

The Virtue of Selfishness Study Guide

The Virtue of Selfishness by Ayn Rand

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Plot Summary

The Virtue of Selfishness is a collection of essays written by Ayn Rand and her associate, psychologist Nathaniel Branden. The essays were separately published between 1962 and 1964 in the monthly publication *The Objectivist Newsletter*, with the exception of the first chapter of the book, "The Objectivist Ethics", which was published in 1961. In this collection, Rand develops the ethical principles of her philosophy of Objectivism. Rand's complex philosophy embodies all aspects of intellectual life including politics, economics, epistemology, aesthetics, and ethics. Though she does address issues of politics, economics, epistemology, and aesthetics throughout the book, Rand focuses on how these issues apply to the ethical theory of Objectivism.

Rand begins her work with an overall summary of Objectivist ethics and then follows up this discussion with extensive applications of this theory within various issues that arise in society. In its most basic form, Rand's ethical theory is the development of a code of specific values that should guide people's choices and actions. This is the purpose of every ethical theory. The specific values that Rand promotes are reason and self-interest. In every chapter that she has written, Rand defines and redefines the terms she uses as they apply to her theory. These include values, reason, selfishness, selflessness, sacrifice, individualism, collectivism, and rights.

Rand's theory is really fairly simple: one should only live one's life as an individual, and one should only take actions and make decisions by using one's natural ability to think rationally. Therefore, people must only act according to their own individual interests, not those of others or those of a group, as their interests are what will benefit their own lives. However, these interests must be based on principles derived from the reason of their own minds, which is founded on their intelligence, growth, and understanding of reality. This theory is based on the idea that every human possesses the natural right to her own life, and this idea extends to social existence. Even when a person lives in a society, which Rand believes is optimal for human survival, his purpose for living should still be for himself and not for others. Rand's theory contradicts social ethical theories such as communism, which decree that a person's purpose for living is to benefit the lives of all people. Her theory also contradicts religious ethical theories, which decree that a person's purpose for living is for a supreme being—one god or many gods—depending on which religion is discussed.

The question that most often arises in response to Rand's theory of ethics is: How can one solely act on one's own self-interests when one must coexist with others in a society? This entire book functions as an answer to this question. Rand explicates her code of ethics by asserting how an individual should act in a society, how a collective group should conduct itself, and how individuals should conduct themselves ethically in the event of emergencies. She introduces her idea of rights: how rights only apply to individuals and not to collectives, and how individuals must construct governments that protect their rights. She expounds upon the nature of government and ethical methods of government financing. She discusses racism—its nature and origin—and how individuals and societies must deal with racist issues. She describes the destructive



nature of societies that violate individuals' rights and how an individual must combat this destruction. Each situation and idea Rand addresses relates to the basic principles of her philosophy.

Branden, the author of five of the essays in this collection, promotes and expands upon Rand's Objectivism but applies her ethical theory to psychology; specifically, the principle of self-esteem. He also emphasizes reason and individualism in his writing and helps Rand explain her theory and ultimately answer the puzzling question formerly addressed.



Chapter 1, "The Objectivist Ethics", Ayn Rand (1961)

Chapter 1, "The Objectivist Ethics", Ayn Rand (1961) Summary and Analysis

The Virtue of Selfishness is a collection of essays written by Ayn Rand and her associate, psychologist Nathaniel Branden. The essays were separately published between 1962 and 1964 in the monthly publication *The Objectivist Newsletter*, with the exception of the first chapter of the book, "The Objectivist Ethics", which was published in 1961. In this collection, Rand develops the ethical principles of her philosophy of Objectivism. Rand's complex philosophy embodies all aspects of intellectual life including politics, economics, epistemology, aesthetics, and ethics. Though she does address issues of politics, economics, epistemology, and aesthetics throughout the book, Rand focuses on how these issues apply to the ethical theory of Objectivism.

In this chapter, Rand introduces her theory of Objectivism with a brief outline of Objectivist ethics, in which she attempts to validate the Objectivist principle of "rational morality". To do so, she first discusses the more widely accepted notions of ethics—those focusing on the standards of altruism and self-sacrifice. She addresses very basic questions as to what defines ethics and morals and asks her audience to first consider not what sort of values people should adopt but why they need values in the first place. She defines a value as something that a person believes necessary to obtain and keep.

Rand questions whether the concept of value, such as the concept of "good" or "evil", is an arbitrary human invention or whether it is based on a metaphysical fact, metaphysical in this case referring to that which pertains to reality and to existence. Rand asserts that in the history of human ethics, "moralists" have largely credited the use of ethics with "whims", some doing so directly and others indirectly, by default. She defines "whim" here as "a desire experienced by a person who does not know and does not care to discover its cause" (p. 14). She states that within history, most philosophers, citing Aristotle as a philosopher of import, tried to establish ethics as a science, stealing it away from its traditional mystical, religious origin, such that humans should be "good" because it is the will of God or "evil" because it is the will of Satan. However, their attempts to define a new origin of ethics were weak because they simply substituted "Society" for God, declaring, "the standard of the good is that which is good for society" (p. 14).

Rand discusses the complex nature of the human mind, and defines and analyzes the ideas of consciousness, volition, reason, self-interest, and rational selfishness. Toward the end of this chapter, Rand finally defines "Objectivist ethics" as the true morality of life and poses this theory of ethics against the three major schools of ethical theory: the mystic, the social, and the subjective. It is Rand's idea that, with the exception of their methods of approach, these schools of ethical theory are all similar, in their focus of



altruism, which is, according to Rand, human sacrifice for the "greater good" of a mystical source of life, for society, or for man's whim of a moral standard. She believes these practices of ethics go against the nature of human survival and will eventually ruin human society.

Rand's major point in questioning what ethics are is that no one, no philosopher or scientist, has ever been able to articulate where ethics and values come from and why a person needs to adopt a particular code of values in order to survive as a human. One of the problems Rand addresses in the beginning of this chapter is that there is no such entity as "society", because a society is just a collection of individuals; therefore, due to the vague definition of ethics posed by the ancient philosophers, if the standard of good is that which is good for society, this standard of good is going to be based on the ideas of the individuals in a society who exert the most power.

Rand asserts that these same philosophers and moralists have declared that outside the realm of discussion of ethics are the ideas of reason, mind, and reality. Her thesis is based on challenging the widely accepted notions of ethics and morals as being flawed because they are not based on any sort of reason, but even more so because they go against the reality of human existence.

In very simple terms, Rand decides that the standard of value for the Objectivist is the standard of man's life, not the will of society or the will of God. In effect, one must judge what is good by that which is proper to the life of a rational being and what is evil by that which opposes or destroys a rational being.



Chapter 2, "Mental Health versus Mysticism and Self-Sacrifice", Nathaniel Branden (1963)

Chapter 2, "Mental Health versus Mysticism and Self-Sacrifice", Nathaniel Branden (1963) Summary and Analysis

In this chapter, Nathaniel Branden provides a brief discussion of mental health and claims that it is in opposition with the primary trait of the traditional idea of ethics and self-sacrifice as is discussed in the previous chapter. Throughout his lecture, he defines certain terms to help his readers understand this discussion. These include: mental health, self-esteem, reason, faith, pride, humility, sacrifice, and self-sacrifice. According to Branden, mental health is "biologically appropriate mental functioning" (p. 36). In other words, a mind is healthy if it can provide a person with the control and cognition needed to support his existence. Branden suggests that a person must possess self-esteem in order to control her reality. Here, self-esteem is "the consequence, expression, and reward of a mind fully committed to reason" (p. 36), or confidence. He defines reason as "the faculty that identifies and integrates the material provided by the senses" (p. 36). Thus, reason is what human minds use to understand their surroundings.

Branden suggests that ideas of anxiety and guilt are perpetuated in society and threaten the self-esteem of those who accept anxiety and guilt into their daily lives. He attributes this occurrence to the mystical idea of faith, here defined as "the commitment of one's consciousness to beliefs for which one has no sensory evidence or rational proof" (p. 37).

Branden continues his discussion by introducing the notion that pride is necessary for the existence of self-esteem, and notes how moralists impose guilt on people who possess pride. He defines pride as the "response to one's power to achieve values, the pleasure one takes in one's own efficacy" (p. 39). He explains that mystics decree pride as "evil" because it allows one to believe in oneself rather than in a higher, mystical being, accepted by notions of faith. On the other hand, mystics see humility as the "good", a necessary virtue to possess, here defined as a virtue obtained, not earned, by abstaining from thinking in order to have faith in a higher being. According to Branden, what the mystics and moralists ultimately want is for people to live their lives adhering to principles of self-sacrifice. He defines sacrifice as the "surrender of a higher value in favor of a lower value or of a nonvalue" (p. 40), and he equates self-sacrifice with sacrificing one's mind, one's rational cognition in favor of another value (in his terms, a lower value).



What Branden intends in this chapter is to illustrate a cause-and-effect scheme, one in which the principles of moralists and mystics threaten the mental health of the individual. According to Branden, a healthy mind is necessary for human survival. In order for a person to be mentally healthy, she must possess self-esteem, confidence, and control over her reality. The moralists and mystics threaten a person's self-esteem by subjecting him to feelings of guilt and anxiety for not adhering to principles of self-sacrifice, which go against his reasoning process and instinct of survival. The concept of faith, used often by moralists and mystics to encourage human self-sacrifice, further goes against man's survival instinct of reason because faith is the belief in something that cannot be rationally proven to exist. Thus, having faith prevents man from controlling his own reality, which will destroy his self-esteem.

