

A REVIEW OF OBJECTIVISM

by

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Objectivism in Business Decision Making

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to review the theory of Objectivism. The theory, initially proposed by philosopher and writer Ayn Rand, has proponents and opponents around the world. Thoughts and opinions are divided as to whether this theory can be taken seriously. Quite often, Rand opponents refuse recognize the philosopher because of her frequent use of words such as “evil” and her persistence in discounting other philosophers during her life time. The following pages will review the ideas behind objectivism and discuss both the supporting and conflicting literature on the subject.

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INTRODUCTION

The philosophy of objectivism and its founder Ayn Rand, has acquired devoted followers and outspoken opponents for several decades. According to the theory, Objectivism holds that:

“Reality exists as an objective absolute—facts are facts, independent of man's feelings, wishes, hopes or fears” (Ayn Rand, 1962). This means that only “objective reasoning” and “sensory perception” can present reality and thoughts have no influence on what exists in reality. Objectivism rejects subjectivism which is the belief that knowledge is a matter of opinion, and skepticism, the belief that knowledge is impossible and no one can be certain of anything. Objectivism also rejects any form of mysticism, the belief that knowledge is a product of revelations or insights into a supernatural dimension. Ironically the word “evil” appears in the writings of Rand often and would suggest that mysticism cannot be discounted if one believes that evil is a vital component.

“Reason (the faculty which identifies and integrates the material provided by man's senses) is man's only means of perceiving reality, his only source of knowledge, his only guide to action, and his basic means of survival” (Ayn Rand, 1962). In other words, emotions and faith are not a path to knowledge and every person is responsible for creating his or her own happiness through their own rationality, independence, integrity, honesty, justice, productiveness, trade, and pride.. This also discounts any concept of feelings and intuition as they pertain to individual bias or action.

“Man—every man—is an end in himself, not the means to the ends of others. He must exist for his own sake, neither sacrificing himself to others nor sacrificing others to himself. The pursuit of his own rational self-interest and of his own happiness is the highest moral purpose of

his life” (Ayn Rand, 1962). Life is the source of all values and supporting that life requires that we as individuals give it the highest value. Objectivism also rejects altruism, which is the doctrine that the highest good is service to others which could be a state, a deity, one's family, society in general' or the poor and disadvantaged. Therefore the philosophy refutes all ideas of Kantianism and Utilitarianism. Parille (2003) points out “She is best known for her advocacy of “selfishness.” Yet she defined selfishness as follows: “concern with one’s own interests.”

According to Rand (1962), “The ideal political-economic system is laissez-faire capitalism. It is a system where men deal with one another, not as victims and executioners, nor as masters and slaves, but as traders, by free, voluntary exchange to mutual benefit. It is a system where no man may obtain any values from others by resorting to physical force, and no man may initiate the use of physical force against others. The government acts only as a policeman that protects man's rights; it uses physical force only in retaliation and only against those who initiate its use, such as criminals or foreign invaders. In a system of full capitalism, there should be (but, historically, has not yet been) a complete separation of state and economics, in the same way and for the same reasons as the separation of state and church” (www.aynrand.org). Objectivism supports a free market with no government intervention. This means the theory opposes welfare programs, censorship of any kind, and both military and "national service" drafts. Finally, Objectivism supports a strong separation between church and state and between schools and state. With this in mind, the ideas of forced distribution would also need to be discounted in order for Objectivism to work in a free market.

These are the principles that must be utilized when applying objectivism to ethical and social responsibility within the work place. The following pages will review objectivism as the key theory in the area of ethics and social responsibility.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The available literature on the subject of Objectivism presents a major division between the proponents and opponents of the theory. In general terms, the opponents of the theory tend to discredit Any Rand because as a philosopher she failed to present her theory in the world of academia which in turn created an entire network of academic philosophers that discount the theory. The proponents of the theory attempt to look beyond the academic areas of Rand's philosophy and support the ideas on various levels. To present an academic review of the literature available on the subject of Objectivism the literature presented is separated into three separate categories, 1) academic proponents of objectivism, 2) academic opponents of objectivism, and finally 3) non academic views of objectivism.

