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J J Kobzeff

Western Oregon University

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**A Brief Disquisition on the Ethics Philosophy of Ayn Rand:
The Objectivist Theory of Morality—A Discourse on Value, Reality, the Virtue
of Egoism, the Immorality of Sacrifice, and the Failure of Subjectivist Ethics**

By

J J Kobzeff

An Honors Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for Graduation from the
Western Oregon University Honors Program

Dr. Ken Kirby
Thesis Advisor

Dr. Gavin Keulks
Honors Program Director

Western Oregon University

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Introduction

Egoism, in the most fundamental and basic sense, is the notion that one should promote and seek his or her own interest—in essence, that one should act selfishly and for the sake of one's own self. Naturally, this in it of itself presents a multiplicity of problems and objectionable theses thereby often leading to the general rejection of the notion itself. However, this complete and utter rejection of egoism is not necessarily without fault, for often egoism is misconstrued and fallaciously defined in a similar fashion to hedonism, predation, materialism, or even solipsism; moreover, egoism as a moral or ethical principle is a veritable antithesis to the more commonly held and promoted ethical principles of altruism, utilitarianism, or any other ethical theory that holds others in higher regard than the self consequently inducing the rejection of any radical new form that breaches the status quo (for example, ethical egoism). Ultimately, as Tara Smith writes, because “egoism is widely perceived as reckless, self-indulgent whim-worship and the selfish person as thoughtless, unprincipled, and inconsiderate of others” it is readily dismissed, and if such were the case for all principles of egoism, then it indeed would be something that should be hastily disregarded and never considered as a legitimate moral theory, but as such, egoism is not lost to such irrational and thoughtless principles, for Ayn Rand, I think, presents a sound argument in favor of a rational, ethical egoism that precludes the commonly conceived issues with egoism and advances instead a logical moral theory that advances the welfare and wellbeing of the individual without the destruction or negative repercussions of others (5).

The foundational point from which Rand develops her moral philosophy is not the question: “what particular code of values should man accept?” but “why does man need a code of values?” (Rand, “The Objectivist Ethics” 14). It is in the answer to this particular question that Rand develops her moral philosophy of egoism: a philosophy founded on logical, rational, objective principles outside “the province of whims” of (according to her) most moralist philosophers and instead “a rational, objectively demonstrable, scientific answer to the question *why* man needs a code of values” (14). This scientific answer to why man needs values is, according to Rand, rooted in the metaphysical facts of life: reality, existence. Therefore, in advocating for rational egoism, Rand is not doing so for the reason that it seems to be the best moral theory, or it suits her fancy greatest, but because it is fundamentally right in the presence of objective reality and harmonizes with the existence and flourishing of humanity.

Rand’s conception of egoism, aside from being founded on objective principles, differs from the more commonly conceived egoist principles: Rand rejects hedonism outright and argues that hedonism does not recognize the individual’s need for rational principles; she also is adamantly opposed to all forms of predation and solipsism claiming that these forms ignore objective facts of reality and ultimately do not contribute to any long term advancement of interests, nor are these moral theories it just in any sense, for they advocate the exploitation of others for the gain of the self. Instead, the intrinsic component in Rand’s egoism is rationality—that “acceptance of reason as one’s only source of knowledge and fundamental guide to action” (Smith 7). That is, that one should act in such a way as only guided by reason

and carefully evaluated thought processing grounded in reality and the way things are; in sum, as Smith writes, “rationality consists of fidelity to facts” —facts of metaphysical reality and being and the nature of life (7). Thus, in it of itself, rationality is the paramount moral virtue, for through rational action all other moral and ethical actions follow.

Ultimately, Rand’s ethical rational egoism is the construction and sum of multiple reasonings that conclude with her Objectivist philosophy. Here, I intend to present a summary of Objectivist ethics: to answer the question why man needs virtue, how ethical egoism and selfishness is a necessity rooted in metaphysical facts of reality, and how, through the virtues of life, Rand determines rational egoism the superior and singular moral philosophy. Moreover, I intend to discuss the W. D. Glasgow’s objection that ethical egoism bears an inherent contradiction and attempt to argue that while subjectivist forms of egoism may possess an inherent contradiction in the notion of conflicts of interests, Objectivist ethical egoism, by the way in which it is formed and founded, is not subject to Glasgow’s arguments and assertions.

Presentation

The primary and most fundamental foundation to the entire Objectivist ethics is rooted in the question of why humanity needs morality. The answer to the question is simple: survival. Rand writes that to properly unpack any question of ethics, one must start at the beginning by asking: what are values? Rand defines values as “that which one acts to gain and/or keep”; this concept, she continues, is not a primary notion or foundational concept, for values “presuppose an answer to the question: of

value to whom and for what?" ("The Objectivist Ethics" 16). Therefore, the notion of value requires an actor, more specifically, an animate actor; John Galt, the protagonist of *Atlas Shrugged*, states that "value presupposes a standard, a purpose, and the necessity of action in the face of an alternative," so "where there are no alternatives, no values are possible" (Rand, *Intellectual* 134). In essence, there must be a choice to be had or made, and ultimately, there is "one fundamental alternative in the universe: existence or non-existence" (134). This alternative only applies to living beings—a rock or a clod of dirt is merely a unit of matter with no volitional consciousness; they cannot be destroyed but reduced and changed, yet in all, they lose nothing. A living organism possesses life, so while the body itself will remain, the life may be extinguished by time or conscious or unconscious choice. Thus, it is "only the concept of 'Life' that makes the concept of 'Value' possible," for "it is only to living entity that things can be good or evil" (134-5).

To clarify this point, Rand offers an example of an indestructible and immortal robot, a being which can act and move and function, but in all it cannot be destroyed, changed, or damaged. Such an entity, Rand writes, "would not be able to have any values; it would have nothing to gain or to lose; it could not regard anything as for or against it, as serving or threatening its welfare, as fulfilling or frustrating its interests"; such a being, because it cannot gain anything nor lose anything would possess no goals or interests in regards to survival and betterment ("The Objectivist Ethics" 16). Essentially, the robot, like a rock, would be in a position where there is no good for it nor anything bad for it. Contrarily, living things, from the most basic life forms to

humans, because they live and die, possess goal-oriented actions on the physical level all for the purpose of sustaining their existence, their life—a heart pumping blood in a human or parts of a cell performing their function in a bacterium. Therefore, writes Rand, an organism’s life depends on two factors: “the material or fuel which it needs from the outside, from its physical background”—food, sunlight, water—“and the action of its own body, the action of using that fuel *properly*”—acquiring more fuel and so forth; more specifically, in this context, proper—*id est*, how such fuel is used properly, or how one acts properly—Rand writes, is determined by measuring it to the standard of that entity’s life: “that which is required for the organisms survival” (17). For most creatures, the first and the second are interlinked in such a way that each follows the other; a plant, for example, from sunlight produces the necessary means of growing taller and further still increasing its need for fuel while simultaneously increasing its surface area for which it can photosynthesize; animals, likewise, hunt for food, and in so doing, they sustain themselves long enough until the next time they feed. Thus, for any non-human creature, it is a perpetual cyclical process of self-sustaining action.

Rand writes that “the range of actions required for the survival of the higher organisms is wider: it is proportionate to the range of their *consciousness*” meaning that a plant, entirely unconscious of itself, merely grows upward toward the light in a manner most effective for its survival; contrarily, animals possess instincts and feel pain and so react accordingly (19). But humans are different. Humans possess more than just sensation that reacts to external and environmental stimuli; instead, “man’s

particular distinction from all other species is the fact that *his* consciousness is *volitional*—that people have the power to make choices and decisions independent of external forces (21). Whereas animals are bound by their immediate environment and sensory reaction to environmental factors and innate sense, humans have the capacity to suspend their consciousness or act contrary to their own good; consequently, as Rand writes, “man has no automatic code of survival. He has no automatic course of action, no automatic set of values. His senses do not tell him automatically what is good for him or evil, what will benefit his life or endanger it” (21). Therefore, while the natural functions of a plant (the “automatic values” as per Rand) and the instinctual values of an animal are sufficient for their survival, humans require willful and conceptual knowledge and action: human survival is dependent upon the “guidance of *conceptual* values derived from *conceptual* knowledge” (21).