It is within this scheme that Branden believes the human mind is assaulted upon, and if a person's mind is threatened, her physical being, her very life is threatened as well. Therefore, Branden's overall point is that proponents of self-sacrifice, of putting others before oneself and harboring notions of guilt and anxiety for having pride or for thinking of oneself before others, are responsible for people's neuroses. Not only does Branden want his readers to be aware of how these philosophical and moral doctrines are destructive to the human mind, but he makes a call-to-action for psychologists and psychiatrists to acknowledge that these traditional doctrines are quite possibly the major causes of mental degradation and to put a stop to this destructive path.



Chapter 3, "The Ethics of Emergencies", Ayn Rand (1963)

Chapter 3, "The Ethics of Emergencies", Ayn Rand (1963) Summary and Analysis

In this chapter, Rand contrasts the principle of good will toward fellow men in the realm of the Objectivist model of ethics with the principle of good will toward men in the realm of the altruist model of ethics. For an altruist to value another human life, he must be willing to sacrifice his one life. For an altruist, an act of good will toward another is an act of self-sacrifice. Conversely, for an Objectivist to value another human life, she must value her own life. For an Objectivist, an act of good will toward another is an act of self-interest. Rand provides different instances in which one has the option of saving another—instances of immediate starvation, poverty, illness, and emergency. In each case, she provides the method of decision for the altruist and the Objectivist.

Rand states that the altruist principle of sacrifice denotes that one should help others just because one's own life is worth less than any other life and that saving the life of a loved one is equivalent to saving the life of a complete stranger. She evaluates the principles by which the Objectivist identifies and assesses situations involving a man's non-sacrificial help to others, that a person can offer a "good" act toward another with selfish and non-selfless judgment. According to Rand, one should determine when to help another by first evaluating one's own rational self-interest and one's own hierarchy of values—for example, time, money, or effort—and the risk one is willing to give, which should be proportionate to the value of the person in relation to one's own happiness. Therefore, a man should save his wife from a burning building if he is going to be miserable in his own life if she dies. One should not save a stranger from a burning building if one risks losing one's own life and has nothing to gain personally from sacrificing oneself for a stranger.

This method of judgment, however, should only be contradicted in the event of an emergency. Rand defines emergency as the "unchosen, unexpected event, limited in time, that creates conditions under which human survival is impossible—such as a flood, an earthquake, a fire, a shipwreck" (p. 47). In this case, a person should volunteer to aid strangers not because she does not value her own life but because she values human life. However, she should still refrain from risking her own life and should not dedicate the rest of her life to helping these strangers.

Rand's thesis is that altruism has destroyed the concept of authentic benevolence among men. She believes this because altruists have created the idea that valuing another human life is an act of selflessness, which translates to Rand as having no personal interest for others. For an Objectivist to help another is an act of self-interest because it is in his interest for a person he values to be alive and healthy. She believes that people should help other people but not because of notions of obligation and duty

perpetuated by ideas of mysticism and morality based on whim. However, she does not agree with those who rebel against altruistic principles of self-sacrifice by never helping anyone, although she asserts that acts of good will should be motivated by reason and personal, rational self-interest.



Chapter 4, "The 'Conflicts' of Men's Interests", Ayn Rand (1962)

Chapter 4, "The 'Conflicts' of Men's Interests", Ayn Rand (1962) Summary and Analysis

In this chapter, Rand discusses the Objectivist principle that conflicts do not exist among rational humans. To explain this idea, Rand offers four considerations involved in a rational man's view of his interests: reality, context, responsibility, and effort. She clarifies that these considerations only apply to relationships among rational people who live in a free society. In a free society, she explains, people have the freedom to choose to only relate with rational people and to avoid irrational people. However, in a non-free society, it is impossible to pursue any rational interests.

Reality: According to Rand, a person's interests depend on the goals he chooses to pursue; however, these goals, if he is a rational thinker, must be possible to achieve. Therefore, desires, defined here as feelings, emotions, wishes, or whims, are not valid standards of value because their achievement is not based on what is "good" or moral simply because one wishes it to be so. In other words, one's interests cannot contradict the facts of reality; they must be cultivated by a process of reason, not of desire. She proposes that a rational man's process of determining his interests should be based on the Law of Identity, which simply states that A is A.

Context: A person's interest must be based on the rest of her knowledge, on her own experiences, and on her ability to view what the result of achieving her interest will have in the long run. Rand introduces the term "context-dropping" as a method in which one (an irrational person) refuses to base her interests on context. A person "context-drops" when she does not distinguish short-range goals from long-range goals; she might pursue a goal (desire) today which will conflict with her values tomorrow. People can also "context-drop" by not considering the means in which the goals must be achieved. A rational person only pursues goals that can only be achieved by her own efforts, directly or indirectly (one achieves her goals indirectly through the objective evaluation of her work by others). A rational person lives and judges long-range, and she assumes the full responsibility of knowing what conditions are necessary to achieve her goals.

Responsibility: Rand charges the commonly accepted notion "that's just the way things are" as immoral and against man's interests. In pursuing his own interests, man must never avoid the responsibility of his interests and his life because, by doing so, he avoids the responsibility of considering others' interests and lives.

Effort: One must achieve her interests by her own efforts only and not at the expense of another's loss. For example, if an employee at a particular company wishes to advance up the company ladder and obtain a managerial position, she must achieve this goal by convincing her employer through her hard work and successful completion of projects

that she would be the best choice for this managerial position. She must not attempt to achieve this goal by convincing her employer that the person already in possession of said managerial position is incompetent (or has committed an indiscretion) and thus indirectly obtain the position because she is simply next in line.

Rand's purpose of discussing the basic considerations that should be determined in one's interests is to refute the idea that conflicts of interests exist among rational people. Her entire discussion is based around a common hypothetical question: If two men apply for the same job, and only one can be hired, isn't this an instance of a conflict of interests, and isn't the benefit of one man achieved at the sacrifice of another? Her answer is no, because in this situation, reality, context, responsibility, and effort are not considered in the interest of either man. If Person 1 loses the job to Person 2, there is a specific reason, the reason of the rational employer. The other purpose of this essay is to inspire readers to understand that they must base every single interest they own; whether it be an interest of employment, physical acquisition, or love; on principles of reason, in other words, consideration of reality, context, effort, and responsibility.



Chapter 5, "Isn't Everyone Selfish?" Nathaniel Branden (1962)

Chapter 5, "Isn't Everyone Selfish?" Nathaniel Branden (1962) Summary and Analysis

Similar to the intention identified in Chapter 4 of refuting a commonly held idea, in this chapter Branden attempts to refute the notion that everyone is selfish because people only do what they really want to do. On the same note, he also refutes the notion that no one ever really sacrifices oneself because every direct action is motivated by a person's desire; thus, people *always* act selfishly. Branden asserts that these "faulty" notions are the result of intellectual confusion and that these "faulty" believers confuse the terms "selfishness" and "egoism", and "self-sacrifice" and "altruism". Furthermore, they confuse the principles behind, and the results of, selfishness with those behind, and of, self-sacrifice. Branden states that issues of selfishness versus self-sacrifice arise in an ethical context; ethics being "a code of values to guide man's choices and actions—the choices and actions that determine the purpose and course of his life" (p. 57).

Branden reintroduces Rand's idea that to be selfish is to act on principles motivated by one's self-interest. To do so, he must analyze his values and goals by employing reason, and he must outline a hierarchy of values based on the standard of his self-interest, just as he must refuse to sacrifice a higher value for a lower one. This is to be selfish. Therefore, the idea that *all* people are selfish is untrue because to be selfish is not to simply act on the basis of a desire or a whim. In another way, Branden states that determining whether an action is selfish or selfless is not by deciding whether the action was desired but why the action was desired, by what standard the action was chosen, and what goal it was meant to achieve. If one is motivated to do something because one feels like that is the right thing to do, or if one is motivated to do something by a sense of charity or duty, one is not being selfish because one is not acting on one's rational self-interest. If a person acts because she is told to, she does not question why she should do it, and she is therefore renouncing a value or goal in favor of either someone else's desire or her own desire to please. An act of this sort is not an act of selfishness. According to Branden, the notion that everyone is selfish is a fallacy. It assumes the position that all intended behavior is motivated, but it does not question the basis for this motivation. It is what lies behind the motivation that determines whether an act is selfish or not.

Aside from Branden's purpose to explicate this principle of selfishness and why not everyone is selfish, is his intention to attack certain psychologists and moralists in human society who encourage people to think that to act based on self-interests is immoral. He deems them responsible for breeding this fallacious notion that all humans are selfish because they do not consider that behavior is prompted by both psychology and ethical choice. The person who chooses to act by first considering his own



motivation *is* selfish and, according to Branden, far superior to the person who does not consider his motivation and simply acts. Whether the results of his action benefits others does not make these decisions "better" or more "moral" than the person who acts on his self-interest and also benefits others. Nor does the person who acts without reason acts selfishly because he does what he feels he wants to do.



Chapter 6, "The Psychology of Pleasure", Nathaniel Branden (1964)

Chapter 6, "The Psychology of Pleasure", Nathaniel Branden (1964) Summary and Analysis

Branden's primary assertion in this chapter is that pleasure is for humans not a luxury but a psychological need. He defines pleasure as "a metaphysical concomitant of life, the reward and consequence of successful action—just as pain is the insignia of failure, destruction, death" (p. 61). He states that the function of pleasure is to give man a sense of his own efficacy. Basically, having pleasure is enjoying life because one feels successful in the way he lives his life and because he values life and believes that life is worth living. A person's individual pleasures are determined by her values and what makes her feel like a successful being, and a person's values reflect her conscious or subconscious view of herself and of existence.

