

“Altruism as Appeasement”: An Overlooked Application of Objectivism

Objectivism, a philosophical movement originating from the publication of Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead* in 1943, has accumulated a number of criticisms due to its seemingly self-centered guidelines. It praises *Laissez-faire* capitalism and promotes action based on one's own interests rather than on those of others. In humanitarian terms, objectivism frames selfless thinking and the sharing of resources as unnecessary expenses (Kelley). Rand's outline seems problematic in that many people see these to be such high value traits of morality, and that the concern for others should play a part in their decision making. I fear too many disregard a very important end of this philosophy in their analyses. Maybe there is another way to process Rand's ideas. More specifically, while objectivism is most often viewed in terms of wealth and ego survival, many may find more agreement in its arguments pertaining to the nurturing of one's intelligence. In order for one to reserve their abilities in reason, they must hold back the urge to seek validation from others who may not have the same foundations of thinking. In this sense, the only obligation of the intellectual should be to build upon their own interests. Ayn Rand's "Altruism as Appeasement" explains objectivism through the lenses of intellectuality and independence with the intention to dissuade thinkers from forfeiting their rationality. Perhaps, in these terms, there is reason we might rethink her theory.

The common search for validation is a distraction to rational thinking. An intellectual who does not conform to today's scene of anti-rationality is bound to feel a sense of guilt. Their need for acceptance and the inability to find others with the same mindset leads to the collapse of their own foundations in reasoning. This is the origin of the need for validation intellectuals seem so unable to let go of. Rand explains that in a broad range of circumstances, the thinker will give

up their own intellect in order to come down to the level of others, leading to an eventual loss of that intellect: “Such is the dead end of the road he has chosen to take, he who had started out as a self-sacrificial priest of the intellect” (Rand 38). The priesthood she describes here refers to the intellectual’s attempt to spread their ideas to those who have no interest in understanding them. Rand argues that it is “not the intelligent man’s moral obligation to serve as the leader or teacher of his less endowed brothers” rather that, “His foremost moral obligation is to preserve the integrity of his mind” (Rand 39). This method, according to Rand, is the only method in which intelligence can be continually fostered in our current society. In order to create a world where intellect thrives, the intellectual must turn inward and accept that not everyone needs or deserves to understand them. Trying to force understanding on others is self-sabotage. For their own protection, the rational thinker ought to calm the urge of receiving validation and form a deeper knowledge of themselves. Maintaining a mind unaltered by the masses, who so often remain unable to perform independent thought, requires a conscious effort to be confident in one’s own perceptions (Rand 34).

In order to fully understand what is being unpacked here, one must be able to apply these ideas to the biggest points in Rand’s philosophy. Every factor and point of an ethical ideology work to create a certain worldview. Jerry Kirkpatrick, in an analytical essay titled “Ayn Rand’s Objectivist Ethics as the Foundation of Business Ethics”, describes her worldview very nicely: “Living organisms, on the other hand, must take specific actions if they are to remain alive, otherwise they will die” (Kirkpatrick 4). On its own, this sentence can be used to describe in one way or another the entire philosophy of objectivism. In the same way that organisms provide for themselves and their survival, we must provide for our own interests. However, things become more precise when we use the same principle in the argument of intellectuality. A person of

intellect, if they want to maintain their rationality, must provide themselves with the ability to be confident in their mindset, which can require a bit of selfishness. This doesn't mean that we should ignore the insights of those around us, but that we must protect ourselves from the need of external validation. The death of an organism by lack of provision for themselves can in this sense be translated to the loss of one's ability to think independently. The loss of independence is a loss of reason. Too much effort towards fitting into the guidelines of others' minds becomes a sort of trade-in, a price paid for the perceived value of this connection. The spread of reason across society requires abundant individual stability (Rand 34).

The problem with seeking validation, according to Rand, is the inevitable loss of strength in the seeker themselves. An intellectual, if overcome by this need, is bound to view validation from others as the utmost form of achievement. Despite the fulfillment from such an interaction, it trains the mind to only function if there is a reward of praise (Rand 33). Natalie Bickel for *Darling Magazine* aims to construe this idea in her article "The Problem with Constantly Seeking Validation", where she breaks down the questions that a person in search of approval may confront: "Were my efforts a waste without a wave of validation, without a rush of what the world defines as success?" (Bickel). A feeling of success should never be restricted to the views of others. The independent thinker who is confident in their own ideas should never have to rely on the mental high provided by external validation. This is not in any circumstance worth the losing of oneself (Bickel). Through objectivism, Rand adds that the authority of one's mind should not be given to others. If people without an understanding of the intellectual's views are given too much power, the intellectual loses grasp on these views forever. Instead of providing others with the ability to control them, the thinker must be able to praise themselves, or at least be independent in thought (Rand 33).

Rand is laying out a blueprint for us here. Her observations of the problematic mindlessness around her leads to the only conclusion of how these thinkers can survive. She forms the argument that the intellectual must shape themselves to see external validation as inessential to their process. In spreading ideas to others in hopes of being understood, the thinker is losing understanding in themselves. However, in prioritizing their own mental integrity by denying their need for validation, the thinker conserves the complexity of their mind. In simpler terms, the intellectual has been trained: “to be proud of his intelligence” (Rand 39).

Through “Altruism as Appeasement”, Rand creates a reasonable and effective approach for intellectuals to avoid a loss of their rationality—to find validation within themselves rather than from others. This approach is not a default for most. Nevertheless, what she provides here is a key method for the application of objectivist principles; one that, due to its confidence-provoking nature, should be considered more often. Being grounded in one’s own ideas has become increasingly important in maintaining independence, especially for the intellectual. With an internal view of their mind, one can eliminate their need for validation from others. Objectivism, when applied in terms of independence and rationality, becomes a tool of the intellectual mind. The result: a further understanding of oneself.

Works Cited

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