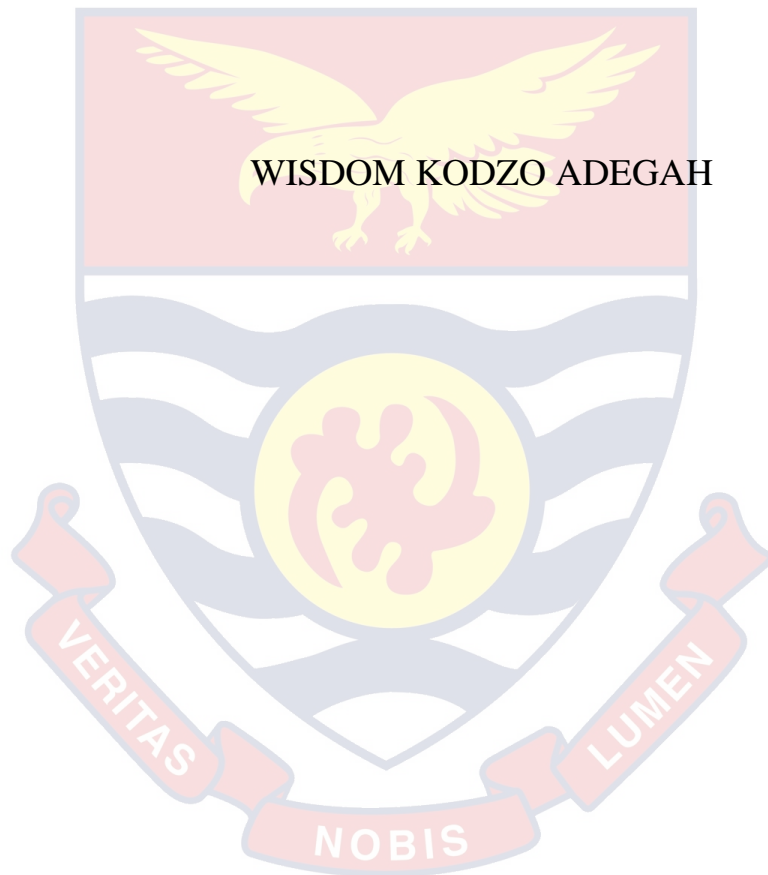


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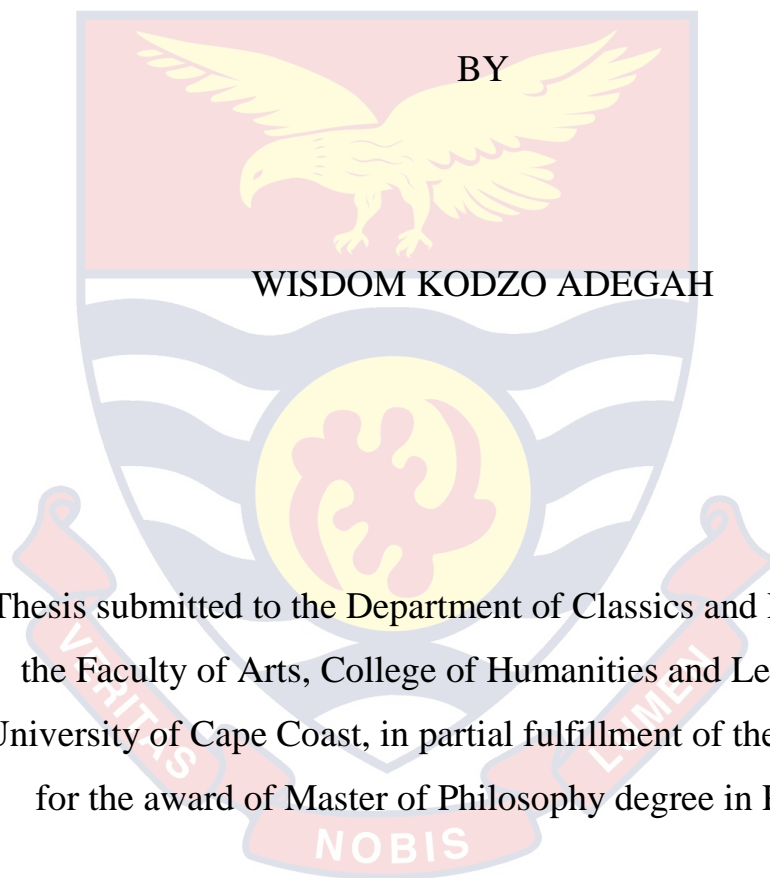
A DEFENCE OF AYN RAND'S RATIONAL EGOISM



JANUARY 2020

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

A DEFENCE OF AYN RAND'S RATIONAL EGOISM



Thesis submitted to the Department of Classics and Philosophy of
the Faculty of Arts, College of Humanities and Legal Studies,
University of Cape Coast, in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the award of Master of Philosophy degree in Philosophy

JANUARY, 2020

DECLARATION

Candidate's Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own original research and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or elsewhere.

Candidate's Signature Date.....

Name:

Supervisors' Declaration

We hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of the thesis were supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of thesis laid down by the University of Cape Coast.

Principal Supervisor's Signature Date

Name:

Co-Supervisor's Signature Date

Name:

ABSTRACT

Egoism has been considered by several scholars as a theory that presents a multiplicity of problems. It is argued on several occasions that a theory that proposes selfishness as the sole criterion for assessing the acceptability and unacceptability of an action, merely presents objectionable ideas. These ideas that are considered as objectionable are used as the basis for refuting ethical egoism in general. This has given grounds to the several criticisms egoism faces. To be fair to all versions of egoism and inferring from the fact that all the varying versions of egoism have different constituent elements in their development, this study sets out to draw a line between the rational egoism of Rand and the subjective egoism. Using an evaluative pattern through explanations and analysis, this study aims at presenting the objective principles underpinning Rand's rational egoism. The study points out that there are differences between the subjective conception of egoism and the rational conception of egoism. These differences tend to present the general criticisms against egoism as trivial cases in the face of Rand's rational egoism. The study further identified that the ethical pillar of Rand's objectivism provides a great trajectory for political and social systems that latch onto its principles. Given this, it is recommended that political and social systems built on Rand's ethical pillar have far-reaching implications on the nation concerned.

KEYWORDS

Egoism

Objectivism

Rationality

Self-interest

Selfishness

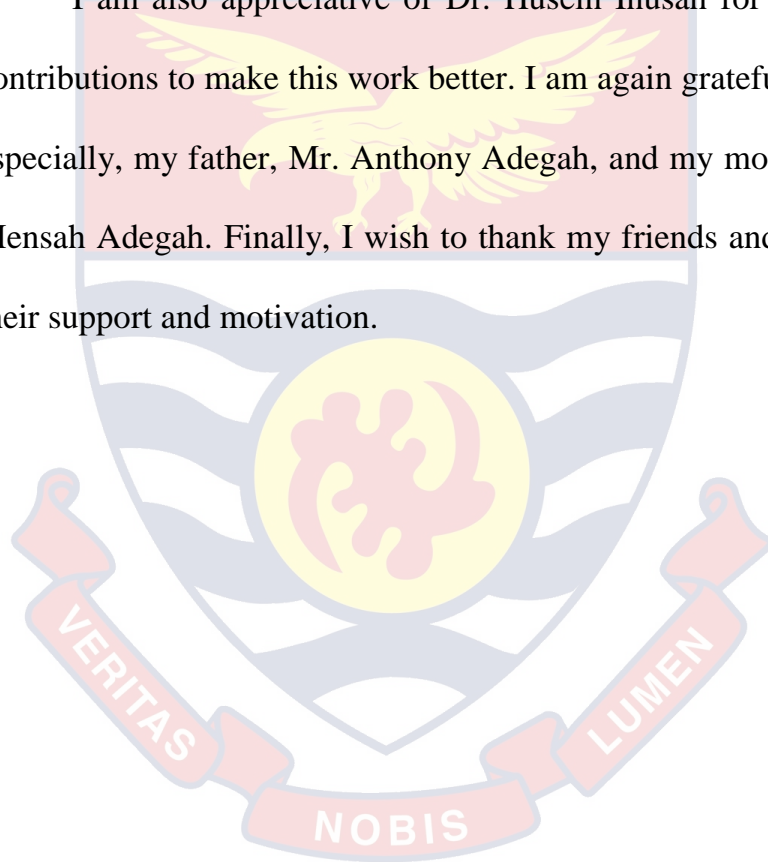
Value



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DEDICATION

To my siblings: Bless and Ebenezer



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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

In moral philosophy, a theory of obligation consists of one or more rules, principles, or procedures that are said to determine the rightness, wrongness, or obligatory nature of actions (Taylor, 1969). As William Frankena (1963) puts it, “A normative theory that outlines duties has its primary concern to be guiding agents in engaging in the most appropriate decisions and assessments that border on the actions people undertake in specific situations” (p. 11). In the attempt to determine the correct theory of moral obligation many answers have been given. These answers are not all the same and hence cannot all be said to have the same correctness. Broadly speaking, two kinds of theories have been proposed. These are teleological and deontological theories. A teleological theory of obligation claims that the sole criterion of the rightness, wrongness, or obligatoriness of an act is the relative amount of nonmoral value brought into existence either by the act itself or by the rule under which the act falls (Taylor, 1969). Deontological theory of obligation is any theory which denies what teleological theories affirm. That is, one holds a deontological theory if one denies that the sole criterion of right and wrong is the amount of nonmoral good produced by the act or by the following of the rule which applies to it. In the determination of right acts, some deontologists reject as irrelevant any consideration of the consequences of the act in terms of nonmoral value. Others allow for consideration of the consequences as relevant but deny that it is the only criterion properly used (Taylor, 1969). Socrates, in *Phaedo*, makes allusion to

the idea that the consequence of an action is all that matters and that the consequence should be one that promotes a person's truest self-interest (Plato, *Phaedo*, 115b). This principle is what the ethical theory, egoism, preaches.

Egoism, in the most fundamental and straightforward sense, is the notion that one should promote and seek his or her interest (Hicks, 2009). In essence, this ethical position promotes the idea that one should act selfishly and for the sake of the individual self or one's personal interest. Every individual act for many reasons. A critical look at the *Phaedo* indicates that the significant questions worth considering as motivations for our actions are; for whom, or for what, do or should we as individuals act and can it be that an individual agent acts solely based on his personal advantages or gains exclusive of the interest of others, or, put differently, could it be that our actions are directed towards the interest of others without regards for our interests? The various responses which are likely to be raised for these questions would constitute the various ethical theories that egoism is directly antithetical to. In light of this, egoism can be said to form part of the many ethical theories such as altruism, hedonism, and utilitarianism since these theories are all found under the consequentialist perspective.

Morally speaking, each of these ethical theories would propose different actions which they would in their domain consider to be the morally right action. The altruist would say that a morally right action would be one undertaken for the interest of other individuals with no regard for the interest of the moral agent (Hicks, 2009). To the hedonist, the right action should be one undertaken to enjoy, that is, promote pleasure. An action that satisfies the utility principle would be the right action for the utilitarian. Antithetical to all

this, seeking self-interest is made up of mindsets as well as characters that build up to a conscious goal, the gain of the individual agent.