Proponents of Objectivism

Objectivism has its proponents; however, they are not as numerous as those that oppose the views of Any Rand. Rand is one of the few nonacademic philosophers that has managed to make waves in both academic and nonacademic circles. The majority of the articles available that support Objectivism are in nonacademic arenas. For that reason, this section will cover peer reviewed articles on the topic and a separate section of this paper will be devoted to the non peer reviewed proponents of objectivism.

Rand's theory of Objectivism holds a wide array of beliefs in many different areas. This is also one of the reasons the philosophy has so many critics. Chen(2003), however, states that there is a divided line between objectivist and constructivist theories, "These two camps are formed by (a) theories that are rooted primarily in positivistic or objectivist beliefs and (b) theories that are derived from social constructivist ideology." Chen continues with a caution,

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“Within each camp, there is considerable variance from one theoretical perspective to another, making it difficult to generalize a set of clear-cut characteristics that define all of the theoretical models within the group” (p. 204). Chen clearly suggests that objectivism needs to be recognized and looked at in more detail for the potential applications in the area psychology. Another author that agrees with the open-endedness of the philosophy is Cheney, and though he does not openly support the theory of objectivism, he does not discount it either. Cheney (1992) warns “Axiological subjectivism, indeed, may be clearly formulated only if the objective and subjective realms . . . are clearly distinguished” (p2).

In agreement with Rand’s view of Laissez-faire capitalism, Foster (1992) writes “A mixed economy can only prosper if its driving force entrepreneurs and honest businessmen--go along with the fraud that it is somehow a tribal effort in which everybody pitches in and so deserves equal credit”(p.2). This coincides with Rand’s theory that a free market would be a laissez-fair market with little or not government interference. Although Foster leans more toward a method of forced distribution, he suggests that Rand’s philosophy is not too far off. Pincus (1992) states “As can be inferred from Objectivist theory, it is not the duty of the government to exercise an individual's rights, it is the duty of each individual to assert those rights, and the government only will intervene in situations where one's rights infringe upon another's. In a perfect capitalist society, the market controls all that is produced, the price at which it is produced, and the manner in which it is produced”(p.3).

Locke and Becker (1998) state, “Objectivist morality, however, is not "rooted in capitalist relations;" rather, it is the other way around. Objectivism is pro-capitalist because it is pro-rights, pro-egoism, and pro-reason. What, then, are one's social responsibilities toward others, spiritually and materially?” This supports Rand’s view that there should be no interference or

intervention from the government except to protect the rights of individuals. The authors continue, “Objectivism would answer as follows: one should deal with others through voluntary trade-material trade in the realm of business and spiritual trade in the realm of friendship and romantic love neither sacrificing oneself to others nor sacrificing others to oneself.” Once again this supports Rand’s theory that no man can make another a means to his own end. Finally, the authors continue their support by concluding that, “Charity toward others is appropriate if it is non-sacrificial and one values the recipient. Objectivism rejects the notion of duty-that is, unchosen obligation to others-as immoral, because it severs morality from reason and values and turns man into a sacrificial pawn whose existence is forfeited to the needs of others” (p.1).

Pincus (1992) writes “The essence of objectivism is the recognition that Woman or Man is an end in herself or himself. Objectivism thus encourages every individual to realize his or her own independence, a right derived from his or her nature as a rational being. This does not mean, as most critics believe, that one naturally has the right to do as he or she pleases, no matter what the cost to others or to society”(p. 2).

Richardson says “To detach ourselves from all such beliefs and commitments-as objectivists ask us to do in one way to assess them by entirely neutral standards, and as relativists do in another way when they ask us to regard them all as lacking in any sort of wider truth-would not amount to some kind of grand liberation. Rather, we would simply not know what meanings things have for us at all and would incur a frightening kind of disassociation” (p.446).

