as she believes that religious morality is the source of all hypocrisy. For this approach, religious values are not seen and sensed to be experienced, so they do not exist, therefore

they are primarily rejected, as goes the argument of some contemporary objectivist pragmatists. (Putnam, 2017, p.93). One would find her criticism of religion and altruism throughout her works, for example, a staunch criticism of religion is found in *We the Living*, in which a "principal question" of Kira is if people believe in God, if they do believe in God, then they don't believe in life. As when one sets God as his absolute notion of the highest possible, it becomes his ultimate conception, therefore, above his far up possible. That turns out, for Rand, to be a heaven which is not sought to be achieved but rather an object of dream. (Rand, *We the Living*, 1936, p129) Despite the role and importance of reason in the construction of values for a self-sustaining life, Rand stood short of recognizing its limitations. An important edifice of the ancient philosophy, certainly the Greek, scrambled owing to their lack of knowledge about these limitations. Rand thought that reason can be the ultimate elixir to human beings' crises, hence she also went on embedding it in her philosophy of self-interest and egoism, as we shall see. Ayn Rand and the morality of egoism.

Objectivism, according to Rand, sees that the good is not intrinsic, that is the good is neither related to things in themselves nor to man's emotional whims. The good, according to Rand is a process of evaluation of reality through man's consciousness, and the process of rationally choosing between different values that serve the supreme one that is life. Thus, Objectivism, as a theory, stresses that "the good is a feature of fact as far as man is concerned, thus it must be achieved." (Rand, 1982) Corollary to objectivism as a theory is the question, which she poses, that is, to whom this value is addressed and for what end? For her, Objectivism, as a philosophy, does not tolerate the suppression of context, and does not allow the isolation of "value" from "intention" and "ends", of the good from its scope and target, and of man's deeds from rationality and reason.

Rand emphasized the need for man to discover morality, in her envisaged character, Galt, who held that, there is no concept of morality, but only what man has been conditioned to, that is socially and mystically. People have been indoctrinated to take that morality is a set of principles and

conduct, fancily forced on them, either through a metaphysical force, or society. The ultimate purpose, is to fulfill the ends of one's relatives, or a power beyond life, but not to achieve one's own life and selected desires. The latter values, are (deceitfully) believed to be immoral, thus one's own goods would be evil, and any moral set of principles, she held, must not be fixed for your interest, but against you, not to develop your life, but to destroy it. (Rand, 2016, p73)

She rejects concepts that suggest that morality is an imposition of ideals that coerce people into ignoring their own interests and sacrifice them to any divine or humane authority. Rand deplors this life of sacrifice, when Galt, her character, says "no one comes to you and suggest that you own your life, and that the best thing is to live it to the full." (Rand, 2016, p73)

Thus, the betterment of one's own life comprises giving up all kind of sacrifices. Rand sets out the outlines of a "new moral philosophy", which designates "the morality of rational-self-interest" as her objective morality, and later dubbed "The Virtue of Selfishness." (Rand, 2016, p10.)

Self-interest, according to her, is distinguished from what she calls whims. The latter she defines as "a desire mastered by someone who ignores and thus does not identify their cause". (Ibid.) Thus, acting on such unchecked whims would be self-destructive. To achieve the good, one is required to sift through a complex code of virtues, principles and values that fulfil the greatest value of all, which is life.

Rand (2016) conceives of egoism as a concept of self-interest, an objective theory, namely that a set of ideals taken through free-will is a source of morality. (Rand, 2016, p10) In her ethics, she raises the issue of selfishness in the face of self-sacrifice as a major ethical theme. People need a set of values that furnish their ethics and guide their choices and actions that define the course of their life. To choose, people need a purpose so that their deeds are to meet or at which they must strive to achieve. For her, value bequeaths an approach to the problem: to whom the value is to be aimed and for what end? (Rand, 2016, p10)

For Rand, the core problem of morality lies in the following questions: what is the objective or meaning of a person's actions? Who is going to benefit of his deeds? And does he take the fulfilment of his own life and happiness as his overriding moral cause? Or should his paramount moral motivation be to fulfill the aspirations and necessities of others? (Rand, 2016, p10)

The distinctive nature between egoism and altruism lies in their opposing answers to these issues. Egoism reckons that a person is an ultimate end, in contrast to altruism, which holds that a

person is an instrument to others. Egoism explains that the one who benefits from a deed should be the one who undertakes the action; whereas altruism highlights that, the one who benefits from a deed, morally speaking, should be another person apart from the one who had acted. (Rand, 2016, p79)

For one to be selfish means to be concerned with one's own interests. For her, this means what one considered as his own vested interests, what objectives and ideals to seek, what code of rules and actions to undertake. According to Rand, if a person was not intrigued with these questions, he cannot be said to seek his vested interests, and thus one cannot be taken by the desire that he has no knowledge of. (Rand, 2016, p.47)

Thus, according to her, actions of selfishness or its opposite should be identified objectively, that is they are not to be left to the people's short and unmitigated whims and feelings. The issue of an action's selfishness or its opposite rests not on whether or not one seeks to put it in motion, but on why one wants to perform it, and by what criteria was the action selected? And to achieve what goal? (Rand, 2016)

Rand (1962), presents an example in this context, of a young man who chooses the career he prefers through rational criteria, then he rejects it to please his mother, who prefers another career for him, one which would earn her more prestige in the eyes of the family and relatives. The gentleman approves his mother's choice because he was brought up to believe that he must put his mother's happiness above his own, even if he realizes that his mother's choice would prove irrational and thus catastrophic for him. Rand maintains that it would be nonsense for the proponents of the "everyone is selfish" theory to state that since the youth was spurred by the whim of "virtuousness" or the suppression of guilt, thus no oblation is engaged, therefore his deed is clearly selfish." (Rand, 2016)

Rand (1962), obliterates the blurred lines between selfishness and unselfishness asserting that it is only mysticism and collectivism that deceive people into believing that they are still behaving and acting rationally, when they state that one can pursue his happiness with the negation of his own.

***- Conclusion**

Rand sought to pursue in her philosophy an approach to life categorically different from other conventional philosophies. In her fiction or non-fiction works, she advocated a philosophy that

prioritizes reason and rejects arbitrary whims and faiths. She saw that to achieve a life of meaning, men must strive to fulfill their potential, ambitions and above all be themselves. Her philosophy taught that men should know their nature and objectives through a rational process, which is based on reflection, observation and experience.

Like Nietzsche, she called on men to stand out of the crowd, avoid blind beliefs and customs, and suppress arbitrary whims and desires. She saw that the most horrific crime inflicted on humanity was the imposition of posturing in the name of morality and ideology. Yet, despite her inspiring feat, Rand failed to demonstrate the limits of reason, moral egoism, and ultra-liberalism, the very themes that need further elaboration and inquiry.

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