Egoism in Facione, Scherer, and Attig's view can be defined as "the notion that the grounds on which all the actions of every moral agent should be performed is the self-interest" (Facione, Scherer & Attig, 1978, p. 45). Similar definitions are observed among other scholars. These views, which can be found in Emmons (1969), Rachels (1971), and Machan (1979), suggest at one point in time that every single individual have to take care of himself exclusively where all individuals are seen to have only their exclusive interest at heart (Emmons, 1969, p. 311). These conceptions and many others emphasize what is without doubt egoism's primary defining characteristics. This defining characteristic can, in my opinion, be stated as 'being concerned with one's own interests'. It carries with it the implication that my sole duty is to promote my interests exclusively, and everyone in that respect, ought to exclusively pursue their interests.

An instance of this sort of behaviour is provided by Rachels (1971) who explains,

if an individual has the longing to torch a supermarket simply because he or she feels fascinated about things ablaze, then the individual in line with the principles of egoism can do it irrespective of the numerous people who may get injured or might die. (p. 429)

Philosophical interest in egoism as an ethical theory has progressively increased making its importance second to utilitarianism (Regis, 1980). This may be because of the increasing focus on the interest of what the majority of

people would consider as right as opposed to what a single individual proposes. It is, however, an inconclusive debate in these recent discussions on the truth of the theory of egoism. Likewise, the suitability of egoism as a moral theory has not received any conclusive agreement. Nevertheless, the supporters of egoistic principles continue to search for arguments in defense of their theory in the light of the critiques raised against egoism as an incoherent ethical theory, along with some other issues leveled against the theory. This gives the impression that this area of concern has been brought to a standstill. Lying beneath the chunk of these deliberations are the suppositions that any attempt to give an appropriate definition of the egoistic theory is not problematic but possible, and there is a unanimous acceptance among its advocates on what egoism expresses. Given this, the basic and sole problem left for philosophical deliberation is whether the difficulties and problems associated with egoism as an ethical system make it susceptible to the problems it is charged with (Machan, 1979, pp. 6-11).

Nonetheless, the additional requirement that the interest of the individual should be the sole worry of the moral agent has been argued against by critics as unacceptable. The reason being that this requirement unjustifiably confines an individual's actions only to the ones that are disparagingly selfish or euphemistically self-centered (Facione, Scherer & Attig, 1978, p. 57). According to this angle of critique, such a condition is objectionable because a person's life can only have meaning if his wants or desires are not subdued. Likewise, his life would be more enjoyable in the absence of suppression of his interests and desires. The assumption underlining this is that asking a person to be self-seeking or self-centered may rid him of precious pleasures

like love, friendship, fellow feeling, and community. This makes it difficult for him to grasp the activities of other human beings. That is to say, he becomes ignorant of their pain, and other feelings that are openly graspable by the individuals who are not self-centered (Williams, 1973). Also, a strong believer in selfishness, according to Facione, Scherer and Attig (1978), may end up becoming a psychopath. Hence, taking selfishness to the excesses, an individual is unable to identify the mental ongoings of others. Applying such a definition to egoistic principles, an egoist would seem to be nothing far from a miserable self-seeking brute (p. 57).

The burden of differentiating between the varying modes of ethical theories has been embarked on by several moral thinkers. In the case of Utilitarianism, for instance, we can talk of philosophers such as David Lyons (1967) and D. H. Hodgson (1967). It would not be out of place to look at several of the distinctions made in that context and extend a similar approach to egoism as an ethical theory. The background survey on egoism up to this point should give the idea that egoism is characterized as a theory that revolves around the “Self”. Though egoistic theories all revolve around the individual self, it would be apt to outline a rough and general survey of these different formulations presented about these theories. The tenability of these variations would not necessarily be assessed since extended arguments would be required for such assessments.

Psychological egoism, the first variety in no specific order, is the view that defines the nature of man as being entirely egoistic as well as self-driven or its claim holds that all human actions are motivated, at the bottom, exclusively by one’s self-interest (McConnell, 1978). This by implication

means that everybody, in the end, is an egoist (McConnell, 1978). Naturally, human beings, tend to behave in ways that seem like the appropriate means of enhancing their individual interests. Basically, this theory assumes that humanity is structured by nature to be selfish. This is a very strong description of human nature. This, on the surface, does not denote that only some or bulk of our individual actions are undertaken with reference to the interest of the self; however, they are developed primarily based on the respective care for one's good barring the fact that these actions may be undertaken as acts of benevolence. A robust form of the theory subscribes strongly to the view that people constantly act in ways that seem to be self-promoting. In brief, altruism or what we call selflessness, is not possible we only hide our truest rationale behind the acts of benevolence or the performance of an obligation.

Ethical Egoism, the second variety, is characterized as a collection of prescriptive concepts that recommends or allows any individual in whose direction the theory is directed to act only in ways that augment their personal gain or advantage (Nielsen, 1959). Good in this sense is accepted to include things that proponents of egoism have identified as vital goals worth pursuing. Ethical egoism can, in this regard, be considered as the normative belief that the morally appropriate action seeks to promote the personal interest of the moral entity. The individual known as the agent is the doer of the act (Nielsen, 1959).

Ethical egoism in its effective form holds that the promotion of one's personal good is the only moral thing to do, hence the denial to promote the individual interest would be immoral (Baier, 1966). This form of egoistic theory does not render an explanation that does away with circumstances of selfless actions as

disguised instances of egoistic behaviour, but could simply assert altruistic ideals are mistaken moral ideals and that we ought to seek only our advantage. A weaker variety of egoism would allude to the idea that though it may be a good thing to exclusively promote only one's advantage, it is certainly not bad if one chooses not to promote his interest. That is to mean that circumstances may permit an individual to consider not only his interest but he may still be engaged in a moral act (Baier, 1966).

Naturally, this theory in itself presents a multiplicity of problems and objectionable theses thereby often leading to the general rejection of the notion itself. However, this complete and utter rejection of egoism is not necessarily without fault, since the desire for the interest of the self is, most of the time, misinterpreted and inaccurately explained akin to hedonism, predation, greediness or even solipsism. Moreover, selfishness or self-interest as an ethical concept forms a veritable antithesis to the more commonly held and promoted ethical theories of altruism, utilitarianism, or any other ethical theory that holds others in higher regard than the self. Consequently, this induces the rejection of any radical new form of ethical theory that breaches the status quo as in the case of ethical egoism. Ultimately, as Smith (2006) posits, for the reason that the promotion of the exclusive self-interest is extensively regarded as an uncontrolled indulgent devotion to caprice, and of the self-centered individual as unprincipled, and uncharitable to others, it is readily dismissed (p. 36). If this should be the description that is readily attributed to all theories of egoism, then it raises the suggestion that egoism, in general, should be hastily disregarded and never considered as a legitimate moral theory.

In spite of this, an examination of a selection of literature gives the impression that the claims against ethical egoism may be unwarranted to a large extent. Judging from the fact that egoism does not have a single conception that is subscribed to by all or majority of the individuals in the ethical deliberation, but the claims raised against the theory, as well as, those that vouch for it seldom refer to the same thing. Much attention ought to be given to the issue of an appropriate formulation of egoism. This turns the focus of discussion from mere ethical egoism to the ethical theory of Ayn Rand. Philosophical interest in egoism has increased to some extent. This is due to the renaissance the ethical theory has undergone in recent decades with the coming of Ayn Rand into the scene. Much has been written by Rand on the subject, egoism. Her ideas were presented in novels which she wrote until 1956 when she began a systematic philosophical inquiry into her position. The zeal with which she defended her stance shows how revolutionary her ideas are. Her position seems to suggest that the thoughtless and irrational principles which are said to bound egoism do not wipe it out of ethical debates (Taylor, 1969). Ayn Rand seems to present an acceptable argument in favor of a rational ethical egoism that precludes the commonly conceived issues with egoism. She is observed to have advanced a logical moral theory that endorses the welfare and wellbeing of the individual without the destruction or negative repercussions of others. Ayn Rand was a writer who gave a significant interpretation of ethical egoism. She is a proponent of objective ethics or rational egoism. It is in view of this that rationality serves as a basic essential in her moral theory. This assumption of a logical account of her egoism is made possible only by her objectivism.

Ethical egoism has, on many counts, attempted to provide arguments to address the criticisms raised against it. To explain the issues of conflict of interest among human beings, ethical egoism elaborates that human beings can achieve happiness without conflict through friendship and interaction with others. In establishing such a relationship with others, man must seek happiness since the solitude desire for happiness is what makes friendship meaningful (Sharaf & Ardakani, 2015). In Egoism, according to Pojman (2004), an intimate friendship, most of the time, demands individuals to give up their interests and aims for the benefit of their friends. This according to him may be a form of altruistic action since it involves giving a higher priority to others than the self. However, this act, considering Rand's position, is a self-sacrifice. For a person to sacrifice the self for the gain of another in a friendship, the other individual involved must play a pivotal role in the person's life by adding value. Anything other than that would mean a compromise of the foundations of egoism since one would only be sacrificing their interest for the benefit of others.

As might be expected, Rand's system of thought on rational egoism has not gone without criticism. As a response to the objectivist egoism, Robert Nozick argues that the foundation of Rand's rational egoism is flawed and unsound (Den Uyl & Rasmussen, 1978). This, according to him, is because Rand is unable to explain events where someone could not rationally prefer dying and having no values. On this account, Nozick argues that Rand's alleged defense of selfishness as a moral theory is merely an instance of circular reasoning. Responding to Nozick's position, Douglas B. Rasmussen and Douglas Den Uyl (1978) raised the argument that Nozick must have been

erroneous in stating the foundation of Rand's ethical system. This is because the Randian ethical theory examines reality, rationality, and self-interest. In her development of the theory, she proffers that for one to decide whatever that is in their interest one would have to use rationality to tease out a value that is grounded in reality. With this in mind, an individual's quest to choose death over living would defeat the fundamental nature of human beings, a nature that seeks the promotion of the greatest value known as life.

On these accounts, it has become obvious that criticisms raised against the ethical theory of Ayn Rand are couched such that they seem to be directed to the entire body of egoism. This is also to mean that critics engage in their enterprise of criticism paying no attention to the fact that egoism as a whole has varying renditions. With this premise in mind, Rand's Rational egoism, based on examined literature, has different underpinning principles from the traditional understanding of egoism. Hence, certain shortfalls need not be attributed to the theory.