According to Branden, there are five major avenues in which people experience enjoyment of life: productive work, human relationships, recreation, art, and sex. One can find pleasure in all of these outlets as long as this pleasure is determined by one's conscious values. Branden states that in order to have pleasure, it is imperative for people to have self-esteem in all of these areas. By valuing oneself and acting confidently, a person senses one's own control over one's existence. One can then find pleasure through productive work, by challenging one's abilities, and by succeeding in whatever terms prove one's efficacy. One finds pleasure in one's relationships with others, determined by one's values of self-worth. One's chosen forms of recreation consist of activities one deems worthwhile, those which help one grow mentally and physically stronger and further prove one's efficacy. One finds pleasure in art because one celebrates the potential of human creativity and the most desirable qualities available in one's society's culture. One finds pleasure in sex as a celebration of one's romantic love, admiration, and value for another person and the desire to form a physical union with this person.

In Branden's estimation, these methods of experiencing pleasure are the rational person's desired methods because a rational person's desire for pleasure is the desire to celebrate his control over reality while a neurotic person's desire for pleasure is the desire to escape reality. He provides similar situations in which a neurotic person tries to find pleasure in escaping reality (working a mindless job that does not demand effort; developing human relationships that are not the result of value for the other person nor for oneself; choosing recreational activities that allow the mind and body to seep into unconsciousness, such as drinking alcohol or watching television) and through these instances explains that the neurotic lacks self-esteem and thus lacks the capacity to truly experience pleasure as it is defined in the beginning of this chapter.



Branden's discussion on the psychology of pleasure provides a theory for the profound happiness experienced by so many individuals in human society. His point is that humans are incapable of enjoying life and their own individual lives if they do not embrace principles of self-interest; at the forefront, the principle of self-esteem. He counters the altruistic notion that people cannot enjoy their lives if they only act on their own self-interests because joy only comes from helping others. Nevertheless, here Branden breaks down the source of pleasure and how an individual's specific pleasure is determined by the method in which he tries to achieve it. Moreover, of course the reason for this lengthy explanation is that Branden believes that humans need pleasure in order to be mentally healthy.



Chapter 7, "Doesn't Life Require Compromise?" Ayn Rand (1962)

Chapter 7, "Doesn't Life Require Compromise?" Ayn Rand (1962) Summary and Analysis

This chapter is a discussion of why the idea of compromise goes against rational, moral thinking. Rand defines compromise as "an adjustment of conflicting claims by mutual concessions" (p. 68). In other words, in a situation where two people value two different things (ideas, theories, strategies, property, etc.) based on their individual rational judgments, a "compromise" arises when each individual adjusts their principles to form one common agreement. However, this, she says, does not exist. If two people believe in two different ideas based on different values and judgments, a common agreement that will encompass each idea in their entirety will never arise. One person must give up one's ideas, and this is surrender. She uses the example of governmental policy to illustrate her point that compromise is synonymous with relinquishing one's freedom. She says that to accept only a few government controls is to surrender the principle of inalienable individual rights in favor of governmental power. Rand makes her point clearer by asking her readers if there is compromise between life and death or reason and irrationality. She states that when people talk about compromise they do not actually mean legitimate mutual concession, but instead are referring to betraying one's principles

In her discussion, Rand strives to destroy the idea that life requires compromise because, in her view, compromise is surrender; it is moral treason. It is an act of self-destruction. It is the act of conceding one's own reason in favor of another's, which is not a rational action. She believes there can be no concession between different people's moral principles and, thus, no compromise.



Chapter 8, "How Does One Lead a Rational Life in an Irrational Society?" Ayn Rand (1962)

Chapter 8, "How Does One Lead a Rational Life in an Irrational Society?" Ayn Rand (1962) Summary and Analysis

In this chapter, Rand provides her answer to the question, "How does one lead a rational life in an irrational society?" She answers that one must use one's rational, moral thinking to judge and evaluate every human or group of humans one encounters, decide what is good, and act on this decision. She begins this discussion by identifying a commonly upheld principle in Western society and declaring it "evil" and oppositional to leading a rational life. The principle is that one must never pass moral judgment on others. Conversely, she declares that to lead a rational life, one *must* always pronounce moral judgment.

Rand concedes that judgment is a difficult action and an enormous responsibility and reasons that the motivation behind moral neutrality in society occurs because people wish to abstain from this burdensome responsibility. The fear of this responsibility is best illustrated by the notion: "Judge not, that ye will be judged". However, Rand says that to follow this principle is to give up one's moral responsibility. By not judging others, for fear of being judged, one allows any person, any villain, any government, to commit evil without any sort of moral repercussion. Therefore, to not condemn an evildoer is to play a role in the doer's evil actions. The mother who chooses not to judge her child-abusive husband contributes to the abuse he gives their daughter each night. In order to make correct, moral choices, Rand proposes that one should adopt the moral principle to "judge, and be prepared to be judged" (p. 72). She donates her definition of judgment, saying that to judge means "to evaluate a given concrete by reference to an abstract principle or standard". In other words, in order to judge a real-life situation, one must use non-concrete tools, these being philosophies that one has accepted as standards of value and morality. To do so, one must perform a ruthless, objective, rational process of thought. Snap judgments based on prejudice or irrational premises are not proper judgments; as with any decision one makes using a rational process of thinking, one must always be prepared to explain one's decision and follow it with a full conscience.

While Rand concedes that human error is unavoidable, she asserts that it is necessary to understand when humans "do the wrong thing," due to honest mistake, or when their immoral action has been motivated by a premeditated act of evil. People tend to dismiss acts of evil they witness around them out of fear: fear of renouncing a loved one or a friend or a political leader they respect and fear of being on the other side of the judgment coin.



In Rand's estimation, the idea of moral neutrality that she describes in this chapter leads to an irrational society of moral cowards. She dares her readers to discard the philosophy in Western society, largely perpetuated by Judeo-Christian principles that have ruled Western values for years, that one's judgment is not superior to anyone else's. People are taught to "turn the other cheek," to walk in humility, honoring the notion that there is good and bad in everyone, and that it is impossible to know who is wrong or who is right in a particular matter. In a society ruled by religious-based principles, the idea is that there is only one true, noble, infallible judge, and that judge is God, in whatever language or estimation a people chooses to define its supreme being. Rand's point is that it is not impossible to know the truth as long as one operates rationally. In order to live, people must make choices, and Rand's purpose of writing this essay is to endorse that no choice go unmeasured. Each moment of silence in the face of evil is a choice, an immoral choice that prevents an individual from living rationally in an irrational society.



Chapter 9, "The Cult of Moral Grayness", Ayn Rand (1964)

Chapter 9, "The Cult of Moral Grayness", Ayn Rand (1964) Summary and Analysis

In this chapter, Rand discusses the tradition of moral bankruptcy in Western culture and how it is perpetuated by the "fashionable" attitude that, concerning moral issues, there are no blacks and whites, only grays. Rand calls this the "cult of moral grayness", which allows individuals in a society to shirk their responsibility to identify the good and bad in a given situation. To make meaning in her discussion, she defines "white" and "black" in this context to mean "good" and "evil". She declares it a contradiction for people to say it is wrong or narrow-minded to think in terms of black and white, because without black and white, there can be no gray, as gray is a mixture of the two colors. To define anything as gray, one has to first identify what is black and what is white. Thus, when thinking in terms of morality, one must first identify what is good and what is evil. Therefore, once a person has concluded what is good and what is evil, she cannot morally justify choosing a mixture of the two.

By accepting the idea that there is no right or wrong in a given situation, that people are wholly evil and wholly good at the same time, is not, according to Rand, a mark of open-mindedness but an willingness to discover what is right or wrong in a given situation. The person who tries to find what is right in a complex moral issue but fails or makes an honest mistake is not morally gray but morally white. On the other hand, the person who does not even try to discover the good in a moral issue but instead refuses responsibility by choosing to not be able to know because all issues are gray, is actually morally black.

By introducing this inherently evil idea of "moral grayness", Rand attempts to trump a philosophy so heavily embedded in Western culture—that thinking in terms of black and white is inherently evil. The problem is not that people do not think in terms of black and white; they do, and, according to Rand, they must. The problem is that people are encouraged to talk as though they do not, as though everything is gray. This conversation breeds uncertainty and confusion among people to the point where they cannot distinguish between good and bad because they are paralyzed into thinking it would be wrong to do so. The fact that there may rightly be two sides to every story does not mean that both sides are equally right, or equally wrong; it means that one must try to discern the right side, if there is one, and act accordingly.



Chapter 10, "Collectivized Ethics," Ayn Rand (1963)

Chapter 10, "Collectivized Ethics," Ayn Rand (1963) Summary and Analysis

This chapter's focus is on the negative aspects of a "collectivized ethics". The notion of collectivism presupposes that one is required to live for the benefit of a collective whole, such as a society. Under this system, certain policies are decreed as beneficial for the majority and are to be carried out at the expense of other individuals. It is by this principle that public projects are instituted within a society, such as public health-care systems, welfare programs, and public parks. The ends of these projects are the benefits they provide to the majority; the means by which these projects are carried out are those produced by individuals through money, labor, and other means. Rand opposes the idea of collectivized ethics because it devalues individuals in a given society. She believes it to be immoral to use individuals as the means to an end, no matter how "altruistic" the proposed end may be.

Rand believes that it is fine for an individual to provide his services to help others as long as he operates using his own rational and moral volition. What is not fine is for a person in power to force individuals to give of themselves to benefit other members of society, even those in desperate need. The problem with devising public goals, to be supported by the public, is that these goals discount the contexts in which they are to be achieved. They discount exactly who will benefit from these public projects, exactly who must provide the necessary materials and efforts to complete them, and for exactly what purpose. Furthermore, Rand declares that in no situation will *every* individual benefit from a specific public project; therefore, the approach of collectivized ethics asserts that some human lives are more valuable than others.