Opponents of Objectivism

Opponents of Objectivism can be found everywhere, in academic journals and websites, as well as non academic articles and websites. Rand is not considered an Academic expert which in turn creates more opposition to her personally than of her philosophies. Finding an

article to refute the theory of objectivism is easy to do and finding the most logical arguments against Objectivism is a little more difficult than finding logical arguments for the theory. That said, the following excerpts and arguments offer sound arguments against the theory of Ayn Rand. Several of the arguments against objectivism center on “ethical egoism” or the “self-interest” portions of the theory as well as her views of free market. Unlike Kantianism or Utilitarianism, objectivism says that you have to look out for yourself first. So the greatest good, or the obligation approaches don’t hold in the objectivists view. This is a huge argument against objectivism.

Allen, Tainter and Pires (2001) suggest that objectivism is nothing more than “Dragnet Ecology” and that the theory is nothing more than a vehicle for those seeking simple answers to difficult questions without scientific basis.

Rejecting the concept of a laissez-faire capitalistic market, Barry and Stephens (1998) argue that the fundamental principles of objectivism must be questioned and critiqued. The authors go on to say “Our critique of objectivism rests on the fact that its account of integrity provides no philosophical advance beyond the amoral theory of commerce; in essence, objectivism constitutes a pseudo-ethical apologia for self-interested business as usual”(p. 163). However, the authors claim that because the philosophy is not mentioned in several academic periodicals that it does not deserve recognition. This unfortunate view shows bias and weakens the argument by asking the question, “Can a philosophy be discounted simply because it was conceived by a non academic?”

Hitchens (2001), states “A number of successful and smart dot-com moguls have recently gone public as Randian or Objectivist models.” (p.1). Hitchens (2001) goes on to say, “Once again, it is difficult to see what is specifically Objectivist about certain positions, just as it can be

hard to discern the difference between "the virtue of selfishness" as Rand pugnaciously phrased it, and the milder statements of "enlightened self-interest" that date back at least as far as Adam Smith and his injunction that it is "not from the benevolence" of the merchant that we expect our on-time delivery of needed commodities" (p.2).

Yet again, presenting another argument against a laissez-faire capitalistic market, authors Knights and Mueller (2004) warn "The danger of the objective approach is to slip into a reification of the so-called objective features of strategy and the context in which it resides" (p56). "The realm of the 'objective' exists through structures, capital markets, corporate governance structures, and labour and product markets. The often economics-based literature treats these as 'objective' in the sense that structures are independent of the actions of any one agent." The authors go so far as to hint that Objectivism falls into a Darwinist category. They continue their argument with, "Here corporations are seen to depend almost completely on the resources that they can command, balanced against the pressures generated externally in the environment. Strategy will be based on identifying the most critical resources for the survival of the organization and ensuring some degree of control over them"(p.57).

According to Putnam (1981), "Jung intentionally rejected the absolutist claims of *objectivism* and the opposite position on 'anything goes' relativism, emotivism, or subjectivism. Instead, Jung forged a path that led to the meta-psychological position similar to internal realism"(Putnam 1981).

Kotsch (2000) states, "Today *objectivism* is being widely challenged in the social sciences and has been shown experimentally to be deficient. Indeed, recently in the multi-disciplined area of cognitive science, a number of scholars have recognized that an objectivist perspective cannot survive the challenge presented by the discovery of the 'cognitive

unconscious' (Piaget 1973, p. 34) and the demonstrable influence of tacit knowledge (Bransford & McCarrell 1974; Franks 1974; Polanyi 1966) on conscious thought. That the unconscious is, in part, a cognitive unconscious structure is an acknowledgement that unconscious mental processes have form and contribute to the human activity of meaning making" (p 6-7).

O'Regan states, "Accounting, and objectivist science in general, have traditionally focused their attention on capturing and representing items which can be fully objectified. An intangible, however, cannot, by definition, be fully objectified; if it could it would cease to be an intangible and representationist approaches should prove adequate to the task." (p. 25).

According to Purser (1997) in order to make the theory work, we would need to make adjustments to our reality. The author suggests "To counter the limitations associated with modernist objectivist knowing, a new vision of reality is needed." He goes on to say, "Global management is grounded in objectivism. Coupled with high technology, global management is indifferent to place and context; such a combo runs ripshod over local concerns. With objectivism, human beings and the environment are viewed as two separate and distinct things opposite ends of a dichotomous polarity"(p. 370).