Statement of the Problem

Traditionally, ethics or moral philosophy has always had a negative and distrustful reaction towards self-interest. It is frequently observed that ethics seems to extol acts which by intent are selfless and all activities that are motivated by self-interest are considered within ethics as corrupt or unacceptable acts. Instances of strong objections to the theory of the egoist can be seen in Smith (2006) as she posits that "for the reason that egoism is extensively perceived as reckless, self-indulgent whim-worship and the selfish person as thoughtless, unprincipled, and inconsiderate of others it is readily

dismissed without hesitation” (p. 36). Also, in the thoughts of Baumer (1967), Egoism, as a theory for behavioural assessment, generates ethically opposing evaluations, thus making Egoism an entailment of the morally impossible. A self-interested person, supposedly, will not consider the interests of others and so will slight or harm these interests of others in the pursuit of his own. To conceive of egoism as a reckless, self-indulgent whim-worship and also of the self-centered person, that is, the egoist as thoughtless leaves egoism with only one option, its dismissal as a moral system. Should this apply to every principle of egoism, then egoism indeed would be something that should, as indicated by Smith (2006), be hastily dismissed and never considered as a legitimate moral theory. This belief that egoism entails all the above-mentioned characteristics has given grounds to the numerous criticisms that egoism faces. The problem then bothers on whether it is conclusively established that egoistic theories are lost to irrational, and thoughtless principles; and whether egoism has the tendency of being adorned with plausibility when taken to the objective domain. Considering the fact that the definition of egoism is not limited to a single model in the view of all its proponents, it would be a misplaced argument against all versions of egoism if the disputants are arguing from a single perspective. There is, therefore, the need to take a look at the philosophy of Ayn Rand with the primary aim of examining the moral theory she expounded in the light of objectivism. As the intent of bridging a gap, this assessment purports to assert a prima facie credibility of the egoism of Ayn Rand as an ethical theory; an analysis which makes way for the application of objective principles to egoism (rational).

Thesis

My intent is to present a summary of Ayn Rand's Objectivist ethics which sought to answer the question why man needs virtue, how ethical egoism and selfishness is a necessity rooted in metaphysical facts of reality, and how, through the virtues of life, Rand determines rational egoism the superior and singular moral philosophy. Furthermore, I intend to present the W. D. Glasgow's objection that ethical egoism bears an inherent contradiction and attempt to argue that while subjectivist forms of egoism may possess an inherent contradiction in the notion of conflicts of interests, Objectivist ethical egoism, by the way in which it is formed and founded, is not subject to Glasgow's arguments and assertions. The essence of these elaborate presentations is to establish that Ayn Rand's moral theory is indeed objective as she proposes.

Objective of the Study

General objective

The objective of this work, on the general scope, would be to reinforce the strength of Rand's objectivist foundation by drawing its strength from the theory's formidable principles against the critiques of egoism. By so doing, the conclusion I intend to defend (that the moral theory of Ayn Rand qualifies as an Objective theory) would be geared towards presenting the ethical theory of Rand as a philosophically adequate theory and a holistic theory albeit the criticisms against the traditional egoism.

Specific objectives

The specific objectives, more importantly, would not only be to provide information and scrutinize positions but to help toward the construction of

Rand's moral theory of egoism as a philosophically adequate and humanly practicable ethical theory. For this to be achieved, it would also be the objective of this work to:

- Examine the philosophical branches associated with Rand's ethical theory and the progressive development of these branches to arrive at her ethical system, rational egoism.
- Scrutinize the elements, as well as the principles of her ethical theory as presented in her *Atlas Shrugged* and *The Virtue of Selfishness*.
- The principles identified shall be used as the basis of refuting the charges raised against ethical egoism.
- It would be systematically emphasized that political and social systems built on Rand's ethical pillar have far-reaching implications not only in ethics but in other fields as well.

Method and Sources of Information

In carrying out this research, the method to be employed is the qualitative method. This would be done mainly as an evaluation of Rand's argument in support of ethical egoism in contradistinction to the criticisms raised against egoism. To do this evaluation, logical tools such as analysis, explanation, and inference shall be employed to make the case for Rand's argument against the opposing arguments. The end to which this approach seeks to achieve is to detect the signals that indicate the plausibility of Rand's ethical egoism and the triviality of the criticisms against her theory of morality.

This research shall dwell predominantly on published literature. The primary documents that would mainly be employed in the course of the research would be the novels, non-fiction books and a collection of essays that cover Randian ideologies. The primary documents, which include, *Atlas Shrugged* and *The Virtue of Selfishness* shall constitute my major sources of information in advancing this research. Relevant secondary materials shall be employed as complementary sources of information in support of the primary sources.

Scope and Limitation

The scope of this research would cover two faces of the development of the ethical theory of egoism. This would guide the research to establish the emergence of Rand's ethical theory and the inherent differences it has that makes it superior as supposed by Ayn Rand. The designated coverage in the development of the philosophy of Ayn Rand would focus mainly on her novel and essay. Information shall be gathered, intermittently, from her other works and novels when there is a need for them.

Significance of the Study

The research has an audience with interest in Normative theories in mind. Given this, the research seeks to provide a systematic development in the ethical theory of Rand so that it could be easily understood by the target group. In any case, the research seeks to clear ethical egoism, especially, the Objectivist or Rational egoism from the tags of inconsistency and contradiction. This is to make readers aware that the theory as developed by Rand presents a formidable front against the various objections faced by egoism. By establishing a universal basis for the Randian moral theory, the

research makes absolute the basic elements of Rand's moral theory. This to some extent revives the elements which would qualify, if not holistically, some aspects of the ethical theory of egoism and in turn rid it of the negative connotation.

Theoretical Framework

Since it is the quest of this work to make a case for Ayn Rand's ethical theory, it would be the preoccupation of this work to employ an analytic approach to assessment. As a theoretical framework, the research would checkout for markers relating to objectivity and, in a way, examine the relationship between the concept of Rational egoism and Objectivism. The framework is meant to specify the relations among the variables of egoism and objectivism with the purpose of explaining and predicting the plausibility of Rand's postulation. In view of this, the theoretical framework for this research would be based on objectivity and egoism. This would aid in providing a systematic view of Randian ethical theory and would provide grounds for judging the merits of her theory.

Using this framework would help connect the research to already existing knowledge in objective egoism. By virtue of this framework, I would attempt to explain the meaning of Objective/Rational egoism, its nature, challenges associated with it and based on that, I would highlight Rand's intention for regarding value as the basis for man's survival *qua* man, the progression of her philosophy from metaphysics to epistemology then to ethics, and would finally establish a grounding for her rational egoism in the objective theory.

Literature Review

Egoism, as an ethical theory, has not in itself attracted much attention after the numerous arguments raised against it. However, philosophers and scholars alike have developed interest in the subject area in the wake of Ayn Rand's position. This is due to the forceful egoistic moral theory she proposed. Her proposal was totally in contrast to such incoherence that has, arguably, plagued the ethical theory before her time. Her distinctive philosophy was developed such that she utilized fictional and nonfictional works to present her ideologies concerning metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, politics, and aesthetics. Her concern for all these fields shows that her examination of the fields was not done with each field independent of the other. However, her position as a philosopher culminated with a logical relation established between all these fields. Her position on the subject provides a unified representation on the understanding of the actions of humans whose nature she considers to be determinate in the objective reality.

The claim or criticism that egoistic principles are not consistent is certain and has had a long-standing effect on the ethical debates. In 1903, G. E. Moore begins with the charge that the theory of egoism symbolizes a total contradiction. This, according to him, is because happiness is restricted to individuals and that is the only good, hence if there are various things according to each individual's only good, this would amount to a total contradiction. Moore's position (as cited in Gauthier, 1970) is evident in the claim that; "What Egoism holds ... is that each man's happiness is the sole good, that some different things are each of them the only good thing there is, an absolute contradiction!" (p. 51). Dwelling on the claims of G. E. Moore,

Edward Regis (1980) expatiated the idea that Egoism, in Moore's view, asserts a logically impossible theory. Regis further pointed out that the works of Medlin (1970) and W. D. Glasgow (1968) support the logical impossibility attached to egoism as an ethical theory. In the Case of Medlin, Regis (1980) indicated that ethical egoism entails a situation where "I desire to come out on top just as Tom and Dick would want same, and I have to acknowledge what Tom and Dick desire just as I respect mine" (pp. 55-56). Glasgow's contentions being referred to by Regis is that although egoism has it that every individual is self-sufficient, it is however not the case that egoism upholds the autonomy of the individual-self, and if self-interest would mean that we all have to engage in acts that are in our individual interests... But it is also fundamental according to the principles of self-interest to disagree with the earlier claim. This is, in a way, to make an individual's good paramount to any other person. This constitutes what is called contradiction within ethical egoism (Glasgow, 1970, p. 80). Through similar lenses of criticism, Edward Regis (1980) presents another objection that self-interest in egoism implies that the parties involved have to undertake the action which is best suited for each one of them. A clear illustration is provided by Donald Emmons (1969): "Supposing some workers at a workplace simultaneously get stuck in a revolving door. Based on the advice likely to be given to these workers by an uncompromising egoist, it is undeniable that the essentials required by one's first moral principle would rule out the view of others in the situation" (p. 312). By and large, egoism collapses in the light of any conflict of interests since it recommends that both parties endeavor to emerge victorious. This situation in Regis (1980) assessment raises the problem of the empirical

impossibility of egoism (p. 56). Rand's rational egoism, with no doubts, requires both parties to emerge victorious. This is because her egoism advocates for a win-win situation. However, her theory cannot be subject to any conflict of interest due to the objectivity in her ethical principles. The literature identified above dwells mainly on the impossibility of egoism but for the focus of this work, they can be seen as works that reinforce the formidability of Rand's rational egoism.

Baumer (1967), among others, explicitly argues that egoism produces moral assessments that are not possible to apply. Explaining the conflict of interest between two parties, Alpha and Bravo, Baumer (1967) claimed that Alpha should stop Bravo from fulfilling his own interest over his, that is, Alpha's in a particular situation of conflict of interest. Yet, in trying to do this, Alpha may be wrong because Bravo must promote his personal interest as well. Bravo going all out to achieve his personal interest would be forced to prevent Alpha from surpassing him as well, and this is also wrong, for Alpha ought to fulfill his own interest (p. 75). In essence, Egoism can be said to imply or entail an unfeasible ethical claim. To say that it is not ethically possible is to mean that one particular standard of assessment of a moral action produces resultant actions which at one time seem right and at another seem erroneous. In brief, the claims discussed here round up into the basic claim that egoism demands something that is not possible. This presents three possible implications. The first, which is logical, implies that egoism gives primacy to the interest of only one person, and simultaneously gives such primacy to the interest of others coming from their individual perspectives. The second, an empirical one, holds that the theory admonishes the two sides

of a conflict of interest to undertake what can be done by only a side of the party. Lastly, it presents moral implications where egoism is observed to assess the same act as both appropriate and inappropriate based on the same principle. Baumer (1967) has been observed in the literature to present an impossibility in the implementation of the principles of ethical egoism. It would be analyzed as a truism that egoism preaches ideologies that are impossible because it asserts of a person to seek his or her individual interest. This literature shall be used to set the tone for the need to justify an ethical theory like egoism. The import is to grant egoism some degree of plausibility.