Rand demonstrates her intense revulsion toward collectivism, and more specifically, toward communism, a collectivist system that forces individuals to sacrifice their own interests for the good of the state. She reasons that in this type of system people are stripped of free will, and by living for a group of people, individuals are ultimately headed toward a path of self-destruction. This chapter will possibly confuse readers even more so than the previous chapters in this collection. Rand basically vies for a system in which public projects—those concerning health care, science, environment, welfare, education, etc.—should never be forced upon individuals in a society. While she recognizes that these types of public projects are needed for a society to progress and for individuals to experience happiness, she argues that these ends should only be achieved by individuals who are willing to donate their own financial and physical support to these projects. This approach to public works is only possible in a capitalist society, Rand states, because it is the only system where men are free to produce and



compete, and where progress is accompanied by a constant rise in the general level of prosperity, consumption, and enjoyment of life.

Readers might argue that if people are not forced to contribute to the effort of public works by paying taxes or similar contributions, these works would never be realized, and society would fail without healthy systems of public education, public health care, and public institutions where scientific and technological advances are created. Rand's response is that if it is in one's interest to promote these public programs, he will do it by his own volition because his rational mind tells him to and not because a political organization forces him to.



Chapter 11, "The Monument Builders," Ayn Rand (1962)

Chapter 11, "The Monument Builders," Ayn Rand (1962) Summary and Analysis

The focus of this chapter is on the ideological theory of socialism and the highly negative effect socialism has had on all nations that have tried to practice it as an economic system. Here Rand aims to destroy any idea that socialism is a political theory motivated by benevolence and aimed to achieve people's well being. Rand describes socialism as a political theory in which individuals are denied property rights; instead, the right to property (the right of use and disposal of property) is vested in society as a whole, and the production and distribution of property is controlled by the state. The fact that socialism is based on denying individuals their right to property cannot be based on benevolent ideals because denying people their right to property is synonymous with denying them their right to life.

She goes on to describe how the enactment of socialism has contributed to the torture and destruction of individuals and to the general economic and social destruction of nations by using examples of nations that have been governed by socialist principles. Rand explicates that socialism may be established by force or by vote. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics established socialism by force, and National Socialist (Nazi) Germany established socialism by vote. The degree in which socialism is practiced can be total, as in Soviet Russia, or it can be partial, as in England. Allegedly, the goals of socialism were to end poverty and to achieve general prosperity, progress, peace, and human brotherhood. However, Rand describes how the results of socialist governments have been the exact opposite of these alleged goals and, furthermore, how a system based on denying individuals property rights and distributing wealth at the whim of society is contrary to providing prosperity, progress, and human brotherhood to a group of individuals.

Following her argument as to why socialist practices have been employed under false pretenses, Rand provides her theory as to the true motivations behind socialist practices. First, socialism is not a movement of the people but a movement of intellectuals, and these intellectuals are motivated by "power-lust", defined here as "a manifestation of helplessness, of self-loathing and of the desire for the unearned" (p. 88). The "unearned" in this case is twofold: the unearned in concrete profit and the unearned in "spirit", by which she means to say one's consciousness. In other words, these intellectuals seek political power by gaining monetary profit after they have "equally" distributed wealth among people and then by gaining the prestige of being supposed benevolent rulers who have solved social and economic inequities and should thus be honored and worshipped by their subjects. It is at this point in Rand's argument where she gives reason for titling this essay, "The Monument Builders".



Socialist rulers have attempted to achieve greatness by building public monuments, using public funds to produce a token of their efforts to fix poverty and human suffering. Her examples of such public monuments include coliseums in Rome, Louis XIV's exorbitant erection of the palace of Versailles, and the marble-lined Moscow subway. In contrast, Rand discusses how American monuments have generally been modest in construction and cost and built, not for the purpose of prestige, but as markers of great historical importance. Furthermore, America's greatness, which can only be achieved by the productive effort of a person's mind in the pursuit of clearly defined, rational goals, lies in the fact that its monuments have been private and not public achievements.

Here is where she deems capitalism to be the superior, truly ethical, and benevolent economic system. In practice, socialism has proved wholly fallacious and unjust. After all, erecting expensive, unnecessary monuments using public funds under a system in which individuals are denied the right to use their own earnings as they desire but are instead to trust their government to redistribute everyone's funds as the government desires makes no sense. In the examples of Soviet Russia and East Germany, nations that still experienced intense poverty even after the deployment of a socialist system, the government used money needed by the individuals for food and productive living instead to erect lavish monuments. Rand points out that these constructions of public monuments are not isolated examples but have been practiced in every nation driven by socialism with the same goal of prestige. Prestige has always been used as a psychological tool to persuade individuals to believe in the ideology of socialist theory, individuals who would otherwise realize that the entire theory is irrational.

In order to fully understand the meaning of this essay, it is important to understand the context and time period in which it was written. In 1962, the year Rand wrote this essay, less than two decades after World War II ended and the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union had begun, the theories of Communism and socialist economics were subjects of high dispute between proponents and opponents of these theories. Rand, who witnessed the rise of communism in Russia, fervently denounced the theory in ideology and in practice. Witnessing the destructive results the practices of communism and socialist economics had on the countries in which they were practiced, Rand has no sympathy for the creators or believers in socialist theory. Historically, socialist economic planning came about as a reaction to modern industrial capitalism. The planning was proposed as an alternative to letting prices and production be determined by the market through supply and demand. The proponents of socialism thought this system would end class inequalities and poverty by eliminating monopolies, business cycles, and unemployment, all necessary aspects of capitalism. While many advocates of socialism claim that these governments failed during the nineteenth century because of flawed practice of an ideal theory, Rand believes that the entire theory is corrupt and not ideal. This is the major meaning of this essay. Her point is not that socialist theory was not executed properly, but that its core premise of eliminating property rights eliminates human rights. If one is denied the right to the material property one has created using one's mind and effort, one is denied the right to own one's own life.



Chapter 12, "Man's Rights", Ayn Rand (1963)

Chapter 12, "Man's Rights", Ayn Rand (1963) Summary and Analysis

This chapter is a conversation on the notion of rights as they pertain to individuals and that a truly free society must be founded on the principle of individuals' rights. To begin, Rand defines rights as a moral principle, one based on principles that guide an individual's actions and that denote proper social relationships between individuals in a society. In essence, a right is the freedom of action, and in a moral society, men are to live by upholding one another's freedom of action. She says, "individual rights are the means of subordinating society to moral law". In other words, moral law in society is created with the sole purpose of upholding individuals' rights. A free society cannot stand above moral law, which it has historically exhibited in nations led by a collectivist code of ethics that decreed that individuals must live and work for the good of society. Examples of societies that exhibited this collectivist system include the theocracy of ancient Egypt; the democracy, led by majority rule, in ancient Greece; the empire of Rome; the absolute monarchy of Western European countries; and, the socialist and communist governments in Eastern Europe and Asia. According to Rand, the United States of America was the first nation to devise a moral law in which society was subordinated to the individual rights of people. In doing so, it was the first human society to directly limit the power of the state and, thus, was the first moral society in history.

It is imperative to understand that the source of rights is human nature order to fully understand the concept of rights. Rights do not come from an outside or mystical source, but are an innate part of human survival; and, if a society denies an individual any rights, it denies humans a part of their life, a means of their survival. Rand discusses the Declaration of Independence, created by the United States government in order to establish a foundation of principles that a free nation must adhere to in order to maintain human rights. Each principle expounded on the idea that a man is entitled to the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Rand also discusses how political theory in the United States became convoluted and corrupted by altruistic, socialistic thinkers who began to discuss rights in terms of rights to objects instead of rights to action. She turns her focus specifically to the Democratic Party platform of 1960 in which the party attempted to create an economic bill of rights that asserted that individuals were entitled to objects such as housing, good health, good education, employment, and material wealth. Rand declares that no individual has the right to property or good health, only the freedom to pursue property and good health and all the means to sustain his life. A government cannot guarantee anything to an individual except the freedom to live.



Rand's idea of rights is basic, yet revolutionary at the same time because it discusses rights only in terms of individual human rights. The idea that a government has no rights, that it is only an entity created by individuals in order to maintain the rights of individuals, is one not often discussed by governments because it takes power away from the government. It is a popular theory that governments were set up because individuals could not govern themselves, and because a smaller, more intelligent group of people knew better than the majority of the people. However, a government is a necessary function in a free society because it protects individuals from those individuals who use force to build a power that will destroy people's rights, people's freedoms.



Chapter 13, "Collectivized 'Rights'", Ayn Rand (1963)

Chapter 13, "Collectivized 'Rights'", Ayn Rand (1963) Summary and Analysis

In this chapter, Rand argues with the notion of collectivized rights. She asserts that societies must operate using a moral code. A society needs to devise moral principles to organize a system in which people choose the right goals and the right methods to achieve them. Just as an individual needs a moral code in order to survive, so too does a society. However, unlike individuals who have rights, societies do not have rights. They are merely entities comprised of individual people. The idea of collectivized rights is the idea that rights belong to groups and not to individuals. Therefore, it is the idea that rights belong to some individuals and not to others and that these privileged few have the right to deny the rights of others.

In a free society, for a collective group to operate morally, it must be freely formed, and it must derive rights from the individual choices and contractual agreement of its members. Every decision made by the group itself—the society, an association, etc.—must be based on the members' rights of free association and free trade. The principle of individual rights is the only moral base of all collective groups. Thus, by joining a group, be it a political party, a business association, or a university association, members can neither acquire new rights they do not possess nor lose any rights they do possess.

Rand centralizes her focus on collectivized rights as they pertain to national rights. A nation has only the right to protect the rights of its individual citizens. Thus, a nation is not a ruler but a servant to its citizens. A free nation has the right to its sovereignty and a right to demand that its sovereignty be respected by all other nations. However, a nation can only demand this sovereignty if it protects the rights of its citizens. A dictatorship, which imposes laws of force and denies the natural rights to its citizens, should not be respected by other free nations.