By conceptual knowledge, Rand means the acquisition of knowledge by the synthesis of concepts; in essence, it is the ability to apply language and thought to abstractions and concretes and in so doing expanding perceptions—what he or she knows or has seen—into concepts of thought and knowledge; it is by this process, writes Rand, “that man is able to grasp and retain, to identify and integrate an unlimited amount of knowledge” beyond the immediate perceived environment of real and present objects (21). Concepts allow an individual “to hold in focus of his conscious awareness much more than his purely perceptual capacity would permit”: one can only see so many objects (a finite number) within his or her range of vision at a given time—he or she cannot see exceptional distances or microscopic organisms by

the naked eye, but one can imagine or know of such a thing, for it is the “conceptual faculty that makes it possible for him to deal with knowledge of that kind” (Binswanger 88). However, this ability that the human brain possesses—to know and think of objects not immediately present—is not a passive and automatic function of the mind; the brain functions automatically and perceives on a subconscious level (impressions can be made on the mind and the perception without an consciously active thought process), but the integration and synthesis of concepts and the process of concept-formation requires an active state of mind on the part of the individual:

conceptualizing, according to Rand,

is an actively sustained process of identifying one’s impressions in conceptual terms, of integrating every event and every observation into a conceptual context, of grasping relationships, differences, similarities in one’s perceptual material and of abstracting them into new concepts, of drawing inferences, of making deductions, of reaching conclusions, of asking new questions and discovering new answers and expanding one’s knowledge into an ever growing sum. (“The Objectivist Ethics” 22)

In short, it is an individual’s effort to learn more and increase his or her base knowledge through inquiry and mental processes; directed by the faculty of reason, it is the process of thinking.

For humans, the knowledge that comes from sensory perception is only a primary (a first order) level of knowledge, but this alone does not alone necessarily provide humans enough knowledge to survive. For example, dryness in the throat

might alert an individual that he or she is thirsty, but it does not tell how one should acquire fluids; pain in one's stomach indicates hunger, but it does not tell one how to gather and prepare the food: nature or natural instincts do not provide for humans as they do for animals, so instead, humans must exercise reason—they must think—in order to solve their problem or they risk perishing. Thus, everything that a person “needs or desires has to be learned, discovered, and produced by *him*—by his own choice, by his own effort, by his own mind”; reliance on instinctual action alone is not enough for an individual to survive, for it is by the power of the mind and the power of reason—the conceptual faculty that allows the mind to integrate thoughts and memories to produce and create knowledge—by which an individual survives (24).

Just as primary sensory perceptions only provide an individual with enough knowledge to know something immediately (that he or she is hungry or thirsty), so does primary knowledge provide the first indications of right and wrong. What causes severe and immediate pain or pleasure can serve as an initial function for providing base knowledge regarding what is right or wrong for an individual; this is helpful in the early stages of life where pain or pleasure can alert a young child to the degree which he or she is benefiting from an action. But as an individual grows older and develops his or her rational faculty and the ability to integrate experiences, primary knowledge fails to be as much of a benefit. For some things may be pleasurable initially, but later that certain thing or experience could wreak a greater degree of harm; likewise, an initially painful experience could prove to be ultimately very beneficial for the individual. Thus, the faculty of reason is absolutely necessary in this regard to

determine—beyond merely the primary pleasure and pain indicators—what is good or bad (good or evil) for an individual. This knowledge that the individual garners and develops through the formation of concepts and the integration of primary knowledge allows the individual to know what is true or false, right or wrong, good or evil; this knowledge, writes Rand, is the knowledge “he needs...in order to live” (24). For every conscious organism, knowledge is the means of survival; this means, writes Rand, that “every ‘is’ implies an ‘ought’”—what is true means that one ought to act in a particular way in response (24). However, what one ought to do does not mean one has to do it; in this way, Rand states, man is free to ignore his consciousness and volition, but man is “not free to escape the penalty of his unconsciousness: destruction,” for it is this freedom, she writes, that allows man to be “the only living species that has the power to act as his own destroyer” (24).

Therefore, because humanity has the capacity to destroy itself—more specifically, humanity must act preventatively in order to not destroy itself—there must exist a set of goals to guide humans from acting contrary to their welfare and interests; these goals or guidelines are established, writes Rand, within and by the field of ethics. More specifically, ethics “is an objective, metaphysical necessity of man’s survival—not by the grace of the supernatural nor of your whims, but by the grace of reality and the nature of life” bound to the exterior objective reality superseding human control; they are a “code of values to guide man’s choices and actions—choices and actions that determine the purpose and course of his life” (“The Objectivist Ethics” 25; Branden, “Isn’t Everyone Selfish?” 66). The Objectivist ethics are in this way simple:

the Objectivist ethics establishes human life as the standard of value—“the standard by which one judges what is good or evil”—with particular emphasis on “that which is required for survival *qua* man” (25). This is determined, moreover, by reason: that which a rational person establishes as proper or helpful to his or her life and welfare is good; that which is hurtful or which negates or destroys life is evil.

The primary component of Rand’s ethical philosophy is that value is objective; that is, as Smith writes, “what is good for a person—what is in his interest—is not simply a subjective projection of that person’s beliefs, attitudes, tastes, or desires, for those are not adequate guides to meeting his life’s requirements” (25). The reason is that reality does not allow for subjective or whimsical or arbitrary motions—it is unyielding in its nature. However, Rand is not stating that value exists inherently in the external world; it is not “a freestanding feature nestled within certain things” that are intrinsically good or bad (25). Rather, value “is always good to someone and for some end,” for “material objects as such have neither value nor disvalue; they acquire value-significance only in regard to a living being—particularly, in regard to serving or hindering man’s goals” (Smith 25; Binswanger 522). Rand defines value as “that which one acts to gain and keep”; value, therefore, implies an object or goal of some form of action: “it is that which some entity’s action is directed to acquiring or preserving” (Binswanger 523; Peikoff 208). This particular definition has certain implications regarding the behavior of an individual: Peikoff writes that “goal-directed behavior is possible only because an entity’s action, its pursuit of a certain end, can make a difference to the outcome” (208). This means that an individual’s action toward any

goal is motivated by the possibility of that individual achieving that goal; if, however, there is no amount of action, regardless of any degree of exertion, that will gain the goal-directed object, then it is not an object of value because it is impossible to obtain—it exists outside the field or realm of value.

The notion or concept of values presupposes two things: an entity (human, plant, animal) that is capable of acting in such a way toward an object, and an object that requires a certain amount of action if it is to be attained (209). Therefore, no inanimate objects—rocks or pencils—pursue values, for they are not living organisms and can neither pursue them nor do they have any need for them. It is therefore living organisms that make values and the concept of values possible, for “they are the entities capable of self-generated, goal-directed action—because they are the conditional entities, which face the alternative of life or death”; living organisms, for the reason of the existence/non-existence dichotomy (that the only alternative to existence or life that a living organism has is non-existence or death), are the only entities that can and must pursue values (209). Moreover, writes Peikoff, it is this “alternative of existence or nonexistence [that] is the precondition of all values”—this is the fundamental context by which values are judged, or the way by which values have value (209). Any object not faced with this alternative has no need of goals nor can it pursue goals.

The best way of approaching this concept is to contextualize it in Rand’s example of the immortal and indestructible robot. This machine, precluded from destruction or vital and mechanical failure, requires no action to sustain itself: it does

not need to eat, drink, sleep, or even move, for there is nothing that can either harm or work to preserve it. The absence of the possibility of life or death and existence or nonexistence removes all “possibility of need satisfaction or need frustration” physically; therefore, simultaneously removed from the robot are all sensory percepts and incentives that accompany the need satisfaction and frustration dichotomy that exists within all conscious beings and creatures (Peikoff 210). Peikoff also writes that on a psychological level, the indestructible robot has no needs for goals that exist beyond the realm of physical frustrations and satisfactions: conceptual knowledge (knowledge formed through synthesis of perception and learning) is entirely unnecessary, for an entity that cannot be destroyed, does not need to establish—intellectually—ways of survival; thus, nothing that would normally satisfy an individual beyond carnal and animalistic needs—money, entertainment, knowledge, and so forth—achieves nothing in satisfying the robot (210). Similarly, the indestructible robot does not possess the faculty for emotional satisfaction or frustration; for example, where most humans or conscious beings enjoy the pursuit of happiness, the robot has no need: happiness, writes Peikoff, “is the emotion that proceeds from the achievement of one’s values...it presupposes that one holds values” (210). The robot does not desire or possess values because it does not need to hold values: there is no fundamental and foundational alternative for its existence; it does not need to consciously decide (when confronted with a choice) what is proper for its existence because nothing can harm it or aid it, and because nothing can harm or help it, it does not require nor possess any value in anything.