In relation to the debate surrounding the credibility of egoism as a moral theory, Brunton (1956) takes up Hare's (1955) charge that egoism is not universalizable. Hare (1955) holds that ultimate principles are open to choices. By this, he meant that none of the principles can be discovered or identified as objectively binding on us all. Even so, to choose egoism is incoherent, something that could not be an ultimate moral principle. Brunton answers this charge by noting that the egoist is someone who is, in similar manner as other recognized moral theorists, bothered about the cleavage usually established between the individual self and the personality of others. Given that several moral theorists get spoken well of and celebrated only because they promote equality between two individuals rather than the care for oneself; shouldn't opposition to the advocates of equality be attacked on prescribed proofs for his position? (Brunton, 1956, p. 297). Brunton defends against the universalizability charge by noting that "the anti-parallel approach found among egoists are most of the times expressed towards themselves and others. This pattern of behaviour is exhibited in diverse ways by ethicists whose

concerns are about others but not the self. Their act is equally supported by the logical reason that is preferred by the exclusive experiences of the individual (Brunton, 1956, p. 298). Underpinning the argument of Brunton is the supposition that for a moral theory to be feasible, it ought to have some directions or agents it is biased towards. For instance, altruism has a bias toward others, utilitarianism toward the well-being or pleasure of the majority and so does egoism. It is highly unlikely, perhaps even not possible, to ask that ethical theory should be totally unprejudiced, fair and comprehensible. So, Brunton's defense of egoism concludes that "if our dislike for egoism would influence us not to choose it, the best we can do about it is to identify ourselves and sympathize with other people of all sort" (Brunton, 1956, p. 303). The literature as developed by Brunton would serve as a basis to establish that though the work of Rand suggests a moral bias towards the individual self, that is, seeking of the individual interest, it equally promotes impartiality. The impartiality in Rand's theory is evident in her morality that conforms to the Absolute reality.

Recently, concerns have been raised concerning Ancient Greek morality. These were concerns that argued that crucial elements of ancient Greek morality were explicitly egoistic. Indeed, the sense in which Aristotle can be considered as an egoist was explained by W. F. R. Hardie in his 1965 paper. A variety of this sort of self-enhancing morality has been examined by some philosophers in our era. W. D. Falk (1965) is one of such philosophers, to begin with. Falk points out that for the Greeks "the individual who is able to keep himself in the best of form is the only individual living appropriately. A life's best form comes with the individual being rational, self-possessed, and

such a person would only be moved to act based on the guidance of appropriate reasons” (p. 362). His careful analysis of prudence was based on the idea of rational egoism he supposedly attributed to Aristotle. Reasons, to him, could direct one to benefit oneself or others, and Falk chides those who would, following Kant, reject prudential conduct as morally irrelevant. In Tibor R. Machan’s (1979) view, since Falk has not been criticized thoroughly for his having given egoism some support, it might be objectionable taking his view as a support for any form of egoism (p. 4). To Falk’s idea, Machan suggests, has not addressed the relevant elements which can make egoism objectively sufficient in his substantive moral discussions. However, Machan was of the view that a closer philosophical position which is similar but more forthcoming in terms of postulation to Falk’s philosophical mode is Ayn Rand’s philosophy. The work of Falk if examined in light of the literature of Machan, establishes that there are crucial elements of egoism. These explicit egoistic elements in the moral theories of the ancient Greeks were accepted by Falk as having rational underpinnings. This analysis to some extent suggests that Rand’s rational egoism has a precursor. The literature of Machan would, in essence, suggest that though Rand had a precursor to her ethical theory, the relevant elements that would make the ethical system objective came into discussions on egoism with the emergence of the ideologies of Rand.

Huemer (2002), examining Rand’s egoism, opines that Ayn Rand was not an egoist in the usual philosophic meaning. By this, he meant that Rand doesn’t fall within the class of ethical egoists. In explaining the reason why he alluded to such position, Huemer explained that in Ethical Egoistic theories, the basic reason a person can ever have for doing anything is that it would

serve his own or personal interests. Also, among philosophers, there is rational egoism which is the assumption that deeds that enhance the advantages in favor of the individual over that of others are known as rational acts. Huemer says, “Nowhere in Rand’s writings can assertions suggesting ethical egoism be found. The most important element identifiable in the writings is her definition of selfishness which she renders as the concern with one’s own interests” (p. 227). This construal of the idea of Rand on self-interest considers an individual as an entity that has no concern for others, one who has sole respect for personal life over others, and one whose primary dedication is to the individual self-interest (Huemer, 2002). Huemer’s idea here would serve as a means to point out that the extensive use of selfishness in place of self-interest or individual interest does not bar her theory from being classified as an egoistic theory. In brief, the suggestion here is that the selfishness as used by Rand connote a positive understanding of self-interest and so serves the same purpose as self-interest in her ethical system.

David Kelley (1996), in rendering Rand’s view, posits that it takes a devotion for one to adhere to the things that promote his personal life and happiness. Hence, all actions that may not serve this purpose can be categorized as a minor form of self-sacrifice (Kelley, 1996, p. 7). He also indicated in his writing that Objectivism maintains that there should be a recipient in every action. But more importantly, the individual agent ought to be the prime intended beneficiary of the actions he undertakes. Also, objectivism implies that an agent should be motivated to assist other individuals only when the other’s good serves as a means to the individual agent’s good (pp. 7-9). This way of understanding the moral theory of Ayn

Rand, that is, Rand's rational egoism influences Kelley's discussion of the benevolent virtues in his work, *Unrugged Individualism: The Selfish Basis of Benevolence* where he is observed to state that the message being conveyed to others when they are benevolently catered for is that they are neither threats nor preys who one way or the other use the helper as means to their success. However, these individuals are made to understand that both the helper and the assisted are would-be allies with only a mutually beneficial relationship (Kelley, 1996). David Kelley sets the primary stage for the distinction between self-promotion and self-denial. It is on the basis of Kelley's distinction that the difference between egoism and altruism shall be brought to bear in relation to Rand's ethical ideologies.

Lesley Brown presents his view on Rational egoism which suggests that an egoistic theory which can be characterized as rational can equally be termed as rational eudaimonism. This according to him is the notion that an agent that is capable of rationality in certain terms acts or makes choices with the ultimate assumption of improving their own happiness. This is to mean that rational egoism focuses on things or activities that are rationally appropriate to engage in (Brown, 2007, p. 47). On such a notion of rational egoism, an individual who is mostly considered as rational acts based on the motive of the self-interest. In view of this, whatsoever a particular individual might uphold as his or her interest comes from the application of reason to the individual interest of the agent, and this constitutes the best approach in arriving at a true and objective motivation for our actions. Certainly, Brown has a point when he alludes to such a position. This is because, when deliberating on a moral dilemma or in a moral discourse, a rational individual

considers the possibility of having actions that would promote the good of the individual involved. These understandings, in effect, serve as reasons supporting why actions are undertaken and why they are not. Ultimately, Brown's rendition of rational egoism suggests that the individuals that are rational are most of the time motivated to engage in an action that satisfies only the self-interest. Also, it is only the reflection on self-interest and the understanding of it that give self-interest a prescriptive power. Finally, it takes deliberations on self-interest to establish motives for our actions, motives which are authentic and essential. Undoubtedly, the rendition of rational egoism proclaimed by Brown in his literature has similar supporting principles as the rational egoism of Rand. Hence Brown's version shall be used to elaborate further on the principles on which the Randian theory latches.

An equally substantive definition of the quest to satisfy the individual interests based on rationality was furnished by Jyl Gentzler (2012) in his work *How Should I Be? A Defense of Platonic Rational Egoism*. Gentzler posited that the main function of rationality in a moral agent is to organise and manage the agent's life in such a manner that the stimulating factors that are responsible for the individual's actions are factors that aim at achieving the interest of the self. Bearing in mind a number of facts about the nature of human beings, proceeding into action without taking the individual interest into account would be described as a contradiction of the agent's human interest. It would basically take the deep-rooted desires of a rational entity to be motivated for a different range of goals or intentions. The agent is also prompted to take steps on the result of cogent reflections. Nevertheless, the rational individual, in the course of his deliberations, will grant dispassionate

significance to circumstances that do not promote the self-interest. In an instance of an agent, A, an issue will have a legitimate and essential prescriptive significance for that particular agent, A, just in case, his situation and nature would serve as contributory factors to his happiness. Hence a rational agent is expected to act if he feels motivated by reasons he regards as mere desires to attain specific ends or by a careful thought process that would be substantiated by his ideal reasoning functions (Gentzler, 2012, pp. 54-55). This view of rational egoism presents the notion about an individual's action as one that grounds the facts concerning what the individual has reasons to partake in in favor of the agent's self-interest. This view amounts to a version of egoism that falls in line with the rationalist perspective. In essence, it seems to be an egoistic view having a great deal of credibility.

The remarks of Ron Beadle (2008), in his work *Rand and McIntyre on Moral Agency*, has established an interesting relation between the views of Rand and McIntyre on what they characterized as a moral agency in the modern social order. Beadle suggests that the disintegrations and confusion that has become part of revolutionized thinking methods have come to be interpreted by Rand as philosophical shortfalls, and these inconsistencies are obviously found at the base of social and political problems as epitomized by Rand's 1982 essay, *Philosophy: Who Needs It*. As might be expected, Rand, in this sense, built a uniquely structured philosophical school of thought through fictions and nonfictional works. She used these works to examine the relationship identifiable among the branches of philosophy, which are, metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, as well as politics. This, according to Beadle, was in contrast to such incoherence she identified to

characterize the thinking of modernity and to be rooted in social and political problems since Rand's theory emphasizes the importance of philosophical dispositions in a cohesive form or style. Her theory relates these beliefs to our apprehension of human actions and how to engage in these actions. It also offers a standard for behavioural acts of individual agents, as well as a uniform framework about what Rand characterizes as defined or absolute human nature in an already defined reality. This is the sort of reality she termed as objective reality. At this point, Ron Beadle has been able to draw the relation between Rand and McIntyre. He was of the view that, Rand's devotion to associating philosophical ideologies to practical ways of life resonates with McIntyre's popular but waning appraisal or criticism of the lack or privation of practical orientations from the Enlightenment and the Post-Enlightenment philosophy. (Beadle, 2008, pp. 222-223). Considering the relationship between rationality, human purpose, and selfishness, it gives us comprehension of the fact-value dichotomy in her resolve to deduce ethical claims from empirical claims. This is because she regards the fact-value, also known to be an is-ought dilemma, as wrong. The reason being that the realities about the make-up of humanity demonstrate the goals that motivate humanity and the principles that ought to guide them. It is due to this hint that she stated that "what is said to be good is empirically fixed or defined by reality. However, the good is accessible to man by means of his mind" (Rand, 1964, p. 23). By way of inference, Ron Beadle would agree that common to Rand and McIntyre, rationality forms a vital requirement for, and to a greater extent, the composition of man's goals. As such, it can equally be inferred that the argument raised by Rand in support of the rational composition of man is relatively an account of the necessary

condition for man's flourishing in terms of moralities as seen in the *Atlas Shrugged* (Rand, 1992, p. 1018). Following from the above, the end to which this literature seeks to achieve is to reaffirm Rand's move from empirical claims to build ethical standards, and also to further establish that rationality is a basic component that forms part of human nature.

