

ALCIPHERON

HAVE YOU EVER IGNORED THE TRUTH BECAUSE
OF LACK OF COURAGE TO SPEAK THE TRUTH?

MAN ARE YOU SELFISH!?

In 1917, standing by the window overlooking the streets of Petrograd, a twelve year old girl stared in shocked indignation at the confused crowds and heard the first shots of the Russian Revolution. She watched as people "shivered in bread line; there was no food to buy, no money and no work". Why did everyone complain about physical hardships created by communists whose slogan was "live for the state". Why? To her this was sheer horror and anyone who considered such sacrifice was blind to the purpose of his life. Her answer to the slogan was that nothing could be more important than one's individual right to his own life. It was not because she was nely a child that she thought in this way, for as the years went by, the woman developed her own philosophy of life, by which she contends, even today, that selfishness is a virtue.

The woman who advocates such a position is Ayn Rand, who is recognized by some as one of the "most creative thinkers alive". Her novels such as Atlas Shrugged and The Fountainhead were extremely popular in the fifties, and some believe, even today, that she has a tremendous mind and a deep introspection into life. Among her writings though, a book entitled The Virtue of Selfishness, A New Concept of Egoism, has puzzled and shocked thousands of readers because her theory of what man really is becomes literally alarming, especially when Ayn Rand says, "I do not believe in the sacrifice of the ideal to the nonideal. I prefer the dollar sign, the symbol of free trade, therefore the free mind".

What then becomes man's purpose in life? If her theory is valid, where does man take his stand? Where is he going? Is man really out for himself?

First, let us consider why Ayn Rand denotes selfishness as a virtue, while we generally tend to think of selfishness in terms of an egotistic position, or see it as wrong and against our code of morality. To answer this question, Ayn Rand introduces her philosophy of Objective Ethics whereby she proudly advocates that rational selfishness is a value required for man's survival. Objective Ethics maintains that just as life is an end in itself, so every human being is an end in himself and not the means to the welfare of others. She believes that man must live for his own sake, neither sacrificing himself to other men, nor sacrificing others to himself.

This latter point though raises a problem. If man acts for his own self-interest, he is bound to, at some point, sacrifice others for himself because the means whereby he lives for his own sake, may in fact, entail the disruption of other people's interest and value.

But Rand does not view the situation as such. Her belief is that selfishness or self-esteem is the way a man ought to function (but her advocating that man does function selfishly, still holds). For her, sacrificing your life for another person at the risk of losing your own life, is immoral. Her reasons are as such. First it is a lack of self-esteem, secondly it is lack of self-respect for others because we then would be viewing men as a "herd of doomed beggars crying for someone's help", and thirdly, that life would become a nightmare where the world would be a trap.

Is sacrifice really as immoral as she believes it is? In so many circumstances, the people who are crying for help today are hardly "doomed beggars", and those who give them help can't really be seen as lacking self-respect towards those who need the help. Furthermore, the circumstances that create problems often stem from men's self-interest where he is out for himself. Even if Rand does advocate that man must know when and how to use the values of his selfishness who is to draw the boundary line so that these problems will not occur?

Rand's basic psychological/ethical framework appears as an over simplification of what

man is all about. You cannot place man in a box and say "You are labelled as virtuously selfish!" There is so much more to consider, the scope being so broad that probably no one theory or statement will ever answer man's quest in a simple, neat, fashion.

Ayn Rand is not saying that because man is basically selfish that he is indifferent to other men. But she does believe that the concern for others reverts back to man's own interest in the end and that man "does not subordinate his life to the welfare of others, that he does not sacrifice himself to their needs, that the relief of their suffering is not his primary concern, that any help he gives is an exception, not a rule, an act of generosity, not a moral duty... and that values not disasters, are the goal, the first concern and the motive of his life."

Yet in view of this, the fact still remains men have sacrificed their lives to the welfare of others. Jesus did. Was it self-interest, was his sacrifice immoral as she believes? Albert Schweitzer did, and how many others in their every day lives have done the same? Can we really say that the subordination of their lives to others was immoral? Does the fact that she sees it as immoral and disastrous make her concept of egoism the final answer to man's purpose on earth?

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