

Essentials of Objectivism

by Ayn Rand

Ayn Rand named her philosophy "Objectivism" and described it as a philosophy for living on earth. Objectivism is an integrated system of thought that defines the abstract principles by which a man must think and act if he is to live the life proper to man. Ayn Rand first portrayed her philosophy in the form of the heroes of her best-selling novels, *The Fountainhead* (1943) and *Atlas Shrugged* (1957). She later expressed her philosophy in nonfiction form.

Ayn Rand was once asked if she could present the essence of Objectivism while standing on one foot. Her answer was:

Metaphysics: Objective Reality

Epistemology: Reason

Ethics: Self-interest

Politics: Capitalism

She then translated those terms into familiar language:

"Nature, to be commanded, must be obeyed."

"You can't eat your cake and have it, too."

"Man is an end in himself."

"Give me liberty or give me death."

The basic principles of Objectivism can be summarized as follows:

Metaphysics

"Reality, the external world, exists independent of man's consciousness, independent of any observer's knowledge, beliefs, feelings, desires or fears. This means that A is A, that facts are facts, that things are what they are—and that the task of man's consciousness is to *perceive* reality, *not* to create or invent it." Thus Objectivism rejects any belief in the supernatural—and any claim that individuals or groups create their own reality.

Epistemology

"Man's reason is fully competent to *know* the facts of reality. Reason, the conceptual faculty, is the faculty that identifies and integrates the material provided by man's senses. Reason is man's only means of acquiring knowledge." Thus Objectivism rejects mysticism (any acceptance of faith or feeling as a means of knowledge), and it rejects skepticism (the claim that certainty or knowledge is impossible).

Human Nature

Man is a rational being. Reason, as man's only means of knowledge, is his basic means of survival. But the exercise of reason depends on each individual's choice. "Man is a being of volitional consciousness." "That which you call your soul or spirit is your consciousness, and that which you call 'free will' is your mind's freedom to think

or not, the only will you have, your only freedom. This is the choice that controls all the choices you make and determines your life and character." Thus Objectivism rejects any form of determinism, the belief that man is a victim of forces beyond his control (such as God, fate, upbringing, genes, or economic conditions).

Ethics

"Reason is man's only proper judge of values and his only proper guide to action. The proper standard of ethics is: man's survival *qua* man—i.e., that which is required by man's nature for his survival *as a rational being* (not his momentary physical survival as a mindless brute). *Rationality* is man's basic virtue, and his three fundamental values are: reason, purpose, self-esteem. Man—every man—is an end in himself, not a means to the ends of others; he must live for his own sake, neither sacrificing himself to others nor sacrificing others to himself; he must work for his *rational* self-interest, with the achievement of his own happiness as the highest moral purpose of his life." Thus Objectivism rejects any form of altruism—the claim that morality consists in living for others or for society.

Politics

"The basic *social* principle of the Objectivist ethics is that no man has the right to seek values from others by means of physical force—i.e., no man or group has the right to *initiate* the use of physical force against others. Men have the right to use force *only* in self-defense and *only* against those who initiate its use. Men must deal with one another as *traders*, giving value for value, by free, mutual consent to mutual benefit. The only social system that bars physical force from human relationships is *laissez-faire capitalism*. Capitalism is a system based on the recognition of individual rights, including property rights, in which the only function of the government is to protect individual rights, i.e., to protect men from those who initiate the use of physical force." Thus Objectivism rejects any form of collectivism, such as fascism or socialism. It also rejects the current "mixed economy" notion that the government should regulate the economy and redistribute wealth.

Esthetics

"Art is a selective re-creation of reality according to an artist's metaphysical value-judgments." The purpose of art is to concretize the artist's fundamental view of existence. Ayn Rand described her own approach to art as "Romantic Realism": "I am a Romantic in the sense that I present men as they ought to be. I am Realistic in the sense that I place them here and now and on this earth." The goal of Ayn Rand's novels is not didactic but artistic: the projection of an ideal man: "My purpose, first cause and prime mover is the portrayal of Howard Roark or John Galt or Hank Rearden or Francisco d'Anconia *as an end in himself*—not as a means to any further end."