In this essay, Rand continues her discussion of individuals' rights in Chapter 12. Here she focuses on the nature of rights in terms of collective groups, specifically nations. She attacks the liberals (in American society during the early 1960s) who uphold the idea of internationalism versus nationalism. These liberals believe countries have their own rights to govern their nations freely, even if they govern their nations using tyrannical means, and no nation has the right to invade another nation based on differing views of government practices. It is this idea that Rand protests in her essay, stating that nations that are not free and do not honor the rights of their citizens have no rights and, conversely, that free societies do have the right to invade countries that do not operate morally. Rand blames the political left with allowing tyrannical societies to function under the false premise that they do in fact have rights. Her attack on liberals is



based more in generalizations and accusations than on concrete examples or hard facts. Her distaste for politically "liberal" thinkers in American society during this time is readily apparent. She criticizes their rationality and their morality by upholding political platforms that call for an expansion of government's rights over its citizens.



Chapter 14, "The Nature of Government", Ayn Rand (1963)

Chapter 14, "The Nature of Government", Ayn Rand (1963) Summary and Analysis

In this chapter, Rand discusses the nature of government, what a government in a free society should look like, and why government is necessary to maintain a free society. She defines government as "an institution that holds exclusive power to enforce certain rules of social conduct in a given geographical area" (p. 107). According to Rand, humans need government if they are to live in a society, and it is beneficial for individuals to live in a society because it is more conducive to successful survival to live in a social environment rather than in solitude. The two great benefits one can gain from social existence are knowledge and trade. The knowledge potentially available to humans is greater than any one person can acquire in one's own lifetime. Thus, one has a greater potential to gain more knowledge by interacting with others. The other great benefit a person gains from living in a society is division of labor. By not having to produce everything one needs by oneself, one is able to specialize in one specific skill and benefit from the knowledge and trade of others. However, the success of any social system is dependent upon the contributions of rational, productive, and independent people in a rational, productive, and free society. Therefore, if a society attempts to enslave its people or to enforce certain laws or restrictions that prevent its people from operating rationally, productively, or independently, the society becomes a threat to human existence.

Rand returns to her focus of chapters 12 and 13, restating that a moral, civilized society must be based on the social principle of individuals' rights. According to Rand, individuals' rights can only be violated by the use of physical force. The precondition to a moral, civilized society is the prohibition of the use of physical force against another. People must only relate to others by means of reason, through discussion, persuasion, and voluntary agreement. The only time one should be allowed to use physical force is as a method of retaliation, such as self-defense. However, the terms of appropriate retaliatory measures must be strictly defined in every society. Society must provide an organized protection against force: the use of retaliatory physical force cannot be left to the discretion of individual citizens. Furthermore, the society must construct an objective code of rules to define and measure crimes and establish appropriate, ethical consequences for crimes committed. This is the purpose of government and one of the most important reasons that individuals need government in order to peacefully coexist with others.

Rand goes on to distinguish private actions from governmental actions. In order for individuals to maintain their freedom in a society, the government must be controlled and held to its limits of power. An individual possesses the legal freedom to do as he



pleases as long as he does not violate anyone else's rights. A government official, however, is bound by law in every action. Another important function that belongs to government is to mediate disputes that arise between individual citizens or groups of people, according to objective laws. The purpose of government is to make social existence possible to all people by protecting the benefits and combating the evils that men are capable of causing one another. The major functions of government are dispersed into three broad categories, all with the intention of protecting individuals' rights: the police, the armed services, and the law courts. The successful, proper implementation of these governmental functions is dependent on complex issues of political science and on the philosophy of law.

When a government fails in its function to protect individuals' rights, it ceases to be a government and descends into a tyrannical state or dictatorship. Despite the incidence of this moral dissension of governments, Rand poses that the essence of government itself is not inherently evil, as some victims of oppressive governments claim, and that a moral alternative is not anarchy—the absence of government altogether. A society void of government produces the possibility of total human immorality and the allowance of unarbitrated, unpunishable physical force. Rand also discusses a variant of anarchistic theory, the notion of "competing governments", in which multiple, different governments coexist in the same geographical area and compete for the allegiance of individual citizens. She says that this notion is absurd and illogical and completely distorts the ideas of government and competition.

According to Rand, the proper functions of government have only been realized within the last couple of centuries, with the American Revolution. In response to the severe violation of human rights exhibited by the British government, the Founding Fathers devised a careful plan to prevent a government from violating the rights of citizens. The American Constitution is a document that does not restrict the rights of individuals by the rights of individuals' government. The American system of checks and balances, for the first time in history, set up limits to restrict a government's power over its citizens.

The purpose of this essay is to establish the necessity and purpose of government. Rand illustrates the ideal nature of government but focuses her discussion to a portrayal of how most governments in the history of human civilization have failed to achieve their basic functions. In her view, governments have been abused as tools to manipulate and harm citizens rather than protect them. Rand upholds the United States' government as the most ideal political system, which many in today's world would disagree with, based on instances in modern American society where constitutional rights have been increasingly violated, political officials have gained more and more power, and the government itself has become less restricted. Still, it is important to understand that Rand is discussing America up to the 1960s, four decades before increasing instances of terrorism and increased warfare with other nations.



Chapter 15, "Government Financing in a Free Society", Ayn Rand (1964)

Chapter 15, "Government Financing in a Free Society", Ayn Rand (1964) Summary and Analysis

In this chapter, Rand theorizes how a government should finance itself in a free society. She deems that imposing mandatory taxation laws goes against the ideal nature of government because it is an initiation of force. Rand believes taxation, the payment to a government in exchange for its services, should always be voluntary in a free society. Because it is in the best interests for individuals to have a government that provides services dependent on the society's survival—the police, the armed forces, and the law courts—individuals would supply the funds for these services. According to her theory, only the abler members of society, the ones financially capable of paying taxes, would contribute to government services, and those unable to financially contribute would simply benefit from the services maintained by others but would not be provided with any extra, special treatment. In other words, the poorer members of society would not be awarded for their inability to pay taxes, but they would not be penalized either.

Rand admits that this is not an easy theory to practice; she concedes that the proper implementation of voluntary government financing must be thoroughly researched and planned in the realm of the philosophy of law and political science. She also does not propose that there is one proper method of implementing voluntary government financing, but she offers some possible approaches to the problem, such as a government lottery or paying for insurance for a government to enforce legal contracts.

In her view, present society is not ready for a system of voluntary government financing because it has not figured out how to do so successfully. However, voluntary government financing should be a distant goal, achieved by a gradual process. For this goal to be realized, the advocates of a free society must be aware that the principle of voluntary government financing is the idea that the government does not own its citizens' income and should not be paid simply because it is the government, but because it provides services.

Rand's argument for voluntary government taxation is based on an ideal theory, her ideal theory that mandatory taxation is evil because it places the government ahead of its citizens and does not allow its citizens to operate freely. She does not, however, propose concrete methods on how this system can be achieved but simply states that it is for the political theorists to puzzle out. More importantly, she does not provide examples as to how this system could fail. Moreover, even though a system of voluntary government financing has never been enacted in any society, she does not even suggest that it could fail. She simply states that rational citizens will realize that they need certain government services and will voluntarily pay for them, and only those who can afford to finance the government will have to provide the necessary funds to do so.



In her argument, she does not allow the possibility that not enough men would offer the necessary funds or that a government might favor those citizens who did pay taxes over those who didn't. She does not factor in how political platforms would be influenced by the wishes of the taxpayers over those who simply benefited from the payment of others. Rand's proposition of voluntary government financing is worthy of discussion, but her argument is weak and unclear.



Chapter 16, "The Divine Right of Stagnation", Nathaniel Branden (1963)

Chapter 16, "The Divine Right of Stagnation", Nathaniel Branden (1963) Summary and Analysis

In this chapter, Branden discusses humans' need to grow and develop in order to survive as a race. Whereas in animals, maturity stops at physical growth, humans have the ability to grow and develop rationally and intellectually even after they have ceased their physical growth. Humans must meet the challenges of existence by never ceasing to invent, create, and improve upon their inventions and creations. One must exert one's efforts to improve upon one's conditions throughout one's entire lifetime, and peoples must exert their efforts to improve upon the conditions of all humans throughout the entirety of human existence.

Branden expands his discussion to industry. He believes that the necessity for humans to progress demands that their industries change. For example, when new machines are invented that provide a service—one once conducted by human labor—more successfully and efficiently than humans were ever able to deliver, then the human labor for this particular service is no longer needed and these people must move on to provide other forms of labor that machines have not yet been invented to perform. This situation forces these particular laborers out of work. Branden asserts that to permit humans to work in industries where their services are not needed or to help an independent business sustain itself in the face of expansive corporate businesses that provide the same services at a cheaper, more efficient rate is immoral, goes against the principles of a free society, and perpetuates an existence of stagnation.



Chapter 17, "Racism", Ayn Rand (1963)

Chapter 17, "Racism", Ayn Rand (1963) Summary and Analysis

In this chapter, Rand centers her discussion of racism on the idea that racism is an immoral notion bred by collectivist thinking. She follows her analysis of racism and why it is a belief based on immoral, irrational behavior with a discussion on how the United States' government corrected racist thought and practice by implementing a government based on individuals' rights and a capitalist economic system. She then discusses how a new trend has resurfaced ("new" applying to the time Rand is writing this essay, in 1963) in the United States, which is trying to legalize racist ideology once again with the introduction of a civil rights bill (The Civil Rights Bill of 1964).