Barnes (1967), in her *An Existentialist Ethics*, devotes a chapter to Ayn Rand's "egoistic humanism" and advances fairly standard existentialist objections against the naturalist ethics Rand defends. Barnes (1967) holds that the sort of naturalism we find in Rand where a code of ethics requires a correct description of the view or idea of 'human being', that is, an appropriate identification of the characteristics of the nature of humanity, implies the existence of "an absolute judgment which stands outside the immediate involvement of the individual life" (p. 131). Barnes' dismissal of Ayn Rand's egoism is seen more as a position that does not emerge from the critique of ethical egoism. In view of this, it can be extended to any ethical system claiming to be rationally grounded or objective that the objection is not as a result of a critique of them. This, in relation to Ayn Rand's egoism, does not imply that her egoism is sound. However, in the words of Machan (1979), it only indicates that criticisms of her position center on various metaethical or other philosophical pre-ethical points. Given her clear intent to build her ethics on such prior, controversial philosophical conclusions, such criticism is certainly not beside the point. It would not be possible to follow through the debate, however, when important elements of the position in question reach so far beyond substantive ethical theory. Suffice it to observe that the ethical egoism we discover in Rand is closer to the classical than to the personal or

subjective varieties mentioned at the outset of this paper. It also appears that such a position invites wide-ranging philosophical work. Hence, it is for the intent of explaining the important elements of Rand's objective theory that are unquestionably universal that the literature of Barnes was reviewed.

For Michael Smith (1994), the peculiar feature of moral assessment holds these assessments as evaluations that purport to be objective. This accentuates his position as an account for the objective nature of Ethical theories. The introductory section of *The Moral Problem* was employed by Smith to present an account of the consequences of his idea of moral assessment as being objective. He did this by stating that questions of morality are usually assumed to have correct objective moral facts which render them correct, also deeds that qualify as good or ethical are totally defined by circumstances, and that by getting involved in ethical debates, we might detect the content of these fact-based ethical facts or what the conditions are (Smith, 1994, p. 6). The term objective can, in this sense, be an indication of the likelihood of a coming together of ethical views of a peculiar kind. This, in Smith's opinion, is also called the objectivity of moral judgment (p. 6). He further asserts that the best way of discerning or unearthing factual moral claims is by painstakingly examining and putting together all the reasons for and against individual peculiar moral interpretations concerning ethical matters that are up for discussion. A debate or discussion of this nature ends up in a confluence of ethical principles, as well as a coherence of the truth of these ethical principles, on the condition that one will consider ideas and opinions that are different from theirs (Smith, 1994, pp. 5-6). More importantly, Smith's view about an objectively structured confluence of the

evaluations subscribed to by people in terms of morality implies a coherence of the truth of all the evaluative ideas through rational inquisition. The import of his idea is that no matter the facts we have, these facts remain facts that are subscribed to by all individuals that engage in rationality, hence all the activities of the rational individuals congregate the actual facts. Agreeing with Sarah McGrath (2010), it can be argued that an ethical assertion such as, “X is true” can only be accepted as a moral assertion if rational thinkers accept it as such. Hence, in situations where they disagree about the eligibility of such a claim as an ethical assertion, the claim would not qualify as an ethical assertion. I regard Smith’s idea here to be appropriate when it alluded to the position that our mundane ethical assessments aim at being objective. This constitutes an element of great relevance for metaethics.

To summarize this section of the literature review, some commentaries are in place. There are numerous attacks against not only ethical egoism but against Rand’s moral theory as well. The few of the arguments outlined in the review seem to point at the inconsistency and contradiction inherent in the nature of egoistic theories. Also, among philosophers and scholars who gave the benefit of doubt to the Randian ethical theory as a credible theory, there seems to be variation in their position. This is seen in the fact that some justify the theory based on its rational grounds and others based on the established moral value outside personal sentiments and feelings. Examining the available research information, there is room for a further look into the possibility of looking at the two blocs for the justification for Randian ethics mainly for the sole purpose of reaffirming the objective nature of the theory. By so doing

Rand's ethics would receive the needed enthusiastic approval as an objectivist theory, as envisaged by this research.

Organisation of the Study

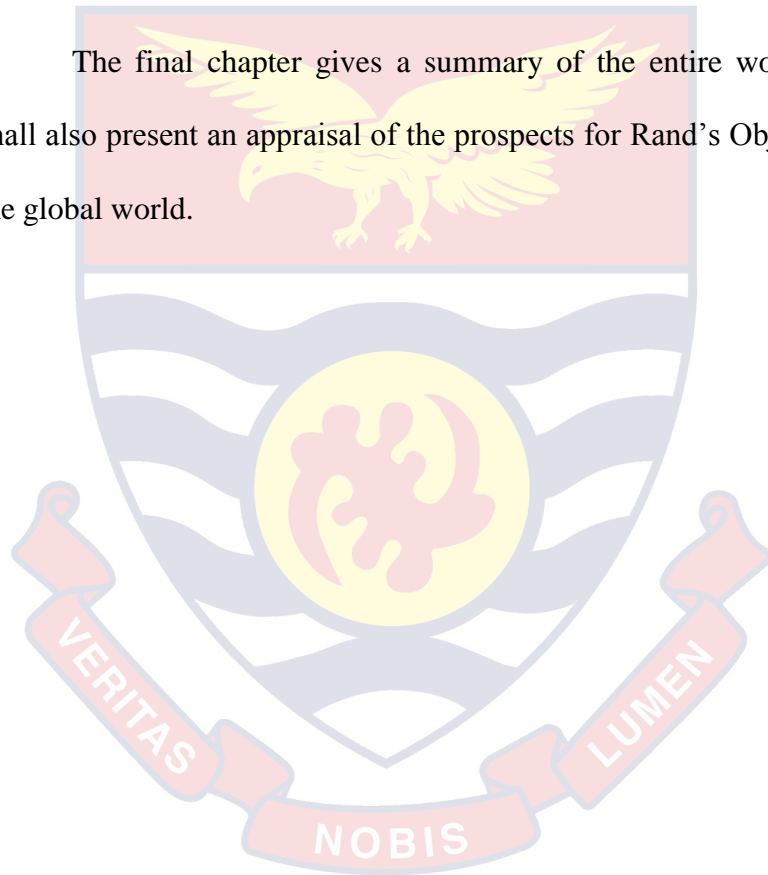
In developing this research, I intend to organise the study into five chapters. This chapter (the first chapter) presents a relevant background to the entire research. This would be the background from which the research problem emerges. The problem statement, thesis, objective, and theoretical framework of the work have been outlined in detail in this chapter. Wrapping up the chapter, literature shall be reviewed to critically explore what various scholars have presented on the problem under investigation.

Chapter two of the research focuses on presenting an exposé on the core claims of the Randian objectivist theory. The chapter would focus mainly on how Rand utilized metaphysics, and epistemology to build a foundation upon which ethics is established. As part of this chapter, it would be established that Rand committed herself to Rational egoism as the theory of right action. In essence, the chapter would outline how Objectivist ethics come to get the accolade as a theory that aims at guiding human actions based on the relation of both metaphysics and epistemology to ethics.

Chapter three would examine the link between metaphysics and epistemology, as discussed by Rand, and on that basis examine her Value theory, the value of living creatures, virtues and values. In effect, the objectivist ethics would be introduced in this chapter. The central objective elements underpinning Randian Rational Egoism would be teased out and scrutinized.

In Chapter four, the argument extends further to objections raised against Rand's rational egoism. In examining these arguments, the focus of this chapter of the work would be to provide responses to the various criticisms. The responses presented are couched from scholars such that they would all cash in to support the claim that rational egoism is equally an objectivist ethical theory. Based on that, rational egoism or objective egoism is apt to the task as an ethical theory.

The final chapter gives a summary of the entire work. This chapter shall also present an appraisal of the prospects for Rand's Objectivist ethics in the global world.



CHAPTER TWO

RAND'S OBJECTIVIST THEORY IN *ATLAS SHRUGGED* AND *THE VIRTUE OF SELFISHNESS*.

Introduction

Ayn Rand's Objectivist philosophy has gained an extensive degree of attention in recent years in spite of, or possibly because of, the fact that her opinions are shocking to most people. She claims that selfishness is a virtue, and not a vice contrary to what most people believe. In conjunction with her claim that rational selfishness is a virtue, she maintains that ethical egoism is the correct moral philosophy. To arrive at this understanding, Rand offers a distinctive philosophy using fictional and nonfictional works as means of proffering her idea about metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, politics, aesthetics and the possible connections between them. She relentlessly subscribes to the view that philosophy as a concept consists of five pillars. In this chapter, I intend to establish that Rand commits herself, first, to the truth of a theory of moral obligation or theory of right action known distinctively as Rational egoism. Secondly, it will be argued out that she devotes her account to a theory of value that examines intrinsic good extensively. This quest necessitates an exploration of the five pillars of objectivist philosophy. In view of this, it would be established in the discussion that the five pillars of philosophy (but the emphasis on metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics) outlined by Rand provide premises that give a trajectory of how an individual can live morally in an objective way. A trajectory which suggests a unified strategy that states the significance of philosophical ideas first to the carrying

out of actions as a human being, and also to the comprehension of these actions. It also offers a direction to the behaviour of the agent and keeps one updated on the nature of existence or reality which specifies man as a determinate individual in a determined world. The Objectivist ethics shall be examined as a theory that aims at guiding human actions using mainly the relationship discerned from the philosophy pillars. Much of the argument raised in this chapter shall employ a number of terminologies and conceptual gears in common use in contemporary moral philosophy. Hence it shall be my preoccupation to mention in detail the conceptual meaning of relevant terminologies intermittently in the course of the discourse. In essence, the focus of the subsequent details of this chapter is to give an in-depth exposé of the foundations upon which the Randian objectivist ethical theory is latched.

Background to *Atlas Shrugged* and *Virtue of Selfishness*

According to Edward W. Younkins (2014), the innovative and contentious philosophy of Rand known as objective philosophy was offered in an embellished manner in the *Atlas Shrugged*. Beyond the characterization as an eminent piece, *Atlas Shrugged* expounded a totally different and incredibly clear philosophy. It offers an outlook on humanity and how humanity relates to the world. It equally demonstrates the necessity of a complete philosophical ideology. The novel expresses objective characteristics in the activities of the heroic characters in the novel (p. 124).

Summarily, Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* is a piece of writing that tells the story of a world in which the members are not fairly treated and these people are on the verge of living dehumanizing and fearful lives. It is her intention to use the

book as a way of preaching a deeper message on the conditions of humanity, as well as, the greatness of humanity. The title “*Atlas Shrugged*” has a deeper meaning to it which serves as the theme for the entire novel. This theme talks about “the great minds on strike” or the revolt of the unacknowledged and victimized resourceful heroes who carry the burdens of the world on their shoulders. The novel demonstrates the impossibility of socialism as an economic system. This constitutes one of several moral and political convictions that the characters, especially, the heroes share throughout the different parts of the novel. *Atlas Shrugged* is organised in three separate parts, with each of the parts comprising of ten chapters. The three sections have each been titled in acknowledgment of the laws of the logic of Aristotle. The names of the parts, as well as the chapters, are titled in ways that have manifold meanings and implications.