Thus, writes Peikoff, “to an indestructible entity, no object can be a value”; rather, only an entity—human, animal, or living things—with the potential for nonexistence and the means for prevention of such “has a need, an interest (if the entity is conscious), a reason to act”—that is, to act to avoid destruction or death and to preserve its life and existence (211). Thus, the ultimate goal which serves no other goal beyond itself for all conscious creatures is to “remain in the realm of reality”; therefore, ultimately, “goal-directed entities do not exist in order to pursue values. They pursue values in order to exist” (211). In other words, it is an ultimate goal that makes values possible, and metaphysically, writes Rand, “*life* is the only phenomenon that is an end in itself: a value gained and kept by a constant process of action”—that is, the preservation and sustenance of life is the ultimate goal (Binswanger 521). Concomitantly, in epistemology, “the concept of ‘value’ is genetically dependent upon and derived from the antecedent concept of ‘life’”; therefore, to separate the concepts is necessarily fallacious, for “it is only the concept of ‘Life’ that makes the concept of ‘Value’ possible” (521). As such, life is the foundation and necessary means for value.

Thus, the most foundational element of Rand’s argument in ethics and values is founded here: that only the alternative of life and death, the dichotomy of existence and nonexistence that creates the necessary position and context for value-oriented action; however, this only applies if an entities end is to preserve its life. As such, writes Peikoff, “by the very nature of ‘value,’ therefore, any code of values must hold life as the ultimate value,” and it is this thesis—this principle—that all of Objectivist ethics rests (212). This explodes the issue of the is-ought question, for the ultimate

value for any entity is the preservation of its life; therefore, the fact that one is thereby determines what one ought to do, and all of this is to be performed through “validation of value judgments” in context and “in reference to facts of reality” (Binswanger 521).

The is-ought dichotomy is solved by the fact that because one is a living, conscious being, one ought to therefore sustain that in pursuit of the ultimate goal: life and the preservation of life. However, according to Rand, life is in a constant and perpetual state of dynamic motion: it is moving and in a constant state of flux. As a result, passivity on the state of any individual ultimately results in that individual’s resignation from life. Moreover, for Rand, life and death are absolutes; that is, one is either pursuing life and longevity, or one is falling toward destruction and death; ultimately, therefore, Rand writes, “in a fundamental sense, stillness is the antithesis of life”; life can only be preserved and maintained in existence “by a constant process of self-sustaining action” (Binswanger 255). Correlatively, Peikoff writes that “life is motion. If the motion is not self-preserving, then it is self-destroying” (215).

Consequently, according to the Objectivist philosophy, a conscious individual must always be engaged in the motion of self-sustaining and self-preserving action.

Perhaps the most central premise of the Objectivist ethics is the way in one must act in the pursuit of his or her values in the act of preserving his or her life; in essence, it is, according to Rand, the very foundation for one’s means of living: rationality. This means “the recognition and acceptance of reason as one’s only source of knowledge, one’s only judge of values, and one’s only guide to action”; moreover,

to be rational is to commit complete and undivided focus to all questions, issues, and decisions one is confronted with (Binswanger 404). Rationality, according to Rand, the basic virtue for all conscious humans; it is the foundation and source of all other virtues. Conversely, “man’s basic vice, the source of all his evils, is the act of unfocusing his mind, the suspension of consciousness, which is not blindness, but the refusal to see, not ignorance, but the refusal to know”—this is irrationality: the rejection of all virtues and all means of survival and self-preservation; it is the “commitment to a course of blind destruction”—that “which is anti-mind, is anti-life” (Rand “The Objectivist Ethics” 28-9). This means, that in all aspects of one’s life—work, school, personal matters—one must engage his or her decisions with regard to reality and in consideration to oneself in all manners of logic and objectivity. In essence, one must never attempt to dodge or evade reality or attempt to rationalize illogical whims and desires. Instead, one must be firmly rooted and grounded in reality and reason at all times and in all places; one must be committed to reason, “not in sporadic fits or on selected issues or in special emergencies, but as a permanent way of life” (Binswanger 404).

For Rand, one cannot be rational or follow reason unless he or she actively engages or follows it. Rationality requires a perpetual state of mental activity engaged in a regular “daily process of functioning on the conceptual level of consciousness” (Peikoff 222). Rationality is engaging the active faculty of mind, not merely registering impressions made upon the individual by outside or foreign entities and events, for

it is an actively sustained process of identifying one's impressions in conceptual terms, of integrating every event and every observation into a conceptual context, of grasping relationships, differences, similarities in one's perceptual material and of abstracting them into new concepts, of drawing inferences, of making deductions, of reaching conclusions, of asking new questions and discovering new answers and expanding one's knowledge in an ever-growing sum. (Rand, "The Virtue of Selfishness" 22)

This is thinking. This action must be engaged by choice and the volitional consciousness of the actor; this action is not a passive phenomenon that will come to existence by random whim or occurrence. Thus, an individual that mindlessly pursues activities in an unfocused manner is not rational: "a man does not qualify as rational," writes Peikoff, "if he walks around in a daze but once in a while, when someone mentions a fact, he wakes up long enough to say 'I'll accept that'" only to return to his former mindless self and passive state of mind (222).

Humans, according to Rand, are different from other creatures in that humans have the ability to act as their own destroyer. According to Objectivism, rationality is the primary means of human survival; however, any individual is perfectly able to engage in irrational behavior which, consequently, equates to his or her eventual destruction—that act of focusing the mind (engaging in rational thought and behavior) is entirely up to the will of that individual. The consequences of his or her action, however, are inescapable: all consequences of an individual's actions are products of reality. The greatest threat to rational behavior, or rather, the primary method of

escape from rational thought is the engagement of the anti-effort mentality. Thinking in such a manner produces an attitude that attempts to act evasively of reality—that is, “blinking out some fact of reality which one dislikes” in order to escape a certain particular of or in reality (224). Ultimately, this results in destruction, for reality is not subject to the mind and therefore created, destroyed, or altered by the mind of an individual. In his speech in *Atlas Shrugged*, John Galt states that A is A, and no amount of thinking otherwise will ever alter that fact. Thinking otherwise is the engagement of non-thinking: an “act of annihilation, a wish to negate existence, an attempt to wipe out reality” (Rand *For the New Intellectual* 142). The problem with this form of thinking, continues Galt, is that “existence exists; reality is not to be wiped out, it will merely wipe out the wiper”—the evader of reality, that individual who attempts to escape the facts of reality and life (142).

Most evaders, according to Rand, do not try to entirely evade or avoid reality; rather, evaders localize or minimize what they evade. They take one small fact of reality and blank it out and ignore it, yet despite the mitigation of their evasion, the act of evasion is destructive because everything in reality is interconnected and bound together. One cannot simply blank out a single point only, for that fact is not isolated in its own reality; in order to sustain this, writes Peikoff, “one would be gradually forced to expand and keep expanding the scope of one’s blindness,” for anything that is connected to it—either threateningly or benignly—the evader would have to blank it out as well ultimately resulting in total nonperception (225). This complete nonperception spells the inherent problem in evasion: the inability to integrate

knowledge and percepts into the knowledge useful for survival. In this state, writes Peikoff, an individual no longer possesses the ability to know truth from falsehoods or consistency and contradiction; in the mind and consciousness of an evader, “all conceptual content is reduced to the capricious, the baseless, the arbitrary,” for “no conclusion qualifies as knowledge in a mind that rejects the requirements of cognition” (225). Ultimately, the individual that chooses to blank aspects of reality—to evade reality—descends into a blindness that disallows the process and end of concept-formation, so as a result of this action, knowledge cannot be garnered ultimately resulting in destruction or death.

Being an act of irrationality and therefore contrary to rationality, evasion is evil; Peikoff writes that “evasion is the Objectivist equivalent of a mortal sin...because it makes possible every other form of moral corruption” (224). However, evasion is not the only constituent of irrationality. The second primary form in which irrationality is manifested and formed is by whims. That is, that one does not consciously think or perform mental processes when confronted with a choice. Instead, the individual arbitrarily makes a choice with little regard for the consequence. Rand defines whim as “a desire experienced by a person who does not know and does not care to discover its cause” (“The Objectivist Ethics” 14). Such an individual does not exercise introspection, nor does he or she analyze the foundations of a want or desire; rather, the individual just acts without thinking rationally and weighing the consequences and effects of an outcome of a particular decision. To act on whim, writes Rand, is to “act like a zombie, without any knowledge of what he deals with, what he wants to

accomplish, or what motivates him”; in essence, it is to act in complete ignorance to reality, oblivious to the consequences, and apathetic to all functional elements involved (Binswanger 531).