Perhaps the most eloquently stated opponent of Rand is Palmer (1992), who notes "That an unfettered objectivism reflects a deep-rooted fear of living in the world. He goes on to assert that objectivism is full of fear-the fear of subjectivity, the fear of relationship, the fear of being challenged and changed by that which we know... We need a way of knowing that makes us not masters but partners, co-creators. I am not a romantic: we need a way of knowing that gives us the power to survive the world. But we also need a way of knowing that gives the world the power to survive us by transforming our lives. We need a way of knowing that brings us into a living relationship with all we know so that our knowledge itself will be a source of community

rather than control. This way of knowing will emerge only as we address the fear that lies behind our commitment to objectivism. This can be said more precisely: our need is not to invent a new way of knowing (an impossible task even if it were needed!).

Non Academic Proponents of Objectivism

Several websites are devoted to the subject of Objectivism. Surprisingly, two of the largest sites available on the subject not only present a view of Rand's philosophy, but also offer links to sites that disagree with Objectivism in order for the reader to get the entire view of the theory. The two sites used in this paper are "The Objectivist Center" and "Objectivism." The following non academic reviews of the literature provide an important look that cannot be ignored.

Experts or "self-proclaimed" experts on the subject of Objectivism offer a view of the theory that warrants consideration. Author David Kelley (2005) explains that self-interest and altruism are not necessarily different. Kelley states "In a free society, most of our interactions with people involve trade: we provide values to others only on terms that benefit ourselves. Generosity, however, means providing someone with a value that is not part of a definite trade, without the expectation of a definite return." Kelley goes on to explain the even though an alleged act of altruism may appear to have no basis for expectation, in reality, the act is nothing more than an act of free trade. In a 2003 article Kelley writes "Trading and giving are different, to be sure, but the conventional view overstates and misrepresents the difference. The chief cause of this confusion is a narrow definition of self-interest as the satisfaction of short-term desires, particularly for material gain. A rational person knows that what serves his interest in a given situation depends on his long-term goals; that it is in his interest to take responsibility for achieving his goals through productive effort; and that he is more likely to gain the values of

living in society—everything from economic exchange to intimate personal relationships—by dealing with others fairly and honestly than by cheating.” The whole idea of self-interest presented by Kelley simply suggests that although we appear to commit acts of altruism, there is always an expectation of some sort of return. Even if that return is a feeling a satisfaction for the act.

Self-esteem is a necessary component of a true objectivist. According to Cambell and Fodis (2003) there is a deeper understanding of self-esteem as it pertains to objectivism. “Genuine self-esteem has two dimensions of self-evaluation: (1) an evaluation that one is competent to deal with life's basic challenges (self-efficacy) and (2) an evaluation that one is worthy of happiness (self-worth).” The authors rebutte suggestions from modern day philosophers that even criminals have high self-esteem. Continuing their argument Campbell and Fodis state, “The standards for *adult* self-esteem include self-reflective and independent thought; taking responsibility for and authentically asserting one's thoughts, beliefs, values, and actions; pursuing meaningful life goals; and adhering to moral values that are based on reason.”

Author Rodger Donway (2000) supports Rand’s views of reason by stating, “Knowledge is of little use, when confined to mere speculation: But when speculative truths are reduced to practice, when theories grounded upon experiments, are applied to common purposes of life; and when, by these, agriculture is improved, trade enlarged, the arts of living made more easy and comfortable, and, of course, the increase and happiness of mankind promoted; knowledge then becomes really useful.”