The first part is titled “Non-Contradiction.” *Atlas Shrugged*, in the opening part, paints a clear image of productive individuals and those who are not productive. We observe in this part an outright separation between characters who work to better their societies and the other group of individuals who rely mainly on charity, theft and mooching. The idea behind Rand’s portrayal of a distinction between productive and unproductive individuals is that socialism cannot work. Hence, the first of the three parts of the novel concentrates on two important business-minded individuals, Dagny Taggart and Hank Rearden whose actions are motivated by the conviction that socialism is not possible. More importantly, this part has its audiences confronted with a multitude of what seem like contradictions or inconsistencies which have no outwardly reasonable explanations. An instance of such contradiction was exhibited by

Hank Rearden who passionately loves life and happiness; but, in an illogical manner, accepts the conservative position that the wants or aspirations which are peculiar to him are individually based. Moreover, they are short of any ethical importance. Such conviction of his opens him up in a vulnerable manner against plots to pull down his company, Rearden Steels. All the different chapters under this part, in sum, work toward amplification of different levels of contradictions.

Part Two, titled “Either-Or,” presents a reader with ten chapters just as the first third. The “Either-Or” part focusses on explaining some dilemmas faced by the heroes or, more appropriately, the productive individuals in the novel. It is observed in this part of the novel that the men in power become more and more frantic as the economy declines at a quickening pace. *Atlas Shrugged* explains here how an individual can choose to fall on the use of rationality or choose to pursue irrationality and bear the consequences of their actions. The characters, as well as the readers, come to see the conviction in the first part as components of a moral code, use of rationality, that makes life possible. Hence, the events developed in Part I of the novel and characters are reconceived in the second part in terms of the alternative between this moral code—rationality, and its antithesis—irrationality, hence the title of the part, “Either-Or”. As part of the dilemma, the scope of action available for the protagonists begins to narrow. This situation gets their hopes ebbing away. A dramatic example of such dilemmas is observed with Dagny Taggart. She fumbles with the dilemma of either continuing the fight to save her business or to give it up. In Dr. Robert Stadler’s case, though not a strong believer in rationality, he refuses to denounce a book which would radically oppose

rationality when published. He is torn between the choice of repudiating the book to protect his integrity, or not reacting to what the book preaches to avoid jeopardizing the tax base for his scientific research. These scenarios and many others are what Rand presents in the different chapters of Part Two of the novel as a way of bringing to the fore a series of stark alternatives. The primary alternatives presented in this part examine the dichotomy between rationality and its antithesis. These alternatives, thus, equip the heroes with a deeper understanding of themselves and the villains. It also motivates them to take actions they were scared of taking in the first part, and it enables them to interpret the results of their actions in ways that lead to further realizations.

The last part of the trio symbolizes the concept referred to by Rand as the Principle of Identity. It is titled “A is A.” This part seeks to give responses to the numerous contradictions and paradoxes identified in the preceding parts. Rand explains here that moral inconsistencies arise in men as a result of their being admonished to focus on achieving illogical values that are also unrealistic. It is these traditional virtues of self-sacrifice, faith, humility, and many others that man is exposed to that force them into horrifying dilemmas of making choices between virtuous acts and acts that only bring happiness, or between what could be termed as moral and that which promotes life. In this part, we come to understand that the new integrative perspective given to these heroes, in the second part, enables them to interpret the results of their actions in ways that lead to further realizations. Based on these realizations, they come to see, in the third part, that such opposite moral codes are expressions of opposite attitudes towards existence. Since A is A, that is, existence exists, compliance with it would mean the use of rationality and to go against it is to

refuse to employ rationality. Hence, it is the grasping of existence as existence that motivates a person to employ rationality. Given this, the cure for all the conflicts, as illustrated in the novel, is deeply grounded in rationality along with the promotion of life, rather than in principles that are not reason-based as in the case of faith, duty, and selflessness.

As a believer in the potency of reason, Rand displays in *Atlas Shrugged* right from the beginning part to the third the numerous means by which life, welfare, and contentment hinge on rationality. This is not different when it comes to *The Virtue of Selfishness*. This work is believed to be an embodiment of an extraordinary quality of integration of philosophical themes. It begins with a summary of Rand's objective ethical theory which is supported by an all-embracing application of the ethics to numerous issues confronting society. Just as *Atlas Shrugged*, *The Virtue of Selfishness*, though not a novel, also depicts rationality as the core element of good or virtue, and that lack of rationality forms the crux of evil. It points out that which occurs anytime individuals assume the obligation of exercising their rationality or at the times they fail to use it. It follows that the distinctive feature Rand associated with her heroes is their absolute commitment to the consistent use of reason as an ultimate principle that is applicable to all without exception. Consequently, people are to behave reasonably at all times, for to act contrary to that would mean death. A handful of individuals are consistent in the practice of rationality a few times. There are, however, others who exercise unique rational thinking and uprightness in working for their objectives, however, they drift to pursue actions in a mindless and self-destructive manner

in their private life. Rand's idea speaks against individuals who betray on Tuesday a planned activity they earmarked a week ago.

To be fairly succinct, Rand's theory in *The Virtue of Selfishness* can be summarized as a theory that suggests that each and everybody ought to live their lives as individuals, and the making of decisions should be through their ability to reason. Moral agents should engage in acts that conform to their personal interests, but not the interest of other individuals or a majority of people. This is because their interests would only profit their personal lives. These benefits, however, ought to be founded on values derived from the mind's rationality. Not only are these interests derived from the mind but the comprehensive understanding of reality. It is on this basis that a man's own happiness has been instituted by Rand as the ethical guide or focus of his endeavors.

After Rand's summary of her ethical theory in the essay *The Objectivist Ethics*, the successive chapters are dedicated as the media through which she attempts to address the issue of coexistence in society as individuals strive to act based on their self-interest. The ensuing chapters after the first explicate Rand's principle of morality by stating the means by which people ought to behave in a society, the manner in which society as a whole should act, as well as how people ought to engage in ethical acts whenever the need arises. This explains why the book consists of essays such as *The Ethics of Emergencies*, *The Conflicts of Men's Interests*, *Isn't Everyone Selfish?* *The Psychology of Pleasure*, *How Does One Lead a Rational Life in an Irrational Society?* and many similar topics that have her idea of moral actions introduced into government systems. She uses the basic principles of her philosophy to

expound further on governmental structures and the moral means by which they are financed. Rand outlines how violation of the rights of an individual can be destructive of a society and this danger must be combated by way of using her basic ethical principle. All elements presented in this writing of hers are cogently linked as though knitted to the whole, and are primarily, in Leonard Peikoff's (1999) words, synthesized with the *Atlas Shrugged's* unifying theme. It is a truism that both writings vividly reinforce Rand's thesis that 'reality is intelligible'.

Both, *Atlas Shrugged* and *The Virtue of Selfishness*, bring to the attention of their audience a unified perspective of man and how he relates to the world. They equally manifest the essentials of a total philosophical scheme which involve metaphysics, epistemology, politics, and ethics. These philosophical systems shall be briefly examined after which the basic elements upon which the objectivist ethics shall be teased out from the two and examined.

The first pillar, metaphysics, is that which examines existence. The objective metaphysics focusses on the unquestionable given. The idea of the objectivists that metaphysics as a branch of philosophy is given, is their explanation of the natural events which are devoid of human intervention or influence. Any event, according to Rand, in which there is no human intervention, as in the case of natural incidents, is the focus of metaphysical discourse. So, metaphysics emphasizes the world's continuation and its various principles about the discovery of the world detached from the dictates of any human agent. The second pillar deals with our experiences and understanding of the ways of humanity. This pillar is known as epistemology. It involves the

accessing of modes of gaining knowledge which would be used to change or convert the fundamental elements of nature. The interest of epistemology is in the consciousness or mentality of humans that helps in the formation of artificial objects from the objects made available by nature. Ethics, the third component, is the classification of values that define our preferences along with our actions as human beings. According to Mayhew (2005) Rand presents ethics as the setup that allows humanity to be able to draw the distinction between the things they would consider to be right and those that are wrong (p. 100). Politics is the fourth pillar of Rand's philosophy. It focusses on the appropriate means by which people are treated by other individuals in conformity to the principles outlined in ethics. It deals with the aspect of political authority coming from the state used by human beings to rule. The use of power, in this sense, is based on ethical principles. The fifth and the last foundation identified by Rand as a pillar is aesthetics. This pillar dwells mainly on the satisfaction of our consciousness as human beings. It deals with engaging in the creation and appreciation of art in a way that is consistent with reality (pp. 11-12).

The Objectivist Theory of Moral Obligation

In moral philosophy, a theory of obligation consists of one or more rules, principles, or procedures that are said to determine the rightness, wrongness, or obligatory nature of actions. As Frankena (1963) identifies, the crucial interest of prescriptive theories is to direct us in the formulation of our choices and our assessments concerning our actions in circumstances (p. 11). In the attempt to determine the correct theory of moral obligation many answers have been given. These answers are not all the same and hence they

all vary in correctness. Broadly speaking, two kinds of theories have been proposed in ethical discourse. They come from two perspectives, teleological and deontological perspectives. The former claims that the sole criterion of the rightness, wrongness, or for considering how obligatory an action can be is the relative amount of nonmoral value brought into existence either by the act itself or by the rule under which the act falls. The latter, however, comprises theories that deny what teleological theories affirm. That is to say, one holds a deontological theory if one denies that the sole criterion of right and wrong is the amount of nonmoral good produced by the act or by the following of the rule which applies to it. Some deontologists reject as irrelevant to the determination of right acts any consideration of the consequences of the act in terms of nonmoral value. Others allow such consideration of the consequences to be relevant, but deny that it is the only criterion properly used. In view of all these, the teleological perspective examines the outcomes of engaging in action whilst the deontological perspective examines as relevant the act itself in determining right and wrong but not the consequences (Taylor, 1969, p. 11-12).

Having used the phrase “nonmoral value” in the above explication, it would be apt to clarify what within the context of this work is meant by it. According to Anthony Quinton (1988), nonmoral values are fundamental ethical values which are not restricted to the purview of morality when such values are being used as a yardstick for judging actions. He decorously mentions that aside from these sorts of values merely being ethical terms, nonmoral values relate to mental goings-on as they apply or relate to actions. The topic on the assessment of acceptable and unacceptable action, he indicates, “covers

anything that lays open to human reflection and requires a decision making.” (Quinton, 1988, p. 195). It should be easy to understand at this level that in guiding actions and making judgements concerning them, a complete teleological theory would not be able to achieve such an aim without a theory of nonmoral value. This is because if one is to equalize the nonmoral good with evil, one must know what this good consists of and what might be expected from it.

With these primary distinctions drawn, I may now turn to the ethical theory Ayn Rand committed herself to. Judging from the shreds of evidence which are apparent in the two major works of hers; *The Virtue of Selfishness: A New Concept of Egoism* and *Atlas Shrugged* under discussion, Rand as a moral philosopher holds a teleological theory of morality or obligation. In more precise terms, Ayn Rand is undoubtedly committed to the teleological perspective of ethical egoism.