Rand is careful here to make the distinction that whimsical decisions are not necessarily decisions based on emotion; that is, one cannot simply reduce the issue to emotions versus reason. It is entirely fallacious to assume that the two are mutually exclusive, and because Objectivism advocates reason, then therefore emotion is entirely precluded. Rather, emotion is perfectly human and entirely rational if reason precedes it. Emotion, as Rand defines it, “is an automatic response, an automatic effect of man’s value premises”; it is an effect of something and not a cause (Binswanger 142). Thus, the perceived dichotomy of reason or the faculty reason and emotional faculties is nonexistent (at least, there is no conflict between the two). According to Rand, a rational person is aware of the source of his or her emotions; moreover, an individual “never acts on emotions for which he cannot account, the meaning which he does not understand” (142). Emotions are therefore not a guide for actions, for the guide of actions is an individual’s mind; emotions are instead a way of enjoying aspects of life. If, however, one does choose to let his or her emotions guide their values and pursuits, and reverses the process exercising his or her reason to rationalize a decision, then this, writes Rand, is to act immorally, for that individual “is condemning himself to misery, failure, defeat, and will achieve nothing but destruction” (142).

Acting on whims, therefore, do not necessarily denote emotional decisions or acting with only regard for emotions. Instead, a perfectly rational person, with perfectly balanced reason and emotions integrated together in harmony, will possess feelings but not whims: feelings and whims in a rational person are antithetical—feelings, the consequence of rational thought and introspection in a rational person is not dichotomously antipodal to reason but closely linked. As Peikoff writes, “think, and you shall feel” (229).

The final aspect of Objectivist ethics needs to be addressed: that is, who the proper beneficiary of one’s actions ought to be. Rand writes that the standard of value is the individual’s life; however, this in itself is not specific enough, for to merely state that an individual’s life ought to be the standard of value does not specify whose life should be the standard. Thus, for the reason that one should set life is the standard of value in the pursuit of his or her happiness, it rationally follows that the self should be the standard of value in the pursuit of values. Thus, the core of Objectivism is egoism: that one should rationally pursue self-interest and maintain a policy of selfishness. When asked why she titled her book *The Virtue of Selfishness*, and why, more specifically, she chose the word “selfishness,” Rand replied: “for the reason that it makes you afraid” (Rand *The Virtue of Selfishness* vii). However, it is not necessarily semantics or arbitrary choice that Rand chose “selfishness” over some other synonymous word, for she writes that the popular meaning ascribed to the word “is not merely wrong: it represents a devastating intellectual ‘package-deal,’ which is responsible, more than any other single factor, for the arrested moral development of

mankind” (vii). In the popular or lay sense, the word, while not necessarily synonymous with immorality, bears a heavy negative connotation: an image of “a murderous brute who tramples over piles of corpses to achieve his own ends, who cares for no living being and pursues nothing but the gratification of the mindless whims of any immediate moment” (vii). However, this image that is most popularly associated with selfishness is constructed entirely removed from the true definition of the word; quite simply, selfishness means “concern with one’s own interests” (vii). Selfishness, the word, does not contain within it moral evaluation or judgment, nor does selfishness state what an individual pursues or does—it strictly only refers to who is the beneficiary of an action: the self.

The morality of selfishness or egoism (which, in Objectivism, are more or less synonymous) therefore, is not determined by the definition of the word necessarily. Egoism merely states who should profit, not what should occur; thus, addressed independently, writes Peikoff, egoism “offers no practical guidance,” for it fails to specify values and virtues, and “it does not define ‘interests’ or ‘self-interest’—neither in terms of ‘life,’ ‘power,’ ‘pleasure,’ nor anything else” (230). Ultimately, egoism merely states that whatever constitutes an individual’s self-interest, that individual should endeavor or strive to achieve.

Egoism, for Rand, is entirely an absolute concept; that is, when one performs an act in which there is some beneficiary, either the performer regards his or her primary moral obligation to him or herself, or the performer regards his or her primary moral obligation to an entity other than him or herself at the cost of denying or

subordinating the self. This alternative, to subordinate oneself, is directly antithetical to the Objectivist philosophy and constitutes perhaps the greatest Objectivist ethical evil: unselfish self-sacrifice. Egoism, for Rand, is not something she arbitrarily thought to be the superior ethical theory because it is the most satisfying; rather, she validated her claim by “showing that it is a *corollary* of man’s life as a moral standard” (230). This validation is as follows: the dichotomous contraposition of life and death and existence and nonexistence provides the foundation and creates the context for value-oriented actions and decisions, and life (self-preservation or the sustaining of the self) is the ultimate goal (for no goals can exist beyond that of life—in essence, the preservation of life is not a mean to some other higher end). This concept of preservation and self-preservation is not an abstract concept formulated but never applied, for the each organism is confronted with the reality that it is its own existence that is at stake—its own life or death; thus, the goal is the preservation of its own self and the continued existence of its own body, functions, faculties: life.

Every organism possesses to some degree an automatic process that works and functions for the ultimate purpose of sustaining some aspect of that organism’s life. When plants photosynthesize for fuel and animals hunt and feed for the sake of self-preservation, these organisms are acting in line with their interests: they are pursuing values necessary for their survival: as living entities, writes Peikoff, “each necessarily acts for its own sake; each is the beneficiary of its own actions” (231). However, moral terms such as “egoist” or “altruist” do not apply to any organisms other than humans because morality implies choice; animals do not act on choice but instinct—they

cannot choose to act as a beneficiary for some other creature, for they do not have a volitional consciousness. Humans are different. Humans are volitional creatures and have the choice to act in their own interests or in the interests of others, and while inward bodily functions (the heart, the lungs, the brain) work toward the maintenance of the organism's life, the individual, as a conscious and volitional being, must make choices that sustain his or her own being (which consequently results in a direct effect upon the inwardly or automatic bodily functions). Humans, therefore, "must choose to make self-sustenance into a fundamental rule of his voluntary behavior," and the individual who acts in this way—that his or her conscious behavior is directed toward self-preservation—is an egoist (231).

Peikoff writes that the principle of existence that demands egoism as an essential way of survival because "survival requires an all-encompassing course of action"; in essence, life, in its perpetual motion, requires value-oriented action in both immediate and long term contexts (231). An individual cannot sustain his or her life over an extended period of time if he or she serves some other goal or purpose than to preserve his or herself; Objectivist ethical theory holds that an individual's life is an absolute matter: what action that is not directly for the sake of self-preservation works in the antithetical direction—against his or her life. Continued or sustained action in this way eventually results in the destruction of the individual's life; this principle, moreover, that that which is not action for an individual's life is against universally applies to all aspects of an individual's life. To compromise this in any way—to essentially surrender any part of one's values or sacrifice oneself for something other

than the sustenance and preservation of oneself—is, writes Peikoff, “to declare war on life at the root” (232). Life requires the pursuit and procurement of values through action, achievement, and success; contrary actions—self-denial, resignation, abnegation—that distract from selfish behavior is antithetical to life; sacrifice, in other words, is the destroyer of life.

Rand is careful to distinguish between two forms of sacrifice—both equally immoral—in the Objectivist ethics: the sacrifice of the self or self sacrifice (self-denial, surrender, abnegation) and the sacrifice of others (subordinating others for one’s own gain). Self-sacrifice is the antipole to life. Rand defines sacrifice as “the surrender of a greater value for the sake of a lesser one or of a nonvalue” (“The Ethics of Emergencies” 50). By this definition, the very nature of sacrifice is irrational: the rational principle of conduct demands that one act in accordance with one’s values and for the sake of one’s values, the ultimate value being his or her life. Moreover, this principle applies to all actions, motives, and choices regarding the self and toward other people; this therefore requires, writes Rand, that one “possess a defined hierarchy of rational values”—values validated and formed by a rational standard and in harmony with reality—for if there exists an absence of such values, “neither rational conduct nor considered value judgments nor moral choices are possible” (50).