CONCLUSION

Ayn Rand's philosophy of Objectivism consists of statements that assert her strong beliefs. However, the mechanisms on which Objectivism are based seem to omit the strong arguments that support the initial statements. For example, author Neil Parille (2003) points "She famously stated "existence exists" and used this axiom to refute skepticism. Yet, from the fact that existence exists (and that skepticism is self-refuting) it does not follow that: (1) the senses are reliable all or most of the time; and (2) there no sources of knowledge other than the senses."(www.solohq.com)

Opponents of Objectivism reject Rand's philosophy using several arguments, the most popular of which is that she was not an academic. This argument weakens valid positions in opposition to Objectivism. In several cases, academics see a need to delve deeper into the philosophy in an attempt to find valid arguments in favor of the philosophy, if they do indeed exist. Perhaps the greatest criticism of Objectivism is the fact that the philosophy itself tends to be incomplete and her arguments inductive. Rand, herself seems to have created the platform on which her opposition stands by failing to complete her work with valid arguments and documentation. This alone produces a faction of academics that not only refuse to recognize the philosophy at all, but become angered when approached with the subject. And perhaps this is exactly what Ayn Rand intended in her efforts to live by her own philosophy and to exist for her own sake and not for the sake of others and to live selfishly for her own interests.

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Allen, T. et al. (2001). Dragnet ecology--"just the facts, ma'am": The privilege of science in a January, 2005 from ProQuest database.

The author is anything but a supporter of objectivism and discusses in detail why the theory is naïve and unsupported by fact. Allen notes "We simply want to point out that there are many middle-ground alternatives to objectivism."

Barry, B. & Stephens, C. (1998). Objections to an Objectivist approach to integrity. Academy of Management. The Academy of Management Review. Briarcliff Manor: Jan 1998. Vol.23, Iss. 1; pg. 162, 8 pgs. Retrieved January, 2005 from ProQuest database.

Barry and Stephens (1998) argue that the fundamental principles of objectivism must be questioned and critiqued. However, the authors claim that because the philosophy is not mentioned in several academic periodicals that it does not deserve recognition. This could be a dangerous assumption.

Campbell, R. & Foddis, W. (2003). Is High Self-Esteem Bad for You? The Objectivist Center. Retrieved January 2005 from www.objectivistcenter.org.

Chen, C. (2003). Integrating perspectives in career development theory and practice. The Career Development Quarterly. Alexandria: Mar 2003. Vol.51, Iss. 3; pg. 203. Retrieved January, 2005 from ProQuest database.

Chen (2003) states that there is a divided line between objectivist and constructivist theories. The author clearly suggests that objectivism needs to be recognized and looked at in more detail for the potential applications in the area psychology.

Cheney, J. (1992). Intrinsic Value Environmental Ethics: Beyond Subjectivism and Objectivism Monist, 00269662, Apr92, Vol. 75, Issue 2. Retrieved December 2004 from EBSCO database.

"Axiological subjectivism, indeed, may be clearly formulated only if the objective and subjective realms . . . are clearly distinguished"(p2). Although the author does not openly support the theory of objectivism, he does not discount it either.

Donway, R. (2000). Benjamin Franklin: Enlightenment Archetype. The Objectivist Center. Retrieved January 2005 from www.objectivistcenter.org.

Donway, R. (2004). Whom Should We Thank? The Objectivist Center. Retrieved January 2005 from www.objectivistcenter.org.

Enright, M. (1990). The Habit of Hope. The Objectivist Center. Retrieved January 2005 from www.objectivistcenter.org.

Foster, P. (1992). Learning to Love the Rand Formula, Canadian Business, 00083100, Mar1992, Vol. 65, Issue 3. Retrieved December 2004 from EBSCO database.

The author suggests that Ayn Rand's philosophical theory is strong and has drawn millions of supporters that are in search of comfort. He states, "With depression looming, the Canadian identity in crisis and the country literally in danger of breaking up, Rand's philosophy provides insight into what ails us."

Goldman, I. (1999). Q METHODOLOGY AS PROCESS AND CONTEXT IN INTERPRETIVISM, COMMUNICATION, AND PSYCHOANALYTIC PSYCHOTHERAPY RESEARCH, Psychological Record, 00332933, Fall99, Vol. 49, Issue 4. Retrieved January, 2005 from Database: Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection.

Habermas, J. (1999). From Kant to Hegel and Back Again—The Move Towards Detranscendentalization, European Journal of Philosophy, 09668373, Jul99, Vol. 7, Issue 2. Retrieved January 2005 from EBSCO database.