Ethical egoism is the theory of obligation which holds that the only measure for determining the acceptability of an action is weighing of the individual agent’s good produced over the evil that comes from the action (Taylor, 1969, p. 14). Egoistic ethic principles, in whatever form, contend that an agent should always look out for his personal good. ‘Ought’ is used in the quite unexceptional sense by the ethical egoist to imply ‘can’. The use of ought in such a definition suggests that for any act about which it is appropriate to say that it ought to be done, one can choose either to do it or not to do it. This is usually taken to mean that man, in fact, is physically and psychologically able to choose between alternative courses of action. This definition is broad enough to allow the option of choosing not to engage in an act even though

it's in one's interest. This may have escaped the attention of the psychological egoists (Nielsen, 1959, p. 502-503).

Ethical theories, in general, have been mainly concerned with questions such as: what is pleasing, advantageous and valuable in life? What is the appropriate life differently from the ethically acceptable life? What benefits in life should agents hunt? What is essentially desirable? What is acceptable in itself? Besides, what is good or valuable not as a means to something else which is valuable, but valuable for its own sake? There is and has been a great variety in the theories of value proposed by moral philosophers based on these questions. However, the revolutionary ideologies and notoriety of Ayn Rand introduced a different approach to ethical questions. The question mainly asked and attempted to be responded to by the objectivist ethicists is the question of why humanity needs morality. This, in essence, can be characterized as the primary and most fundamental question on which the entire Objectivist ethics of Ayn Rand is rooted. The objectivists' response to the question is simple: survival. Human beings need moral principles and theories mainly to enhance their existence or their survival. In their opinion, for any question pertaining to ethics to be properly unpacked, one must take a look at the beginning of what necessitates the survival of humanity. The objectivists consider the beginning of human survival to be Value. Because of this, the objectivists ask the question: what is value? (Taylor, 1969, p. 14)

To concretely establish what value is, it would be appropriate to look at Rand's delineation between three, that is, metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics, out of the five pillars she gives as the foundations of philosophy as a concept. It can be stated that Rand, when developing her philosophy, aimed at

attributing to it multidisciplinary integrity even though her main concerns dwelt predominantly on metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. In this sense, her unyielding efforts to present a systematized objective philosophy evolved into a sort of tree of knowledge, in which conclusions reached in one supporting discipline would function as true premises for the next practical discipline. Rand's philosophical outline maintains as the roots, metaphysics, but since Rand endeavors to focus on the genetic makeup of humans as well as their realistic life, epistemology was demarcated as the trunk upon which ethics is built and on ethics, we tend to have political philosophy and Aesthetics. It follows that politics is determined by ethics, which in turn is determined by the answers given to the questions posed by epistemology and metaphysics (Rand, 1964, pp. 3-5). One would be hard-pressed, I think, to conceive of this systematic approach to ethics as an objective ethical theory. Indeed, one is far from wrong for holding this systematic approach as an objectivists' ethical theory. However, there is more to the systematic delineation than it just appears on the branch level. This would become all the more evident considering the sections yet to be discussed under this chapter.

Value as the basis of moral obligation

With the focus of the discourse back to what value is, it can be gathered that the question of what value is, is directed at challenging the basic premise of ethics as a discipline. In Rand's opinion, value is "something our actions aim at attaining and/or keeping"; i.e., value sets the condition for answering the question; of value to whom and for what?" (Rand, 1964, p. 10). It would appear then that the concept of value presupposes an actor, more specifically, an animate actor. This is also to denote that whatever action a

person engages in is directed towards a recipient, this may possibly be the agent himself or others directly related to the agent. Based on this supposition, the Objectivist ethics sets the beginning of further discussions on an inquiry into the features of human nature. Grounded on logical assumptions, Ayn Rand sought to describe the specific nature of the human composition. She did this taking into consideration the pillars she has established for philosophy. Per such background, Rand proposes that metaphysics is ruled by what she calls the “law of identity”, according to which things retain their nature just as they are, objectively, and never change. That is, “A is A” and no contradictions are admissible (Rand, 1964, p. 58). Hence, the philosophy developed by Ayn Rand begins by embracing the basic fact, objective reality.

Objectivist Metaphysics (Objective Reality)

Reality, as defined by the Merriam-Webster (n.d.), is the quality or state of being real. Rand and her followers are however not just subscribing to the idea that things have the state of being real. They aver that reality is objective, that is, the natural world which we perceive around as beings is outside of the realms of human emotions and dispositions or any other factor which is supernatural (Rand, 1992, p. 1074). Reality, in her opinion, exists, that is, IS. Thus, in our endeavors to flourish we have to get wind of the nature of reality and adapt to successful acts in nature. To say of a thing that it exists is to mean that such a thing is something that possesses a precise identity. Considering the case of a scientifically proven fact like the world is spherical, a person’s continuous insinuation that the world is flat would denote a disposition contrary to the universally accepted outlook. This, however, cannot warrant a change in the belief that the world is spherical. Hence, facts remain

facts, independent of any consciousness. That is also to say that, facts constantly remain immutable since neither would any degree of wishes or anxious desires change that which is, nor will disregarding the realities wipe them away. This then introduces the Law of Identity which is usually stated simply as A is A.

The law of identity

The Principle of Identity holds that A is A. This is further explained, in *Atlas Shrugged* as meaning, facts are facts which can never be changed (Rand, 1992, p. 930). For Rand to explain reality in an objective context summarily as A is A, she is, based on inference, primarily suggesting that “existence exists.” Such an inference from Rand’s law of identity presupposes that reality is the perceptually obvious or undeniable element that rests at the bottom of all knowledge. The Identity principle establishes that all elements constituting nature have peculiar characteristics that make them rare and with purpose. Following from this, a thing can be said to be in existence because it is something unique or to be is to exist as an object of peculiar characteristics. For anything which is without characteristics has no possibility of existing. Employing the law of identity as championed by Rand enables a person to differentiate a thing from another. This is to suggest that when you perceive a book, it exists not as something else but mainly as a book. The law of identity makes reality unique such that the book being perceived cannot be mistaken as a piece of wood. For a book is distinctively a set of sheets of paper held together in a cover. However, if in any situation a book gets to be perceived as that which is pasted on the wall as posters, then it has an additional identity. In like manner, a tree, a metaphysically given, exists as a tree but nothing else

(Rand, 1992, p. 1016). In any event, it would be a matter of crossing over the boundaries the moment the tree is described as having characteristics beyond a trunk, stem, root, and branches. Also, bees, for instance, have over the ages been identified as being yellow and black in color. They are forced to sting in the light of a threatening situation. However, bees help plants to flourish because of the pollen grains they carry to the plants. All these are the characteristics of a bee as a metaphysically given. It follows from the above-outlined characteristics of both tree and bee that these are the features that give them an identity in nature. Also, one is able to identify them as such entities and not mistake them for other things because of the characteristics they possess (Robinson, 2011, p. 16). The idea of the identity law expressed in this section could be related to the theme in *Atlas Shrugged* and *The Virtue of Selfishness* which suggests that every living creature has unique features by which it can be identified. Rand specifically made reference to humanity, animals, and plants. These entities, according to her, have unique qualities. These qualities enable us not to mistake one for the other. By drawing out these differences in qualities, Rand is setting the grounds on which she can explain why human beings are expected to act in a certain manner which would give them the tag as moral agents. In short, the identity principle explains that man is, indeed, man, an animal is an animal, and a plant is a plant. This is because reality is reality (A is A). It is for this reason that no amount of compromises can be used to explain why a man can behave as an animal.

The law of non-contradiction

To extend the implication of the principle of identity, the axiom that A is A, to a secondary level, we definitely get to the point where we see a strongly expounded argument in support of the principle of non-contradiction. The principle illustrates how an individual is able to distinguish one thing from another simply because that one thing, say 'A', cannot be all big and small at the same time. In Rand's view, to say of A that it is an entity that is big, then there would be a contradiction if one were to say also that A is equally a small entity. This violates the law of non-contradiction and goes further to challenge the law of identity. Drawing from Rand's argument, if we see a leaf which can either be all red or all green and we say that the leaf is all red and all green at the same time or when the weather is perceived as being hot and cold at the same time, we may be asserting an impossible nature—a contradictory nature, of both the leaf and weather.

Analyzing the characteristics of the metaphysical givens identified earlier, which are, a tree and a bee, it would be a contradiction to say of a tree that aside from its characteristics it also may exist without branches, trunk, and stem. Similarly, it would be a contradiction to assert of a bee that aside from carrying pollen grains to help plants flourish, it is able to carry poison which is hazardous to plants. These statements are considered to assert a contradiction because they are false. Being false statements means a contradiction of nature and this further implies that they are not existing according to the law of identity. These examples as illustrated by Robinson (2011) with personal elaborations aim at establishing that subscribing to such a position would imply that we are first of all affirming the supposition that, the axiom A is A

does not always work in that way but it is possible to have A is B. That is to say that the leaf, tree, bee and other metaphysically givens do not have specific nature that makes them what they are or gives them identity. Hence, there is no need for the law of identity. Secondly, there is a defect to the grounds of what the person claims to know. This is because, the assertion that the weather is all cold and all warm, or that the bee can carry pollens to flourish a plant or poison to destroy it, or that the leaf can be all green and all red at the same time, would mean an affirmation of a contradiction within one particular object. Conversely, nature does not admit of a contradiction since this is against the law of identity. The weather, bee, leaf, and tree exist as they are because of their specific nature as those specific objects. Supposing also that these objects were lacking specific nature or attributes then it suffices to say that they do not and cannot exist (Robinson, 2011, pp. 16-17). Importing the law of non-contradiction into the philosophical themes of *Atlas Shrugged*, it could be observed that she considered it as an impossibility for one individual to exhibit one characteristic and have a trait of the opposite of that characteristic. For this reason, if a character in the novel is portrayed as an industrialist there is no way such an individual can be considered as a fribble individual for this would be a contradiction in the character traits of that individual. One instance of contradiction in the story is evident in the life of Dr. Robert Stadler. He decides to sponsor a book written by Dr. Floyd Ferris although he loathes the idea in the book. He finds it difficult repudiating the book in public since that would reduce the tax base for his research institute. Judging from Rand's explication of contradictions, this would exact heavy complications on Dr. Stadler, more importantly, on his self-esteem. Evidently,

he is observed to be totally corrupted. The idea Rand seems to advance in support of her moral theory, in the long run, is that a person who exercises exceptional rational qualities when it comes to pursuing his career must consistently apply such traits in his private life. If he, in any way, drifts from that trait in his private life then his personality consists of contradiction. This would be a self-destructive course of action for a person to chart.

At the same time, the basic understanding of the Objectivist metaphysics outlined above suggests that the objectivist metaphysics considers that which exists (reality) as having no alternatives, no competitors and ultimately, reality has nothing that transcends it. In Rand's words,

The importance of existence is the principle that existence exists and it is not dependent on any individual agent. Understanding the principle translates into the understanding of the view that nature is what it is, for it cannot be altered by way of creation or destruction. Nature is solely governed independent of the mind by the law of identity, for it is that which is metaphysically given. (Rand, 1982, p. 24)

To embrace existence from this objectivist's perspective is to throw out all dogmatic ideas of the paranormal, the spiritual and the belief in anything alleged to transcend existence, including God. One general feature identifiable in some religions is a mystical element and embracing objective reality would imply a rejection of these spiritual elements on which these religions are built. This results in atheism, a rejection in the belief in God.