In his radio speech, John Galt defines sacrifice as not “the rejection of the worthless, but of the precious...not the rejection of evil for the sake of the good, but of the good for the sake of evil. Sacrifice is the surrender of that which you value in favor of that which you don’t” (Rand *For the New Intellectual* 156). Thus, trading an excess

of money—a value—for a pebble—a nonvalue—is a sacrifice, for that is the surrendering of some higher value for a lower value; however, if an individual gives one's life defending his or her country and freedom, that is not a sacrifice, for that individual would rather fight for freedom and die than live under some other law, but if that individual who fears to fight and lives in slavery, it is a sacrifice. Ultimately, sacrifice is the surrender of what one holds valuable to something or someone that he holds less valuable. Galt states,

Sacrifice could be proper only for those who have nothing to sacrifice—no values, no standards, no judgment—those whose desires are irrational whims, blindly conceived and lightly surrendered. For a man of moral stature, whose desires are born of rational values, sacrifice is the surrender of the right to the wrong, of the good to the evil. (158)

Thus, sacrifice is improper for those have something to sacrifice—those with values, standards, and judgment, those who desire values based on cognitive judgment and rational thinking developed through introspection and self-reflection. To expect a rational person to commit to a sacrifice is to expect that he or she will surrender his or her judgment, act antithetically to knowledge, deny the reality of the context—essentially, ask him or her to release the mind and abdicate all rational faculties.

The motions through life require the rational individual to follow his or her cognitive conclusions regarding metaphysical reality in relation to his or her welfare regardless of the opinions or whims of other people or the consequences his or her actions might have on others' consciences. Thus, if evidence suggests that he or she

act in a certain way that is rational and fully validated, then he or she should proceed with little or no regard to what other people might feel or think—whether it makes others happy or sad, if that is less of a value to an individual than the rational value which he or she seeks to pursue, then it would be immoral to do anything than pursue that value. Peikoff writes that “since thought is an attribute of the individual, each man must be *sovereign* in regard to the function and product of his own brain”—he or she must act in fidelity to the facts of reality and the summations and products of his mind (232). Ultimately, this is impossible, however, if it is expected of him by others to value others’ welfare, whims, opinions, thoughts, or desires over his or her own rational conclusions. Thus arises the problems with the non-egoistic moralities (altruism, for example): it is expected that the individual suffer a compromise to his or her individuality, mind, in essence, his or her life.

The question is therefore raised regarding sacrifice and those that the individual cares about or loves, for to love is regarded widely as an unselfish act. However, Rand argues that contrary to what is commonly believed, “love and friendship are profoundly personal, selfish values: love is an expression and assertion of self-esteem, response to one’s own values in the person of another”; what results is a profound and deep personal joy from the existence of that other individual and of the love that binds the two: “it is one’s own personal, selfish happiness that one seeks, earns and derives from love” (Rand “The Ethics of Emergencies” 51). Thus, if an individual has a spouse or friend that he or she loves deeply, to insert oneself into an uncomfortable position for that other person is not a sacrifice if it is correlative with

that individual's hierarchy of values. Rand offers the example of the man who has a wife with a terminal illness: he is passionately in love with his wife and cares for her deeply. If he spends a fortune in an attempt to maintain her life or cure her, Rand writes, it would then be "absurd to claim that he does it as a 'sacrifice' for her sake, not his own, and that it makes no difference to him, personally and selfishly, whether she lives or dies" (Binswanger 431). This is absurd for the reason that if he holds his wife higher in his hierarchy of values than money, then it is not a sacrifice—surrendering a lower value for a higher one is not a sacrifice, it is rational. Rather, it achieves a greater amount of happiness for him because the preservation of her existence is more important to him than money; ultimately, he is pursuing a value—his wife and her life—that will generate a greater degree of happiness for him.

Contrary to this, however, the man would be committing a sacrifice if he followed the code of altruism: if he surrendered the life of his wife and let her die so he could donate that money he would spend on her to save the lives of more than one other person whom he does not know, then it would be a sacrifice. For the difference between the other people he does not know and his wife only differs in respect to the value that she holds in the husband—that is, she is of far greater value to her husband than any other people that he does not know: his happiness is not contingent on those individuals that have no effect on his life, but his wife's welfare does hold great weight in the nature of his happiness. What is most important, according to the Objectivist ethics, is the achievement of one's own happiness—that is the highest moral standard,

so thus, the way the man acts to achieve that goal is not sacrifice; anything antithetical to his happiness is sacrifice.

The contrary aspect to self-sacrifice is the equally malignant and evil sacrifice of others for the sake of one's own gain. A common misconception with egoism is the image of the brute that requires sacrifice of others for the sake of personal gain; however, Rand is adamantly opposed to this for two reasons: first, it treads on other people's rights and their individualism and is therefore barbaric and immoral, and second, it is unnecessary, for a rational person does not require the sacrifice of others for his or her welfare and the sustenance of his or her values. Rand writes that

there is a fundamental moral difference between a man who sees his self-interest in production and a man who sees it in robbery. The evil of a robber does not lie in the fact that he pursues his own interests, but in what he regards as to his own interest; not in the fact that he pursues his values, but in what he chose to value; not in the fact that he wants to live, but in the fact that he wants to live on a subhuman level. (Rand *The Virtue of Selfishness* ix)

In this way, therefore, selfishness in it of itself does not denote or imply sacrifice of others. One can live a perfectly selfish life without sacrificing others. The robber, in this case, does not sacrifice others—*id est*, by seizing property without earning it in a respecting way—because he is selfish, he takes because his values are misdirected; he has not rationally formed his values, they are the product of some other faculty—whim or emotion—without proper validation. In this case, therefore, the evil in the

robber can be traced to a lack of cognitive effort, not selfishness; to irrationality, not egoism.

The ultimate moral responsibility of an individual, according to Objectivism, is the achievement of one's own happiness; however, Rand is not sanctioning a hedonistic whimsical free-for-all in achieving happiness: this achievement of happiness "does not mean that he is indifferent to all men, that human life is of no value to him and that he has no reason to help others," nor does it mean "that the good is whatever gives you pleasure and, therefore, pleasure is the standard of morality" as the doctrine of hedonism claims (Rand "The Ethics of Emergencies" 49; Binswanger 200). Ultimately, the problem with these two mentalities is the lack of reason involved in choosing to set values in either case. As I have already noted, Rand regards love and friendship as profoundly selfish acts—both which provide various amounts of happiness to the individual involved in the relationship. Thus, a complete indifference to all men only serves to rob an individual of the happiness contained within those values. Moreover, Objectivist ethics do not sanction the sacrifice of others, so therefore, in order to remain within the realm of morality, I think, there is required at least some degree of care for fellow human beings: that is, enough care that prevents one from being a complete brute and sacrificing others, enough care that demonstrates respect for their integrity as well as his or hers.

Hedonism is immoral in a way that emotional decisions are immoral: it inverts the process of reasons. Hedonism regards whatever brings pleasure is moral; Objectivism, contrarily, states that the good "must be defined by a rational standard of

value, that pleasure is not a first cause, but only a consequence, that only pleasure which proceeds from a rational value judgment can be regarded as moral” and as such, pleasure—much like emotion—cannot be regarded as a standard of morality (Binswanger 200). To regard pleasure as a moral standard allows for decisions and value-oriented action based on both rational and irrational cognition, conscious and unconscious thought. It is neither moral to assume value-oriented action and later rationalize the decision. Ultimately, pleasure, like emotions, is a byproduct rational thought and action, not a cause for action. Put another way, Rand writes that “‘happiness’ can properly be the purpose of ethics, but not the standard”; to act in such a way where happiness is the standard ultimately translates into a state where “the proper value is whatever you happen to value”—an uncontrolled state with no rational anchoring or foundation (Rand “The Objectivist Ethics” 29). The proper role for ethics is to define how happiness should be achieved through a proper code of values; to act as hedonism would suggest, denies the purpose of ethics and recklessly pursues the path of irrationality and incognition.

Egoism’s primary premise is that the individual should act as the beneficiary of his or her own action; the Objectivist ethical egoism states that the individual should act in his or her own rational self-interest. This, however, writes Rand, gives the individual right to act in such a way because that “right to do so is derived from his nature as man and from the function of moral values in human life”; in essence, this applies “only in the context of a rational, objectively demonstrated and validated code of moral principles which define and determine his actual self-interest” (*The Virtue of*

Selfishness xiii). Thus, he must act with regard to metaphysical reality and objective values: what is actually in the individual's interest objectively and not merely what the individual thinks or feels is in his or her interest. Reason, in this case, denies the individual "a license 'to do as he pleases'"; moreover, it precludes the notion of the selfish brute and it denies the morality of value-oriented action by any individual "motivated by irrational emotions, feelings, urges, wishes, or whims" (xiii). The fact that rationality is the dictator of moral virtue addresses the issue of what Rand calls the Nietzschean egoists: those egoists "who believe that any action, regardless of its nature, is good if it is intended for one's own benefit" (xiii). This manner of thought is closely related to hedonism, but differs slightly: it abandons rational thought and instead assumes that egoism is to be followed at the cost of anything or everything but the self; thus, an extremist in this viewpoint would justify the infringement upon the lives of others for the sake of his or her own gain. Moreover, it commits the error of attempting to include a moral evaluation in "selfishness"; it essentially states that if it is good for the individual, or if it is a selfish act, then it is good. This is diametrically opposed to Objectivism, for Objectivism states that rationally determined objective values are what should be pursued, and the beneficiary should be the self. The Nietzschean egoism opens the door of morality to whims; Rand's response is that "morality is not a contest of whims" (xiii).