According to Rand, racism is "the notion of ascribing moral, social or political significance to a man's genetic lineage" (p. 126). In other words, racism is the judgment of individuals based on the genetic and biological makeup of their ancestors. When a person is judged on racist terms, character, intellect, and potential are not evaluated by his own individual actions but by the qualities of his ancestors, dating back to the dawn of human civilization. This practice is not only unethical but also irrational; it presupposes that humans are not driven by reason or choice but by inherited genetics, something no human can control. Rand asserts that all individuals are different and that their actions have nothing to do with chemistry or biology but only with how they use their ability to think and act. Therefore, if a particular race consists of largely unintelligent humans whose behaviors are motivated by irrational thinking (judged subjectively, of course); an individual member of that race should not be automatically marked as unintelligent because the majority of the group functions irrationally. The individual must only be judged on his own actions. This principle works both ways. Just because ancient Greece produced a myriad of intelligent, philosophical thinkers does not mean all Greeks were intellectually superior. Each individual in every situation must be judged independently.

Rand blames the incidence of racism with the psychological notion that causes men to feel inferior. By deeming their race superior to others, they are able to preserve their superiority and to generally discriminate against entire groups of people. She also blames the incidence of racism on collectivist ideas, particularly the "quest for the unearned" (see the summary and analysis of Chapter 11). By relying on racist beliefs, one attempts to earn the automatic knowledge of all individuals based on the race to which they belong. Rand believes that racism exists largely among people who have not acquired individual distinction or merit based on achievement but still try to claim distinction and superiority based on the achievements of other members of their race.

The only cure of racism, according to Rand, is the philosophy of individualism and the political-economic system of laissez-faire capitalism. She explains that under laissez-faire capitalism, people are judged only on their ability to produce, not on the productive



trends of their ancestors, and are awarded accordingly. Thus, capitalism is the only system that rewards rationality and punishes all forms of irrationality, including racism. It is under a capitalist system that slavery and serfdom were abolished in favor of free trade. Slavery ended in the United States because the capitalist North prevailed over the economic system, based on slavery, of the agrarian-feudal South.

In the modern free world, governments have tried to correct political and economic policies of racism by eliminating race as a legal factor of consideration in regard to employment, entry into political office, and acceptance into institutions of higher education. However, Rand discusses the modern trend, limiting her discussion to the United States, to reintroduce racist policy by giving members of races that were formerly discriminated against—using as her largest example the African-American race—privilege over the race that formerly discriminated against them: the white race. She deems this practice indistinguishable from other forms of racism. Rand indignantly criticizes the civil rights bill, which was introduced in 1963 then passed in 1964, after she wrote this essay. She claims that the bill infringes on individuals' rights and property rights because it forbids discrimination in privately owned establishments. While she says that discrimination should be forbidden in government-owned establishments because the government has no right to discriminate against its citizens, the government has no right to forbid discrimination in privately owned establishments because it has no right to violate the property rights of its citizens. Rand asserts that private racism is distinct from governmental racism because it is not a legal but rather a moral issue and should be combated by private means, such as economic boycotts or social ostracism, but not by laws or constitutional bills.

Rand's discussion of racism is very clear, well-thought out, and consistent with her philosophies of individualism, man's rights, the nature of government, and rationalism. While she spends a great deal of this essay analyzing the causes and effects of racism among individuals and governments, the purpose of her essay is more to address the modern notion of counter-racism (just another term for racism) introduced in the United States during the early 1960s. She writes at great length about how policies proposed (and later enacted) by President John F. Kennedy and later Lyndon B. Johnson violate the individual's rights because they forbid racism in private establishments. She believes that no government can tell a private business owner to whom they are allowed to serve. Though immoral and irrational, an individual is free to discriminate against others and act on racist ideas, as long as he does not violate another's rights. Thus, he cannot use physical force against another or take property away from another. Her view might come off as wholly confusing to her readers, but it is important to understand that Rand holds individual rights above collectivist rights. The government has no right to uphold racist policies and must condemn them but only in public institutions or in situations where an individual is violating another's right to life.

What bothers Rand is that the victims of historical discrimination and oppression, the African-Americans, are now proposing inherently racist doctrines, specifically quotas in the workplace, in the political sphere and in education. Today, Rand would certainly be appalled with the introduction of the policy of affirmative action in the early 1990s and the proposition to pay reparations to individuals of African-American heritage for the



damage caused to their ancestors by the white race for centuries in the United States. Undoubtedly, Rand would assume that the United States has evolved into an even more racist society since its attempt to end racism by removing race as a criterion of employment or evaluation of character during her lifetime. Interestingly, at the end of this essay, Rand warns her readers not to succumb to racism in response to the new racial ordinances created by the African-American leaders and the "liberal" white leaders. She says to not "hold against all Negroes the disgraceful irrationality of some of their leaders. No group has any proper intellectual leadership today or any proper representation (p. 134)."



Chapter 18, "Counterfeit Individualism", Nathaniel Branden (1962)

Chapter 18, "Counterfeit Individualism", Nathaniel Branden (1962) Summary and Analysis

In this chapter, Branden defines individualism, according to the philosophy constructed by Rand, in order to explain what individualism is not. The bulk of this essay is dedicated to the proper means of identifying what does not constitute an individual. He notes that individualism is a concept of ethics and politics and simultaneously a concept of ethics and psychology. In the realm of ethics and politics, individualism upholds the supremacy of individuals' rights. In the realm of ethics and psychology, individualism upholds the principle that humans should think and judge independently, valuing their own intellect above all else.

Basically, an individual lives for his own sake, making decisions using the reason of his own mind. An individual is not simply one who does not live for the collective. Branden states that many people incorrectly define individualism as the action of not conforming to the standard actions or ideas of the group. However, this is a false summary of the Objectivist idea of individualism because it allows for the idea that an individualist is someone who operates on his own whims or desires just for the sake of doing the opposite of a collective. Branden says that the principle of acting on whims is not individualism but rather subjectivism. Just as saying that what a collective chooses to do is good because the collective says so; it is equally irrational for a person to say, "What I choose to do is good because I say so". An individualist must justify her actions with reason, and she must use her knowledge of life and reality to formulate rational conclusions.

It is necessary to understand how individualism is defined because it is the central component of the theory of Objectivism. What many critics of Rand's Objectivism and her principle of the virtue of selfishness criticize the most is that her philosophy allows that individual persons may do whatever they like regardless of how their actions will affect others. This idea completely contradicts Rand's theory of individualism, and it is this very idea of collectivism that she despises because it allows groups to act based on the decisions of some regardless to how their actions will affect all individuals. For this reason, Branden clarifies what Objectivists mean when they speak of individualism.



Chapter 19, "The Argument from Intimidation", Ayn Rand (1964)

Chapter 19, "The Argument from Intimidation", Ayn Rand (1964) Summary and Analysis

In this final chapter, Rand discusses a type of irrational argument that is often used in modern society to end any kind of debate between individuals. She labels this particular argument the Argument from Intimidation. To define this argument, she relates it to the fallacy *ad hominem*. *Ad hominem* is used to refute an argument by attacking the moral character of the person making the argument. For example, a person using *ad hominem* would say something to the effect that "X is immoral; therefore, his argument is false". More descriptively, because Senator A cheated on his wife, his argument that the new tax legislation is flawed is false. This form of debate is fallacious because it does not follow a logical pattern. The senator's character has nothing to do with his ideas about the new tax legislation. One must judge the senator's argument based solely on his reasoning, and not on his moral character. Rand's Argument from Intimidation stems from the same psychological root as *ad hominem* but works in the opposite direction. It is a psychological pressure-method of attacking an individual's moral character based on his arguments. With the fallacy of *ad hominem*, a person's immorality is provided as proof that his argument is false. With the Argument from Intimidation, however, the supposed falsity of his argument is provided as proof of his immorality.

Those who implement the Argument from Intimidation in matters of debate attempt to persuade others in a particular direction by instigating feelings of guilt, fear, and ignorance. While the application of *ad hominem* appeals to people's feelings and prejudices, the application of the Argument of Intimidation appeals to people's moral self-doubt. Rand explains that this method of persuasion often takes the pattern: only those who are (insert immoral quality) would agree to this idea.

Rand illustrates the Argument from Intimidation by recalling the story of "The Emperor's New Clothes". In this story, some charlatans convince an emperor to buy nonexistent clothes under the premise that the clothes are so magnificent in their splendid beauty that only those who are morally depraved cannot see them. For fear of being branded as morally depraved, the emperor buys the "clothes" and doubts his own logic and reason, which should tell him that he is not wearing any clothes. Rand explains that the reason why the Argument of Intimidation works so successfully is that it appeals to the biggest social fear of disapproval. She claims that the psychological source of this argument is social metaphysics. In her view, social metaphysics is the practice of regarding the consciousness of other men to be superior to one's own consciousness and of the facts of reality. The social metaphysician is concerned more with meeting the approval of his peers than with seeking the truth of an argument. Thus, he will readily



cease to promote an idea he conceived of by using reason and evidence if he fears the group will not like him because of this idea.

Those who debate using the Argument of Intimidation are unable to supply facts and reasons for their justifications but only circular, fallacious logic, such as X is wrong because he is. Rand believes that most political debates consist of mainly smears, apologies, intimidation, and appeasement, all qualities belonging to the Argument of Intimidation. They are derogatory assertions void of evidence or proof. She states that this argument does not actually consist of introducing moral judgment into intellectual issues but instead of the substitution of moral judgment for intellectual argument. While Rand does believe that moral judgment should be taken into account when evaluating someone's argument, the judgment should be made only using reason.

This essay serves as a warning for individuals to be aware of this type of argument so present in modern (and past) culture. By being able to identify this method of fallacious argument by name, people can more easily avoid debate of this kind.



Characters

Nathaniel Branden

John Galt

Aristotle

Friedrich Nietzsche



Objects/Places

Atlas Shrugged

This was Rand's last work of fiction, published in 1957. In this work, Rand applies her theory of Objectivism and creates a world that illustrates what she believed should be the role of a person's mind in society. Her notion of the ideal man is depicted in the novel's heroic protagonist, John Galt. The novel is set in America during a period where the industrialists rebel against the collective resentment toward them by going on strike and retreating to a hideaway in the mountains. As a result, American society and economy begins to collapse, and the government perpetuates this collapse by increasing its controls over industry and the people. The plot is simply a means for Rand to convey her political and philosophical ideas. She illustrates how a collectivist society destroys the individual by stifling his progression, forcing him to live for the benefit of a group rather than for his own interests. Rand refers to *Atlas Shrugged* throughout *The Virtue of Selfishness* to provide concrete examples, though fictional, for her abstract ideas.

Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Soviet Russia)

Soviet Russia is Rand's birthplace. Her extremely negative views toward this country are based on her experiences in living there after the Communists took over and controlled the way people lived. As a result, she rejected all forms of collective governments and adopted principles that upheld the individual's right to live and produce independent of government control. Throughout this book, Rand uses Soviet Russia as the example of the most evil form of government and society and portrays the atrocities and crimes perpetuated by the Soviet leaders in the name of the collective.

Nazi Germany

Nazi Germany is another nation Rand refers to throughout *The Virtue of Selfishness* to demonstrate the results of societies based on political and economic systems that uphold the society over the individual. She explains that these socialist systems were adopted in Germany by vote rather than by force, like what happened in Russia; even so, the people's rights were heavily violated and denied. Nazi Germany is Rand's most extreme example of how societies that do not promote individuals' right and independent existence will only lead to the total destruction of their citizens and to the total destruction of the societies themselves.

United States

This is the country where Rand sought refuge after fleeing Soviet Russia. In her youth, she was fascinated by American history and believed that America's Founding Fathers



created the most ideal form of government and society, that which promoted capitalism, democracy, and the rights of individuals. It was the first nation to draw up a bill of rights which outlined humans' natural rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and which subordinated the government to the individual. In her view, America was the first country to declare that government should only function to protect its citizens' rights and not to control them. Throughout this book, Rand praises the United States for being a nation of freedom and believes it represents the most ideal society in terms of Objectivism. However, during the 1960s, Rand would witness the U.S. government exerting more control over its citizens and warns her readers that the U.S. is veering toward collectivist principles and could experience the fate of Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany.

Communism

Communism is a social theory that advocates the elimination of private property. In this system, the commonwealth owns all goods, and the society provides individuals with what it deems they need. Rand fervently rejects this system as an ethical system throughout this book. She presents concepts and situations that explain why this type of system contradicts the natural reality that a person possesses the right to his own life. Furthermore, she describes how this system has never worked successfully in societies that have practiced it because it stifles production and progression and forces its citizens into poverty, degradation, and virtual slavery.

Socialism

Rand discusses how socialism is the economic application of communist theory, and how in this system, the goods produced by individuals are seized by the government and redistributed to the people. The government controls production and the (supposedly equal) distribution of wealth. Again, there is no private property: all property is own by the state. Rand discusses socialism extensively in this book and asserts that it is evil both in practice and in ideology.

Capitalism

Capitalism is an economic system characterized by private or corporate ownership of property. Rand discusses how in this system, individuals determine the production and distribution of goods within the society by investing and competing in the free market. Individuals can only obtain wealth independently, and prices of products are not determined by the government but by competition. Rand ardently supports capitalism and deems it the only virtuous economic system for a free society to practice. Though the United States has never operated on a completely capitalist system, she praises the U.S. for its largely capitalist principles. She believes that not only is capitalism the most ethical economic system but it is the most rational and the most successful.

Altruism

Rand despises altruism in all forms throughout this book, and views it as the enemy of individualism. Altruism is the principle of acting for the benefit of others over oneself even if benefiting the collective impedes the success and survival of the individual. Rand believes altruism to be contradictory to the natural existence of individual humans, and thus is irrational and immoral.

Religion

Rand does not delve too heavily in religious doctrines, but merely declares religion to be synonymous with collectivism in basic principles. She believes the notion of conducting one's life according to the divinity of nonexistent beings contradicts reality and functions as a manipulation of individuals. People are told to worship deities based on the principle of faith and are thus instructed to make their decisions on the basis of blind, irrational submission. Like altruism and communism, religion contradicts the idea of human survival.

Civil Rights Act of 1964

When Rand discusses racism in *The Virtue of Selfishness*, she asserts that the government should only forbid racism in public institutions because all governments should denounce the practice of racism. However, she declares it is a violation of individual rights for the government to forbid racism in privately-owned establishments. She opposed the Civil Rights Act because the bill states that private facilities cannot refuse services to patrons based on race, creed, religion, sex, etc. Rand believes this section to be a violation of property rights, which is a violation against individuals' rights; therefore, she decides that the entire bill is immoral and fears the effect of its passage on the United States. Her opposition toward this bill, what few today would argue was an immoral document, demonstrates the extreme nature with which Rand supports or opposes ideas in this work.



Themes

Individualism

The foundation of the ethical theory of Objectivism described and explained by Rand and Branden in this book is the individual. When searching for the "meaning of life" Rand had to look no further than the self. She believes that the survival of the human race demands the survival of individual humans. Therefore, a human must live using her own mind to guide her actions. Such is the principle of individualism. While Rand concedes that humans are social animals and their chances for survival are greater as individuals if they live in a society with other humans, they must still uphold the principle of individualism. According to Objectivism, people can exist employing their own self-interests while simultaneously acknowledging and respecting the rights of others to exist by employing their own self-interests. Individuals can care for others and learn from others while always maintaining individualism and never surrendering their self-interests to the interests of others.

Throughout *The Virtue of Selfishness*, Rand and Branden promote individualism as the only virtuous method of existence and they denounce collectivism, which they view as the only alternative to individualism. Collectivism demands that individuals must live relying on the interests of others to guide their actions. This principle proposes that the meaning of life can only be discovered—not in nature and not in the self—but only in the group.

Reason vs. Whim

Rand and Branden assert the position that to live a virtuous life, individuals must always use reason to make decisions and analyze situations. When adopting values, individuals must ask themselves: Why is this a value? They must be able to answer this question, extracting the answer from their own minds. The employment of reason is imperative to every decision and action. Even in terms of pleasure, people must be able to provide reason for liking an art form or loving another individual. Without reason one has no control over one's reality, and one cannot live successfully without this control.

All of the doctrines portrayed to be immoral in this book such as communism, racism, and altruism, are all deemed irrational because they are all fundamentally irrational. Communism asserts the collective to be superior to the individual. Why? Why are some men deemed more superior to others? Racism is an irrational doctrine because it supposes that an individual's mind is determined by his ancestral lineage. Why? Under what basis? Altruism asserts that it is moral to benefit others over oneself even if it impedes on one's survival. Why? What logic supports this idea?

Rand and Branden suggest that the only alternative to acting based on reason is to act based on whim or desire. People can make decisions based on what feels good or



simply "just because", however, to do so goes against the natural reality of human existence. By behaving on the basis of whim, one resigns one's ability and responsibility to anticipate the consequences of one's actions. Then one is no longer in control of one's own existence. Not to live rationally is not to live ethically because it impedes human survival. The destruction of individuals can only lead to the destruction of the entire human race.

Self-Interest vs. Self-sacrifice

Rand's ethical theory of Objectivism demands that individuals act on their own rational self-interests. This is the principle of the virtue of selfishness. Selfishness is only a virtue if it is conceived by a rational process with the value of one's own life at its core. Throughout *The Virtue of Selfishness*, Rand and Branden show how traditional theories of ethics uphold the principle of altruism, the principle of giving of oneself to another. In this book, altruism is made synonymous to self-sacrifice. Rand defines self-sacrifice as the surrender of one's life, which should be a value of the rational individual, to another life, which, if it is surrendered, is a lesser value to the rational individual. Both authors believe there is a fundamental difference between helping another or risking one's life to save another, if the objective of this aid or risk is one's self-interest, and surrendering one's life to another. They declare that no action of an individual should ever be classified as a sacrifice. To sacrifice is not a virtue but a loss of individualism and self-worth. To sacrifice is not to value one's own life, and if one does not value one's life, for what reason does one have to exist?

Style

Perspective

Rand's upbringing has played a large part in her formation of the theories she presents in *The Virtue of Selfishness*. Ayn Rand was born Alissa Rosenbaum in 1905 in St. Petersburg, Russia, to an upper-middle-class family. While in high school she witnessed the Bolshevik Revolution. After the Communists came to power, her father's pharmacy was nationalized and her family was forced into poverty. Ayn moved to the United States, a country she believed embodied the most ideal political and economic system and trumped the rights of the individual over society.

Rand's experience living in Soviet Russia under a totalitarian, destructive government led her to adopt a philosophy that completely rejects all forms of collectivism and upholds individualism as the only means for human survival. The fact that she was a witness to the transformation of life in Russia after the country was taken over by the Communist leaders dominated the way Rand viewed the world. She deemed *all* forms of collectivism to be evil, in both ideology and practice, and all of her novels portray the destructive nature of collectivist societies and the ideal nature of the strong, rational individual.

The Virtue of Selfishness is a collection of essays written with the purpose to clarify the ideas of Rand's Objectivism and various issues that pertain to its application. She wanted to provide her readers and students of Objectivism with a consistent philosophical frame of reference. Rand's writing style, sophisticated vocabulary, discussion of complex ideas, and references to history and philosophy limit her audience to intellectual, scholarly, and inquisitive individuals. In her writing, she simultaneously tries to engage and challenge her readers.

