

Kyle Graser  
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## Altruism and Spiritual Bankruptcy

Causing quite a ruckus, Ayn Rand's philosophies seem to naturally strike up passionate thoughts and opinions surrounding the concepts she questions. Acting as somewhat of a catalyst of thought, I think Rand had a profound affect on society by creating a new arena for thinking in her era and into the present future, inspiring awareness and reinvigorating rationality in a time when she thought philosophy seemed hushed. In this paper I'll use Ayn's view on America and her philosophy of altruistic selflessness as a base and branch out, clarifying what I saw altruism to be, some interesting points and insights about the idea.

I was roused most by Rand's theory on the altruistic selflessness of America, where she explains the nearly-unconscious popular trend of self sacrifice. Upon first exposure, Ayn's philosophy (and perhaps disposition) appears to attack and degrade America as she relates its rationally-deprived society to a body with no head, having no intellectual strength. She draws attention to the America's conditioning, molded by a world that teaches it's society that man's mind is impotent, reality unknowable, knowledge an illusion, and reason but a superstition...reinforced by the idea that one can never truly *know* anything. But deeper beneath the surface and seeing past Ayn's initial first impression of an irate, ranting philosopher, I discovered a less emotionally charged and instead balanced, reasonable view of her idea of the altruistic morality. Comparing the current altruistic mentality to primitive tribes that have practiced human

sacrifice, Ayn shows the way in which current American society has deviated from its original foundation of the pursuit of one's own happiness, and has now rooted itself in the philosophy that true happiness is found by helping others, a euphemism for self sacrifice. Ayn makes known the unique human faculty of rationality and then exposes the rejection and downfall of man's rational abilities. She shines light on the way America has caught the virus of Immanuel Kant's philosophy that implies anything done with any hint of self interest is not truly moral, and in regards to man's ability to acquire knowledge, that the human mind is incapable of perceiving true reality, that certainty is unknowable to man, and what humans are capable of knowing is but a small fraction of reality.

Upon hearing Ayn's idea of society's shift from altruism to self interest, tendencies arise that lean one towards a black and white perception...if a person isn't to be altruistic, that then must mean they have no concern for others and must be overly self absorbed... I think it is quite common for people to hear a brief overview of Rand's philosophy of altruism and from it - mixed with the stereotypes attached to her demeanor - presume that she is simply a raving mad philosopher promoting selfishness. This is quite unfortunate, in my opinion, that as a philosopher advocating rationality over emotion, Ayn allowed her frustration to visibly sneak in with her presentation of her ideas, giving investigators reason for prejudgement . However, remembering that Ayn is a philosopher, not a politician, one can take her ideas as just that, ideas for personal analysis and disposal...and with patient persistence one can finally gain some clarity into Ayn's distaste of altruistic selflessness, seeing that she stands behind some humanitarian principles. Principles relating to individuality; to self esteem; living

according to one's own natural rationality and judgement. And the debilitating effects on person that blindly follows a collectivist agenda - or to blindly follow *any* agenda, really. The idea of rational self interest allows one to imagine just how well a self-nourishing society of people might get along. A fulfilled people allowed and encouraged to reach their full potential, physical, mental, and emotional needs met, never deprived.

I believe Ayn's perspective towards America was greatly influenced by her wearying experience of socialism in Russia, and I think investigators of her philosophies are at best to keep her background in mind, which may perhaps exaggerate the negativities she noticed of America. It seems to me that America and its capitalist foundation has strong values towards self interest and individual success, yet Rand sees America as holding a mindset which condemns the rich for being "too selfish", and causing the business man to feel guilt for his hard-earned success...

Embracing this altruistic philosophy in the land of the free seems quite the paradox. This way of thinking promotes the complete opposite of self fulfillment and other progressive ideas upon which the United States was originally built upon by the founding fathers. Personally, I believe Ayn Rand made an important contribution to American society by shining the light onto this vital detail of our deviation from our direction, bravely reminding us of our misdirection and pointing out just how much we have strayed from our original foundation, purpose and intentions as a country....

The last and most important point I would like to touch on, was what Rand identified as the "spiritual bankruptcy" that has been afflicted upon America due to the negligent fail of the modern intellectual. Rand makes a profound gesture stating the way "America's intellectual stature dries up like a river into the 20th century..." She explains

that it is the modern intellectual's duty to fulfill the role of the eyes, ears, and voice of free society - just as it is the inventor/business man who leads the material progress of a people. If this intellectual leader deprives society of information and of vital rational guidance, the society - lacking any intellectual instruction - is hindered in advancement. An ever growing free society needs intellectuals to point the way to better views of existence and to push the envelope. Ayn sheds light on the detrimental effects of telling a progressive and expansive industrial nation such as America that their mind is impotent and useless...this has taken a nation to a world of enormous material progress, yet has kept society remaining on the level of the primitive brute in spirit. It is this imbalance between the way the present-day business man has raised the standard of physical living, but the intellectual has failed to keep up in the moral rational aspects, lowering the level of mens thought to that of a savage, that we have reached this well-coined state of "spiritual bankruptcy". Society needs a correlating philosophical structure to balance it's material progression. A nation's philosophy seems to act as a hidden hand that governs, and by exposing it and bringing it into awareness for better enhancement, it can hopefully create a better quality of life. Some may see the present state of society today and use it as proof that thinking and philosophy is impotent, Ayn however, emphasizes that it only demonstrates philosophy's phenomenal power.