Finally, the last related error in egoism related to the Nietzschean egoism and hedonism is that an individual, in his desire to be guided by his own mind and faculty, declares that "any action he chooses to take is moral if he chooses it" (Binswanger

448). This is similar to the Nietzschean egoist conception, except that the individual does not declare it moral because it benefits him, but rather, it is moral because he or she deems it to be. The primary error in this way of thought is that it assumes that one's judgment is infallible: an individual's judgment, writes Rand, is not the validation that is required to determine the morality of something—the individual's judgment is the means. Rational judgment is the only way of achieving moral ends, but it is neither “a moral criterion nor a moral validation: only reference to a demonstrable principle can validate one's choices” (448). That is, only validation within in the context of the objective reality with regards to objective values can properly justify an action. And all of this is only achieved by rational means. All other egoistic fallacies as demonstrated fail because of one fatal flaw: they do not function on the foundation of reason.

Hedonism, Nietzschean egoism, and other forms of egoism conceived without a rational and objective basis for their grounding are essentially theories of egoism perverted by a severe lack of objectivity; this denial or absence of the objective element in their conception is what Rand calls subjectivism. There are two fundamental types of subjectivism in this context that lead to the flaws in these forms of egoism: metaphysical subjectivism and consequently, its fallacious offspring, ethical subjectivism. The ultimate guiding principle in Objectivist ethics is the fact that reality exists, that A is A, and no amount of thinking otherwise will change that fact; thus, while one can work to alter reality (by physically interacting with it), reality still exists independent of what an individual thinks or feels. In metaphysics, subjectivists hold “that reality (the ‘object’) is dependent on human consciousness (the ‘subject’)” which

would consequently mean that “reality is not a firm absolute, but a fluid, plastic, indeterminate realm which can be altered, in whole or in part, by the consciousness of the perceiver” (Binswanger 486). This is impossible, however, if reality is independent of the human consciousness—reality cannot be altered as if it were fluid or plastic; the subjectivist doctrine, therefore, contradicts the facts of reality—the important element in Objectivism is that reality is objective and independent of the consciousness, not fluid and subject to the mind.

The most glaring problem with metaphysical subjectivism is that it denies the truth regarding a question or issue that corresponds to facts. According to subjectivists, the consciousness creates or adapts or molds the reality which therefore alters the truth rendering it subject to each individual person. Thus, if ever an individual creates for themselves a different reality, slightly altered from the next person, the truth or validity of statements would vary from consciousness to consciousness—what would hold true for some would not be true for others. Peikoff writes that the fallacy of the subjectivist lies in the fact that he or she would not say something is true (for that implies objectivity), but that something is true for that individual. Therefore, he concludes, “there is no truth, only truth relative to the individual or a group—truth for me, for you, for him, for her, for us, for them” (Binswanger 487).

Metaphysical subjectivism—the subjectivity of reality and the variance of truth—ultimately present problems beyond just metaphysics. Objectivist ethics are founded on the metaphysical fact that reality is real, that existence exists. The morality

of Randian egoism stems from the idea that it is most helpful for the individual to be selfish because of its consistency with reality; in other words, reality—metaphysics—mandates, for the sake of survival, that an individual be an egoist. The problems with egoism arise when that foundation is removed. The moment an individual decides to perceive reality in a way that is not consistent with what exists or what is real is the moment when egoism encounters issues. Thus, metaphysical subjectivism translates into ethical subjectivism, a severe ethical fallacy and immoral school of ethics.

Metaphysical subjectivism holds that reality or existence are products of the human consciousness; ethical subjectivism holds that “the good bears no relation to the facts of reality, that it is the product of a man’s consciousness, created by his feelings, desires, ‘intuitions,’ or whims, and that it is merely an ‘arbitrary postulate’ or an ‘emotional commitment’ (488). So thus, ethical subjectivism denies that there is any objective or intrinsic value or good in reality, but that the good is ensconced in the individual’s consciousness.

This theory creates multiple ethical problems, so like metaphysical subjectivism, where the truth is not objective but subject to the individual, so in ethical subjectivism, the good or the moral is subject to the individual. This manner of thinking results in moral chaos and ethical anarchy: there is essentially no governor of values. Instead, what best suits an individual’s fancy becomes what is moral for that person—what that individual feels, wishes, or wants becomes the good and there is no counteract to that. Thus, the charges against egoism that it is purely immoral only exist because of conceptions of subjectivist egoism, but those charges do not hold against

Randian egoism for the reason that Rand's conception of egoism does not allow for that ethical anarchy; she firmly established a governor for moral values: reason, and reason is further bound to the greatest factor in determining morality: reality.

Now by having stated what the Objectivist conception of egoism is not (subjective), I would like to return to what, more specifically, egoism is. In a letter to Professor John Hospers, Rand writes that "an egoist is a man who acts for his own self-interest"; moreover, "man's ego is his mind; the most crucial aspect of egoism is the sovereignty of one's own rational judgment and the right to live by its guidance" (Berliner 553-4). Thus, a true egoist is not just one who acts in one's own best interest, nor is it necessarily one who acts in his or her own rational self-interest, but rather, the true egoist, the most selfish person the one with the independent mind: Galt states in his speech that "the most selfish of all things is the independent mind that recognizes no authority higher than its own and no value higher than its judgment of truth" (Rand *For the New Intellectual* 159). Thus, the egoist is the independent individual. Those who claim to be egoists in their immoral activity—robbing, cheating, whimsical pleasure-seeking—are not truly egoists, for they are not truly independent. Activities such as theft imply a dependence on others for sustenance. A true egoist relies on no one or nothing other than his or her own mind. A true egoist, writes Rand,

in the absolute sense is not the man who sacrifices others. He is the man who stands above the need of using others in any manner. He does not function through them. He is not concerned with them in any primary matter. Not in his aim, not in his motive, not in his thinking, not in his desires, not in his source of

energy. He does not exist for any other man—and he asks no other man to exist for him. (Rand *For the New Intellectual* 88)

This relationship, according to Objectivism, is the only form of mutual self-respect that can exist between individuals—that every individual act in his or her own rational self-interest.

A common misconception of Randian egoism is the assumption that Rand's statement that an individual does not need others (that he "stands above the need of using others") means that the individual must live his or her entire life in solitude. This assumption is grossly fallacious. In today's world, the need for others is constantly growing, but this is not a need for that individual necessarily. Rather, it is the need for what that individual produces. Therefore, if an individual is productive in some way and maintains an independent mind, then it is proper for that person to enter in some sort of relationship with others who also have something to offer. This sort of relationship is rational. However, if one is not productive it would be absurd for that individual to expect to come into a similar relationship, for that individual would have nothing to offer (be it money, goods, services, and so forth). Thus, to a certain extent there is interdependence, but Rand is not referring to that necessarily. Rather, she means full independence of thought and consciousness. A person may need food, but he or she is free to decide where to get it; a person may need tech services, but that individual is free to subscribe to any one of the services offered. Thus, John Galt, in his speech, states that he owes no obligation to anyone, himself, or anything but rationality. He states,

I deal with men as my nature and theirs demands: by means of reason. I seek or desire nothing from them except such relations as they care to enter of their own voluntary choice. It is only with their mind that I can deal and only for my own self-interest, when they see that my interest coincides with theirs. When they don't, I enter no relationship...I do not surrender my reason. (Rand *For the New Intellectual* 133).

Galt's statement is, in essence, the Objectivist conception of egoism: care for the self and reason and rationality in all relationships, thoughts, motives, values, actions, and things. This Objectivist egoism, rational and firmly rooted in reality, maintained in this way is the means to one's sustenance of life and existence—it is the preserver of one's integrity, the path toward happiness, the inducer of self-flourishing. And for this reason, it is moral and singularly the most superior ethical philosophy to which one can adhere.