Tone

In *The Virtue of Selfishness*, Rand and Branden write in a completely subjective tone. The issues they address are all based on Rand's self-constructed theory of Objectivism. Rand's standpoint on every issue is that she is entirely correct in her assertions. She never relents in her writing by suggesting that she might be mistaken on certain issues or that a contradictory perspective might possess certain validity. Nor do she or Branden present their views as suggestions of ways to live but as the only ways to possibly live. The essays are largely written as lectures; neither Rand nor Branden ever really pause to ask the audience to reflect or puzzle out their views. Both writers constantly refer to the novel *Atlas Shrugged* for further evidence of the legitimacy of their ideas. This tone might come off as arrogant and narrow-minded to readers and thus alienate them from Rand's views. Furthermore, Rand's unwillingness to concede to others' ideas and to attempt to prove herself with her own fiction might decrease her credibility. To combat this problem, it is up to the reader to realize one is not forced to accept Rand's or



Branden's ideas in their entirety, but if one wishes to understand Objectivism, one must absorb the material and use one's own cognition and reason to choose which principles with which to agree or disagree.

The mood of this work is highly cynical and critical of human societies all over the world, specifically those under control by governments that deny individuals' rights. Rand decrees that if humans continue to perpetuate the principles and practices she opposes, human civilization will not survive for much longer. Her essays function as a call to action; readers must adopt the principles she addresses in order to promote human survival. This mood might be perceived by readers as wholly negative and hysterical and, again, alienate them.

Structure

The Virtue of Selfishness is comprised of nineteen essays, five of which were written by Nathaniel Branden, and an introduction. Many of the chapters' titles are written in question form because they were written as responses to questions readers sent to *The Objective Newsletter*, in which these essays were originally published. Each essay is relatively short and addresses a separate issue pertaining to the ethics of Rand's philosophy of Objectivism, which is summarized in the first chapter. Though each essay was published separately, within a period of five years, Rand organized them in such a way that each issue logically flows into the next. The chapters do not function as separate entities, but unite to provide a better understanding of the material. The structure of this work achieves the effect that these essays were originally intended, to coexist in a book. Furthermore, the organization of the chapters was well planned because the issues in one chapter are often further expanded upon in the next, and the reader can easily refer back to previous chapters in order to better comprehend the issues addressed in the present chapter. One flaw of this format is that it is more difficult to read a chapter on its own. Because the chapters are presented as separate essays about different issues, a reader might decide to read a chapter on its own but become confused by ideas that were better articulated in the previous chapters. In essence, this book is similar to a concept music album that can best be understood when listening to the entire album, in the order in which the songs are arranged.



Quotes

"The reasons why man needs a moral code will tell you that the purpose of morality is to define man's proper values and interests, that *concern with his own interests* is the essence of a moral existence, and that *man must be the beneficiary of his own moral actions*." Introduction, p. ix

"The avowed mystics held the arbitrary, unaccountable 'will of God' as the standard of the good and as the validation of their ethics. The neo-mystics replaced it with 'the good of society,' thus collapsing into the circularity of a definition such as 'the standard of the good is that which is good for society.' This meant, in logic—and, today, in worldwide practice—that 'society' stands above any principles of ethics, since *it* is the source, standard and criterion of ethics, since 'the good' is whatever *it* wills, whatever *it* happens to assert as its own welfare and pleasure. This meant that 'society' may do anything it pleases, since the 'good' is whatever it chooses to do *because* it chooses to do it." Chapter 1, p. 14

"What, then, are the right goals for man to pursue? What are the values his survival requires? That is the question to be answered by the science of *ethics*. And *this*, ladies and gentlemen, is why man needs a code of ethics." Chapter 1, p. 22

"Ethics is an *objective, metaphysical necessity of man's survival*—not by the grace of the supernatural nor of your neighbors nor of your whims, but by the grace of reality and the nature of life." Chapter 1, p. 23

"*To introduce into one's consciousness any idea that cannot be so integrated, an idea not derived from reality, not validated by a process of reason, not subject to rational examination or judgment—and worse: an idea that clashes with the rest of one's concepts and understanding of reality—is to sabotage the integrative function of consciousness, to undercut the rest of one's convictions and kill one's capacity to be certain of anything.*" Chapter 2, p. 37-38

"Every code of ethics is based on and derived from a metaphysics, that is: from a theory about the fundamental nature of the universe in which man lives and acts. The altruist ethics is based on a 'malevolent universe' metaphysics, on the theory that man, by his very nature, is helpless and doomed—that success, happiness, achievement are impossible to him—that emergencies, disasters, catastrophes are the norm of his life and that his primary goal is to combat them." Chapter 3, p. 48-49

"Living in a society, instead of on a desert island, does not relieve a man of the responsibility of supporting his own life. The only difference is that he supports his life by *trading* his products or services for the products or services of others."

Chapter 4, p. 52



"Because a genuinely selfish man chooses his goals by the guidance of reason— and because the interests of rational men do not clash—other men may often benefit from his actions. But the benefit of other men is not his primary purpose or goal; his *own* benefit is his primary purpose and the conscious goal directing his actions." Chapter 5, p. 58

"If, motivated solely by a sense of charity, compassion, duty or altruism, a person renounces a value, desire or goal in favor of the pleasure, wishes or needs of another person whom he values less than the thing he renounced—*that* is an act of self-sacrifice. The fact that a person may feel that he 'wants' to do it, does not make his action selfish or establish objectively that he is its beneficiary." Chapter 5, p. 59

"A rational, self-confident man is motivated by a love of values and by a desire to achieve them. A neurotic is motivated by fear and by a desire to escape it. This difference in motivation is reflected, not only in the things each type of man will seek for pleasure, but in the nature of the pleasure they will experience." Chapter 6, p. 63

"There can be no compromise between freedom and government controls; to accept 'just a few controls' is to surrender the principle of inalienable rights and to substitute for it the principle of the government's unlimited, arbitrary power, thus delivering oneself into gradual enslavement." Chapter 7, p. 68

"Observe, in politics, that the term *extremism* has become a synonym of 'evil,' regardless of the content of the issue (the evil is not *what* you are 'extreme' about, but *that* you are 'extreme' i.e., consistent). Chapter 9, p. 79

"The next time you encounter one of those 'public-spirited' dreamers who tells you rancorously that 'some very desirable goals cannot be achieved without *everybody's* participation,' tell him that if he cannot obtain everybody's *voluntary* participation, his goals had jolly well better remain unachieved—and that men's lives are not his to dispose of." Chapter 10, pp. 84-85

"Fifty years ago, there might have been some excuse (though not justification) for the widespread belief that socialism is a political theory motivated by benevolence and aimed at the achievement of men's well-being. Today, that belief can no longer be regarded as an innocent error." Chapter 11, p. 86

"An eloquent sign of the moral corruption of our age is the callous complacency with which most of the socialists and their sympathizers, the 'liberals,' regard the atrocities perpetrated in socialistic countries and accept rule by terror as a way of life—while posturing as advocates of 'human brotherhood.'" Chapter 11, p. 87

"Greatness is achieved by the productive effort of a man's mind in the pursuit of clearly defined, rational goals. But a delusion of grandeur can be served only by the switching, undefinable chimera of a public monument—which is presented as a munificent gift to the victims whose forced labor or extorted money had paid for it—which is dedicated to the service of all and none, owned by all and none, gaped at by all and enjoyed by none." Chapter 11, p. 89



"A 'right' is a moral principle defining and sanctioning a man's freedom of action in a social context. There is only *one* fundamental right (all the others are its corollaries): a man's right to his own life." Chapter 12, p. 93

"If some men are entitled *by right* to the products of the work of others, it means that those others are deprived of rights and condemned to slave labor. Any alleged 'right' of one man, which necessitates the violation of the rights of another, is not and cannot be a right." Chapter 12, p. 96

"A government is the most dangerous threat to man's rights: it holds a legal monopoly on the use of physical force against legally disarmed victims." Chapter 12, p. 98

"Since only an individual man can possess rights, the expression 'individual rights' is a redundancy (which one has to use for purposes of clarification in today's intellectual chaos). But the expression 'collectivist rights' is a contradiction in terms." Chapter 13, p. 102

"There is only one basic principle to which an individual must consent if he wishes to live in a free, civilized society: the principle of renouncing the use of physical force and delegating to the government his right of physical self-defense, for the purpose of an orderly, objective, legally defined enforcement." Chapter 14, p. 110

"Capitalism, by its nature, entails a constant process of motion, growth and progress. It creates the optimum social conditions for man to respond to the challenges of nature in such a way as best to further his life. It operates to the benefit of all those who choose to be active in the productive process, whatever their level of ability. But it is not geared to the demands of stagnation. *Neither is reality.*" Chapter 16, p. 125

"The question of whether one alleges the superiority or the inferiority of any given race is irrelevant; racism has only one psychological root: the racist's sense of his own inferiority." Chapter 17, p. 127

"An individualist is, first and foremost, a *man of reason*. It is upon the ability to think, upon his rational faculty, that man's life depends; rationality is the precondition of independence and self-reliance. An 'individualist' who is neither independent nor self-reliant, is a contradiction in terms; individualism and independence are logically inseparable." Chapter 18, p. 136



Topics for Discussion

Why does Rand use the term "selfishness" to describe virtuous qualities a human should possess to live rationally and prosperously? What are her intentions in using a term to describe virtue that most people associate with the opposite of virtue?

What are ethics?

What is the difference between individualism and collectivism?

Why does Rand oppose altruism?

What does it mean to live rationally?

Do you agree with Rand that no conflicts of interests exist among rational men? Why or why not?

Why does Rand reject the notion of compromise?

If one were to ask you if you view issues in terms of black and white, what would you respond? Explain your answer.

What are Branden's major criticisms of modern psychology?

Do people need government? Explain your answer.

With what political party in the United States do you think Rand most agreed? Explain your answer.

Why or why not would a policy of voluntary government financing work in a society? Give examples for both instances.

Why did Rand oppose the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (the bill, not the movement)? Do you agree with Rand's reasoning? Explain your answer.

Rand credits the United States with being the first truly moral nation because it was the first nation to uphold and protect individuals' rights. How do you think Rand would assess the United States today, in terms of protecting individuals' rights?

How can one solely act on one's own self-interests when one must coexist with others in a society?