Hazelton, J. (2003). Starting and Sustaining An Objectivist Discussion Group. Presented at The Objectivist Center 2003 Summer Seminar in Boston, MA. The Objectivist Center. Retrieved January 2005 from www.objectivistcenter.org.

Hitchens, C. (2001)/ AYN-RANDED. American Spectator, 01488414, Sep/Oct2001, Vol. 34, Issue 7. Retrieved January 2005 from EBSCO database.

This author writes of the many successful Silicon Valley entrepreneurs that follow the Rand philosophy of Objectivism. Amazed at the number followers, Hitchens then explains that although these faithful followers of objectivism claim to understand the philosophy, he found that none really fully understand the concepts and theory of objectivism, which in turn, makes the ideas of Ayn Rand more of a fad than a theory.

Hogsett, C. (1994). Feminist Teacher. Knowing and Reasoning in College: Gender-Related Patterns in Students' Intellectual Development Feminist Teacher. Norton: Fall 1994. Vol.8, Iss. 3; pg. 149. Retrieved January, 2005 from ProQuest database.

Kelley, D. (1996). Generosity and Self-Interest. The Objectivist Center. Retrieved January 2005 from www.objectivistcenter.org. December 2004/January 2005 issue of the Fraser Forum.

Kelley, D. (2005). "I Don't Have To" The Objectivist Center. Retrieved January 2005 from www.objectivistcenter.org.

Kelley offers a logical view of the definitions of self interest as they pertain to Objectivism. "Trading and giving are different, to be sure, but the conventional view overstates and misrepresents the difference. The chief cause of this confusion is a narrow definition of self-interest as the satisfaction of short-term desires, particularly for material gain."

Knights, D. & Mueller, F. (2004). Strategy as a 'Project': overcoming dualisms in the strategy debate. *European Management Review*. Houndmills: Spring 2004. Vol.1, Iss. 1; pg. 55. Retrieved January, 2005 from [ProQuest](#) database.

The authors review the theories of objectivism and subjectivism and propose a third theory of duality to suggest that neither of the theories are correct. "The danger of the objective approach is to slip into a reification of the so-called objective features of strategy and the context in which it resides"

Kotsch, W. (2000). Jung's mediatory science as a psychology beyond objectivism. *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 00218774, Apr2000, Vol. 45, Issue 2. Retrieved January, 2005 Database: Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection

*This author takes a psychological look into objectivism and compares the theory to Jung's philosophies. "Jung intentionally rejected the absolutist claims of **objectivism** and the opposite position on 'anything goes' relativism, emotivism, or subjectivism. Instead, Jung forged a path that led to the meta-psychological position similar to internal realism" (Putnam 1981).*

Kozinski, A. (1989). Bookshelf: Life Is Not a Novel *Wall Street Journal*. (Eastern edition). New York, N.Y.: Jul 18, 1989. pg. 1 Retrieved January, 2005 from [ProQuest](#) database.

Locke, E. & Becker, T. (1998). Objectivism's answer to the sad, old world of subjectivism. *Academy of Management. The Academy of Management Review*. Briarcliff Manor: Oct 1998. Vol.23, Iss. 4; pg. 658, 2 pgs. Retrieved January, 2005 from [ProQuest](#) database.

Locke and Becker rebut criticisms on their writings and views of objectivism. The authors provide a sound basis for their support of objectivism.

O'Regan, P. & O'Donnell, D. (2000). Mapping intellectual resources: insights from critical modernism. *Journal of European Industrial Training*. Bradford: 2000. Vol.24, Iss. 2/3/4; pg. 118. Retrieved January, 2005 from [ProQuest](#) database.

Palmer, P (1992). Reflections in a program for the "formation of teachers." Occasional paper of the Fetzer Institute. Kalamazoo, MI: Fetzer Institute.

Parille, N. (2003). Ayn Rand's Philosophical Style: A Brief Introduction. Retrieved March, 2005 http://solohq.com/Articles/Parille/Ayn_Rands_Philosophical_Style_A_Brief_Introduction.shtml

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