Defense

There seems to be an attempt to refute ethical egoism on the grounds that it is inconsistent and contradictory; that is, that a practitioner of ethical egoism cannot necessarily be an egoist because he or she would contradict his or her values in any situation where there is a conflict of interest. Roughly summarized, W. D. Glasgow argues that an ethical egoist believes that everyone ought to act in a manner that is in their best interest; however, this implies that the egoist must be willing to accept other individual's autonomy, but in some cases, to do so would result in an outcome

that is not in the egoist's best interest, and therefore, the egoist encounters a contradiction. I think, however, that the Randian ethics from her philosophy of Objectivism in its conception and formulation of ethical egoism avoids the contradiction and escapes Glasgow's assertions and claims: that is, because Objectivist ethical egoism separates the value of an action from the beneficiary of an action—that a moral action is not determined and qualified by who benefits—the Objectivist conception of ethical egoism does not suffer the problems that lead to the inherent contradiction. Therefore, my argument is not necessarily that Glasgow's claims are in them of themselves not sound or valid; rather, I hold that Ayn Rand's conception and formulation of ethical egoism—ethical egoism founded on objective values—does not bear this alleged inherent contradiction in the conflict of individual's interests and values and therefore escapes Glasgow's claims and arguments.

The contradiction Glasgow perceives is best illustrated in his arguments as follows:

A	and	B
I ought to do what is in my interest Dick...		I may or may not care about Tom, and
And		
Tom ought to do what is in his interest about me, Dick...	and	Tom may or may not care and
And		
Dick ought to do what is in his interest about me, Tom...	and	Dick may or may not care etc.
Etc.		(82)

Here, he states, one can see the inherent problem in egoism, for Glasgow argues, the egoist argues that everyone (Tom and Dick) ought to look after and pursue his or her own interest. To state this, consequently, essentially grants that there are other individuals who are autonomous. Glasgow defines an autonomous individual as one who “has the ability to consider the possibilities of action that are open to him in a particular situation, who can deliberate upon each of these possibilities, in the sense that he can weigh up the reasons for and against actualizing any given possibility, and who can come to a decision which he has the ability to carry out” (83). He continues, stating that it would be perfectly possible for an individual to be autonomous in this sense, “and yet deliberate, decide, and act within the confines of his own wants”; this sort of action, Glasgow states, would be that of “the prudent man” (83). This egoist (consistent with Column B) would accept and consider others as autonomous; however, that individual’s regard for others would be constrained by the extent to which they either promoted or impinged his or her own interest resulting in a disposition where others’ value would be “instrumental not intrinsic” (83).

Glasgow, at this point, has only shown that one half of the egoist position is contradictory, for the egoist of Column A would not accept that particular position; rather, egoist A, Glasgow states, would recognize the autonomy in others in the same way he or she would recognize it in him or herself: in essence, “he recognizes that the judgments and actions of other individuals can be rationally justified, just as he himself can justify his own judgments and actions” (83). Consequently, in believing this way, the egoist of Column A would acknowledge that the wants of others can provide

reasons for their actions just in the same way his or her wants provides a reason for action; thus, this implies, writes Glasgow, that the egoist, “as a rational agent, is willing to consider seriously, and sometimes accept, the judgments, and the resultant actions, of other rational individuals” (83). In other words, the resultant actions of other rational individuals can, for the egoist, be regarded as acceptable for both the egoist and the others committing to those actions.

Now this, Glasgow asserts, is where the problem with ethical egoism lies; he holds that there is a problem when actions or reasons of others that are “acceptable” (in the above stated sense) to the egoist conflict with the egoist's best interest. Glasgow concedes that it is possible that the egoist may accept that the action is reasonable, so (maintaining a consistency with Glasgow's examples) if it is in Tom's best interest to do something, the egoist may say that Tom ought to do so even though Tom's doing so would contradict or conflict with the egoist's best interest. However, continues Glasgow, the egoist cannot advise Tom to do something against his or her own best interest because that would result in the egoist doing something against his or her own best interest; rather, it would be in the egoist's best interest to encourage Tom not to do that particular act. What results is a moral conundrum for the egoist: he or she realizes that Tom ought to act, yet he or she must advise Tom to not act; but, Glasgow continues, if the egoist realizes or knows that Tom ought to act, then this implies that the egoist approves of Tom's acting (even though it is not in the egoist's best interest). Thus the contradiction: the egoist would thereby be approving of something that is not in his or her own best interest, “a position logically

intolerable for an ethical egoist” (84). Glasgow concludes his argument by stating that when an individual states that someone ought to do something (that Tom ought to do X), then that person is recognizing the autonomy of that other figure (Tom, for example). However, asserts Glasgow, respecting the autonomy of another individual is not consistent with ethical egoism, for to do so means the surrender the position as an autonomous person; there is, writes Glasgow, “after all, for the egoist but one autonomous individual (himself) who is also an end in himself” (84). Stated another way, the egoist denies that others are ends in themselves “because he believes that he should be concerned only with his own interest: he himself is the only autonomous individual who is also an end in himself” (Glasgow “Ethical Egoism Again” 70). Ultimately, therein lies the contradiction.

Before I proceed and attempt to defend Rand from Glasgow, I need to clarify the difference between subjectivist egoism and Objectivist egoism. However, before one can effectively understand the understand the contrast between Objectivist egoism and non-Objectivist egoism, I need to properly define and articulate the Objectivist concept of value. According to Objectivist ethics, egoism in it of itself only identifies one aspect of a moral or ethical code: it “tells us not what acts a man should take, but who should profit from them”—that each “individual’s primary moral obligation is to achieve his own welfare, well-being, or self-interest” (Peikoff 230). The second and equally as crucial aspect of Randian ethical egoism is what action an individual should take, and this action is determined by value. A primary feature of Objectivist ethics is that value is objective: “what is good for a person—what is in his

interest—is not simply a subjective projection of that person’s attitudes, beliefs, tastes, or desires,” for such subjective desires are sufficient guides and means for meeting one’s life requirements (Smith 25). Value does not mean, furthermore, that a preference or desire for object by an individual is necessary or beneficial for one’s survival and as such valuable, nor is value something that is intrinsic or inherent; Smith writes that “value is not found ready-made in the external world, a freestanding feature nestled within certain things” (25). Now, the presence of values, according to Objectivist ethics, is made existent and relevant by the very most foundational and fundamental alternative an individual faces: life or death. Consequently, “any code of values must hold life as the ultimate value” (Peikoff 212). Yet no object or thing is good or valuable in it of itself; rather, value is always good to some individual or for some certain end. This means that values serve a purpose: they advance a person’s life and well-being. Thus, something can be considered objectively valuable—an objective value—if it offers a gain or ultimate benefit for an individual’s life. In this way, it is impossible for an individual to establish values that conflict with his or her self-interest. The reason why an individual holds values is because the values further that individual’s self-interest: as Peikoff writes, “entities do not exist in order to pursue values. They pursue values in order to exist” (211).

Certain things are necessarily valuable for humans such as life and all of its necessary constituents and needs—food, water, and so forth. However, there are also many things that are objectively valuable for one person that may or may not necessarily be objectively valuable for another. For example, an individual who is sick

would be in need of medicine; therefore, the proper medicine, in this case, would be objectively valuable for that person—outside of that individual’s wishes or wants, the medicine would serve the purpose of furthering and advancing that person’s life. Contrarily, for a person who is healthy, that medication may not be valuable, and as such, the medicine is not objectively valuable. While there are necessary values for the sustenance of life, there do exist values that are optional. For example, wealth may be reasoned to be valuable, yet this does not denote an imperative: any individual may choose a line of work or career that procures little money if he or she has good reason for doing so. This value, therefore, of amassing vast quantities of wealth is optional. Ultimately, thus, values serves an individual’s needs, but values are not universally valuable. Therefore, the objectivity of value “rests in the relationship between specific ends and a particular person’s life”; thus, something that is good is good for a person, but “what makes a thing good is its nature and impact on the person’s life independently” of their beliefs and wishes regarding that impact on their life (27).

Rand defines an egoistical person as one “who acts for his own self-interest” (Berliner 553). This does not, however, denote or state what that interest is; therefore, it is not necessarily egoism itself that determines the morality or value of something, it merely states who should be the beneficiary of an action. The morality and value of something, argues Rand, is to be determined in the field of ethics. In Objectivist ethics, the value of something is determined by a rational standard validated within the context of reality; Rand maintains “that an egoist is a man who acts for his own self-interest and that a man should act for his own self-interest; however, self-interest only

“identifies one’s motivation, not the nature of the values that one should choose” (554). Contrarily, traditional egoists and primarily subjectivist ethical egoists hold that the value and morality of something or some act lies inherently in the notion that it benefits the individual; this results in the mentality of “I will do what I want, and it is right because it pleases me” or “because it is right for me, it must be good.” An individual engaged in this sort of behavior, “a self-destroying, whim-worshipping neurotic is not a representative of the ego; in fact, he has neither self nor interests—and it is certainly not self-interest that he pursues and achieves” (554). Instead, the subjectivist egoist ultimately ends in destruction. Objectivist ethics rejects the subjective egoistic values: Objectivism rejects the evasion of reality and principles and the notion that what one arbitrarily deems is right for the self therefore means it is necessarily moral. The sacrifice of others—*theft and extortion, for example*—is predation, it is not in any way a constituent of Objectivist ethics. Ultimately, the key distinction is that Objectivist egoists form their values through rational thought and sufficient introspection and from there proceed to act whereas subjectivist egoists establish their values based on either pleasure or whatever benefits them.

Part of the reason why Objectivist ethics escapes Glasgow’s arguments is that Objectivism divides value and morality from beneficiary. That is, he defines egoist an agent who “has but one duty, viz., to produce for himself the greatest balance of good over evil,” and later he also states that ethical egoists who desire happiness have to “make up [their] mind[s] about which course [they] ought to take which will be in [their] own best interest” (“Contradiction” 81; “Ethical Egoism Again” 67). It is the

subjectivist definitions of egoism that conflate value and selfishness into one moral package; Objectivist ethical egoism partitions the two concepts. Egoism or selfishness only denotes who should be the beneficiary; it does not state what is good or what one should value. Therefore, to say something benefits an individual is not saying the same thing as something is moral. There is nothing that is moral for one person and immoral for another, necessarily. Value is objective. Conflating value and selfishness (in essence, to say what is good for me must be good) is a gateway to ethical anarchy: there is no controller of what is moral and immoral. Objectivism holds reality as the controller, the governor of values. Thus, Glasgow's argument only stands against those who believe that selfishness in it of itself is complete in its morality; however, Objectivism asserts that this is not the case, for there must be a process of cognition and validation in both choosing values and pursuing values. Ultimately, therefore, Objectivism manages to escape Glasgow's assertions: Objectivism has, from and as a result of its foundation, avoided the predicament—this alleged inherent conflict—altogether.

There is one other matter I would like to address in Glasgow's paper, and that is the notion that there can be a conflict of interests in rational people. Glasgow claims that example above regarding Tom performing some act that conflicts with the egoist demonstrates that there could be conflicts of interests between two rational individuals. He writes that if Tom performs X and it conflicts with the egoist's self-interest, then the egoist, therefore, "cannot really accept in any full-blooded sense that in a case of conflict of interests, Tom ought to do X" ("Contradiction" 84).

However, I think that within the realm of Objectivist ethics, there are no conflicts of interests which would consequently mean there could be no such scenario, and as result, Objectivism does not contain this contradiction.

Rand writes that a “man’s interests depend on the kind of goals he chooses to pursue, his choice of goals depends on his desires, his desires depend on his values—and, for a rational man, his values depend on the judgment of his mind” (Rand “Conflicts” 57). The crux of this chain lies in the fact that desires are not proper foundations for cognition or action. To act on a desire is to fail to divorce oneself from the subjectivist egoists; desires, in them of themselves, do not validate value nor justify action. That an individual desires a certain thing or end is not proper criterion that it is in the individual’s best interest. A diabetic can desire candy, but this would not be in the diabetic’s best interest. A person bedridden from a bacterial infection may desire to not take the prescribed antibiotics, but this would not be in the person’s best interest. Thus, the object of desire may not necessarily mean it is good (or moral), so neither does the existence of a desire denote that it is in fact in the individual’s best interest. A fully rational individual, therefore, does not formulate goals based strictly on desires; rather, that individual chooses his or her goals—based on his or her rational and validated values—through process of reasoning and cognitive practices. This rational individual does not desire and then rationalize; rather, the individual will reason and formulate goals and values, and what follows is the desire to pursue those goals or values. The rational person does not think it is right because he or she wants it; rather, the individual “does not act until he is able to say: ‘I want it because it is

right,” and through all this, it is reality that is the “paramount consideration in the process of determining his interests” (58).

The second element of the Objectivist egoist that separates him or her from Glasgow’s contradiction is that he or she realizes that the gain of one individual or another does not equate to a loss for the egoist. Rand writes that “a rational man knows that man must achieve his goals by his own effort, he knows that neither wealth nor jobs nor any human values exist in a limited, static quantity, waiting to be divided” (62). As a result, the rational individual realizes that if he or she does not achieve what he or she intended to get, then it is not a loss or a detriment to his or her interest: what one individual gains does not translate to a loss for another—an individual that achieves a certain end does not mean that those who did not achieve it were sacrificed and the achiever earned it at the expense of others. If Tom pursues and achieves X, the egoist whose “interest was conflicted” was not sacrificed: Tom did not achieve X at the egoist’s expense. If a track athlete wins the 100-meter dash, the other seven contestants are not sacrificed in doing so, nor did the winner win at the expense of those other athletes. If two applicants are applying for a certain position, the one who is not hired is not sacrificed, nor is it at his or her expense. What one does not already possess, what one has not earned, one cannot lose through sacrifice. Thus, a rational individual, asserts Rand, “never imagines that he has any sort of unearned, unilateral claim on any human being—and he never leaves his interests at the mercy of any one person or single specific concrete” (63).

The subjectivist egoist, however, is subject to this notion of conflict of interests. The subjectivist will think that he or she, because he or she desires it, was sacrificed in the pursuit of a job or in Tom's achievement of X. He or she might prematurely lay claim to the job or to X with the blind and irrational notion that because they desire, because they want it, it is good for them. And because it is good for them, then any other individual who is in pursuit of the same is a threat and is conflicting with their interest. Thus, a rational individual will regard Tom as autonomous, as an end in himself, for a rational egoist will realize that he has no inherent or rightful claim to X because he is aware of the nature of reality. It is because he is cognizant and is in a perpetual state of reasoning that he knows that he has no claim on any end or any person, and therefore, the pursuit of some end is only achieved by his own effort and earning. Ultimately, that two individuals desire the same end does not mean that either of them are (a) entitled to it, and (b) that that end is good for either of them; also, that two individuals that pursue an end and only one reaches it does not mean that one was sacrificed, that his interest was compromised; it means, rather, that one earned it, and the failure of the other to achieve that end means merely that he or she failed to reach that end, not that he or she was sacrificed or used in the process.

Glasgow's argument, therefore, as I have shown, holds no bearing over Objectivist egoism. First, Objectivism does not recognize the conflation of moral value and selfishness (or egoism) into one package as the subjectivists do. Moral value is not based on what an individual thinks is best or what works best for the individual, so therefore, Glasgow's argument in this respect does not and cannot apply to the

Objectivist egoism theory. Second, in Objectivism, there is no such thing as conflict of interests: a rational individual does not set goals and establish interests based on strictly arbitrary desires; neither does a rational being lay claim to anything that he or she has not earned; finally, the gain of one individual does not mean a loss for another—one person can gain much and another nothing, this does not mean that the one who gained nothing lost anything. Therefore, while Glasgow's argument and charges against ethical egoism may have some traction against subjectivist notions and conceptions of egoism, I think that Objectivist ethics and the Randian conception of ethical egoism properly and fully escapes the charges that Glasgow levels.

Conclusion

The Objectivist ethics and the Randian formulation of egoism, for the reason that it is founded on reason and rooted in reality, seems to escape problems commonly associated with prior or other forms of egoism. Thus, what I have presented and analyzed is not my original formulation of egoism, but what I perceive as a valid and logical moral theory—one that does not place imperatives or demands on an individual or expect others to surrender values and goals for a greater or common good, but rather, one that asks individuals to exercise their faculties to think and act in a moral, proper, and life sustaining way, and consequently, one that respects the integrity and dignity of each person as their own individual. In conclusion, I would like to let Ayn Rand have the last word to summarize, in essence, what Objectivism and more specifically Objectivist ethics is. Rand writes,

I am not *primarily* an advocate of capitalism, but of egoism; and I am not *primarily* an advocate of egoism, but of reason. If one recognizes the supremacy of reason and applies it consistently, all the rest follows. This—the supremacy of reason—was, is and will be the primary concern of my work, and the essence of Objectivism. Reason in epistemology leads to egoism in ethics.

(Binswanger 410)

Reason, egoism: these are the root and core of ethics—these are what are moral and what are right.

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