Consciousness

Another key element identifiable in the metaphysics of the objectivists is the principle of consciousness which in their view is the endowment an individual has to perceive existence. For a person to have consciousness, as Rand explains it, is to be cognizant of something. By implication, what is identifiable as consciousness can only be well grasped if it is about reality or there can be no consciousness if nothing exists. At the initial stage, we get an understanding of the things that lie external or are unknown to our consciousness and later come to have a grasp of these perceptions by way of meditating on the means by which the awareness began. This simply means that consciousness does not establish the awareness of itself and until it is able to create an awareness of another reality, it is itself nonexistent (Gottself, 2000, pp. 36-38). Accordingly, objectivism asserts that the mind is a means by which we gain access to what is out there, reality. And it is worth mentioning that the mind, in the objectivists' perspective, is not responsible for the creation of realities. Articulated differently, the objectivist, Ayn Rand, gives primacy to existence over consciousness since consciousness only conforms to existence. It is by virtue of this position that Rand emphasizes that the belief in anything supernatural, mythical or anything that transcends existence, such as God, is to be rejected. This is because this would amount to the primacy of consciousness over existence, a clear indication of a claim vividly in support of metaphysical subjectivism and theism (Rand, 1982, pp. 24-28).

In *The Congruity Among Ayn Rand's Metaphysics, Epistemology, Value Theory and Ethics*, Younkins (2004), outlines Rand's explanation of the metaphysically given as every event that lies innately within existence or

reality aside our deeds or actions as human beings. This embraces the rubrics of science along with occurrences that occur without the influence of man. This metaphysical principle has a distinctive feature as absolute. The absoluteness of the metaphysically given is what necessitates Rand's claim that this absolute principle ought to be always acknowledged and for that reason can never be altered. She elaborates that it is the nature of man to change or adjust nature for his necessities. Here, human beings simply utilize the laws of existence as guides to cause changes in the components of nature (Younkins, 2004, pp. 1-2). John Galt, in the *Atlas Shrugged* opines that the faculty responsible for the identification and integration of the materials given by nature is reason. Reason, in this sense, is aided by consciousness. To elaborate on Rand's idea of consciousness as portrayed in the novel gives the indication that the use of our consciousness is, to a large extent, under the control of our rationality. This is because it is what processes the information acquired about the sensual world through sensation into a new and more powerful form of consciousness.

Causation and the law of identity

The final element discussed in the metaphysics of the objectivists is how they account for human actions in addition to causation by using the law of identity. Here, the principle that is applicable to actions is used in explaining causation. The idea in this is that actions are engaged in by entities, so every action is one way or the other the action of an entity or agent. With this established, it would equally be accepted that the way beings engage in acts is based on their specific nature or more appropriately, their identity. It can be seen then that a being would definitely act differently supposing it is a

different entity. As with the other axioms, an entity utilizes its personal and basic examination of causal relationships observed between objects or organisms to establish an implied understanding of causation prior to it being recognized or ascertained and functions as the grounds for extra information (Peikoff, 1991, p. 14). The understanding derived from Rand's idea is that the formation of increasingly abstract concepts allows us to get hold of increasingly complex causal connections that vary over greater expanses of time. This explains why entities do what they do. The idea also suggests that the law of identity which maintains that reality is what it is and never changes works in addition to concept formation to explain the idea of causality. For instance, living entities, be they animals or humans, are able to identify the particular things which would satiate their hunger. If they identify that mango can satiate their hunger, they may be motivated another time to go in for mango when they feel hungry. Hence, it can be said that the cause of some actions we engage in is grounded on the law of identity which holds that anything that helped in reducing our hunger today would be of same help tomorrow. However, for individuals to have a grasp of more complex causal connections they must form increasingly abstract concepts to make that possible. It follows that an animal such as a goat might be able to identify fruit as something that can help curb its hunger although it is without concepts but it would not be able to find a means of generating that mango as a plant. It would only take a man to learn that planting will result in fruits for him, so he would find means to produce the fruits.

The core reason for Rand alluding to such principles or axioms concerning reality is because that which exists or existence cannot be altered or evaded.

However, it is to be proudly and seriously faced. This approach in Andre Santos Campos' (2012) view, is an affirmative methodological principle for conceiving man as he should be from a realistic vision of what he is. And the nature of humans should be recognized from their unique peculiarity for persistence and success. The point being established here is that human beings, just like other animals, begin their consciousness or understanding with sensations and perceptions. These sensations are usually automatic and instantaneous reactions to external physical stimuli, whereas to talk of percepts, in Rand's jargon, are abilities for retaining sensations throughout a certain period and thus for acknowledging entities rather than mere singular stimulus. The core idea suggested here is that man can know the various things which work for his goodness if he is able to acknowledge and appreciate the reality in which he finds himself (pp. 75-78). The world, in this sense, exists and encompasses everything in it. However, its existence is independent of human thought but could only be discerned or noticed by thinking. Examining the world of industry created in *Atlas Shrugged*, characters like Dagny Taggart, Hank Rearden, Francisco D'Anconia and John Galt were used by Rand to explain the idea of causation and the law of identity. These individuals are considered, based on many actions of theirs, as heroic characters in the novel. These are self-made businessmen, entrepreneurs, investors and financiers who have been able to identify through conceptualization actions that are beneficial for their survival. It is based on their understanding of their needs and wants that they, convert the innovations of scientists and natural materials into products that could be put to pragmatic use.

Objectivist Epistemology

In view of the development thus far in Rand's theory, life can be seen to be possible on the perceptual level only through an instinctive adjustment to the surrounding environment. In this sense, survival is said to be possible only to those living creatures or animals fit to satisfy their instincts of self-preservation. The epistemology of the objectivists begins with the assertion in the foregoing section that, a person has consciousness only because he is conscious of something. It follows that objectivist epistemology is built on the maxim; consciousness is identification. What can be inferred from this maxim is that Ayn Rand's epistemology is a consequence of her metaphysics, specifically the metaphysical law that reality is identity (Rand, 1961, p. 124). Epistemology basically can be explained as the domain of philosophy concerned with the characteristics and the starting point of knowledge. Rand identified, as part of her theory, the faculty of rationality which is responsible for the identification and integration of materials provided to it by the senses. She gives the details that reason is the intellectual or rational capacity man is endowed with that is mainly responsible for his ability to put perceptual information into conceptual terms via cogent means. As soon as the facts of reality are handled by an individual either through perceptual examination or conceptualization, such an individual is said to be knowledgeable. The objectivist conception of knowledge upholds that every form of knowledge is basically grounded in our sense experiences. Sense data are the self-evident given, that is, natural elements of nature. It is highly considered amongst the objectivists that the legitimacy of the senses is obvious, hence all purported arguments that suggest the contrary commit the fallacy of 'stolen concepts.'

This fallacy occurs simply by presupposing the validity of concepts that, in turn, presuppose the validity of the senses. For the basic reason that the sensation of our surrounding is physically determined and is devoid of error means that it possesses a self-evident validity. The only possible way of recording any error about the senses is when there is an error in the conceptualization of the given, that which is being perceived. With regard to an error such as visual illusion, the error is not with the sight of the perceiver, however, the error can be identified as one which occurred in the conceptual identification of what is being perceived, in this case, what is being seen (Kelley, 1986, pp. 44-48). It follows from this Randian position that perception is not susceptible to error. Epistemology, from the objectivist standpoint, is necessitated by man's fallible nature. It is alluded to that human beings are imperfect beings who are capable of coming to terms with things in an incoherent developmental step. He, therefore, needs an appropriate method to gain access to the expertise that would necessarily promote his actions, survival and flourishing. Life, however, on the perceptual level alone is impossible to man, since that would imply his unconsciousness and consequently his destruction. The implication of holding life to be impossible to human beings at the perceptual level is that man has no automatic means of survival and he lacks inherent comprehension or urges responsible for the inevitable and mistaken promotion of his welfare. He certainly is unaware of the things that will help promote his life and neither does he have any idea of those that would thwart his life. Consequently, he ought to know the acquisition of consistent and unbiased knowledge of facts, that is, the knowledge required for a man to live. Man, in this regard, is characterized as

the sole existing species whose consciousness extends beyond mere sensations and perceptions with the distinctive characteristic or ability to form concepts (Younkins, 2004, p. 2).

Concept formation

The ability to form concepts involves the combination of multiple perceptual concretes through the processes of abstraction and definition (Rand 1990, pp. 5-7). Everything that is perceived or apprehended by man is specific and concrete. However, concepts, mainly classified as universals, are abstractions. Given this, Rand's explanation that a moral agent, based on perception, differentiates certain objects from their background and other objects is based on the capability of forming concepts. This involves the practice of rendering objects in groups based on the resemblance found with each of them as a whole and consequently integrating the group of similar objects into one concept which is a mental object. The faculty that allows the perception of objects is what makes humanity different in terms of cognition. This faculty also serves as the passage to the conceptual formation in the individual man. In Rand's opinion, a concept comes about as a result of the putting together of two or more objects observed as separate entities based on certain features. This, in conjunction with the similar characteristics between them, grants them a unified definition. Where definition denotes the concentration of a great number of scrutinized elements. A concept can also be explained as an abstract combination of two or more entities that have similar features but have their peculiar features taken out. Concepts are stored mentally while reference is made to them by substantive sense perception. This involves the conveying of concepts into the mind as a word after the concept has been

given an identity through definition (Younkins, 2004, pp. 2-3). Judging from these elaborations and taking a cue from Rand's *Virtue of Selfishness*, concepts can be regarded as units of thought which are mostly represented by a single word that applies to a whole category of objects that have a common nature and act accordingly. The ability of men to understand the world is dependent on their understanding of the causal connections which are inaccessible to animals, and this is made possible through conceptualizations. From this perspective, the world as we conceive of it, as human beings, is different from how animals conceive of it for humanity only has awareness of the world conceptually.

Conceptual knowledge

The mention of knowledge as conceptual, in Rand's opinion, refers to the idea of acquiring knowledge by the process of synthesizing concepts where one is able to apply language and thought to abstractions and concretes so as to expand the scope of what one perceives into concepts of thought and knowledge. According to Rand, it is only by this process that man is able to grasp, and combine an unrestrained degree of comprehension which lies out of the reach of the directly perceived environment of present objects (Rand, 1982, pp. 24-28). She elaborates on this in *Atlas Shrugged* in the words of John Galt,

Rationality involves the recognition and merger of the contents of a man's perception. When one is able to put together the content of his sense of touch and sight, he gives an identity to the object. By so doing, one may ascertain the identity of the object as a solid table made

of wood and other elements. In the process where the individual tries to identify and integrate the objects of his perception, his mind is confronted with the question: what is it? (Rand, 1992, pp. 1016-17)

This explanation suggests that we identify an object based on our conceptual knowledge about the object. For example, to identify a particular man we, as part of our concept formation subsume him and his characteristics under concepts such as man, animate being, rational being, and many others. To arrive at these concepts, we integrate our knowledge about many objects into a single, unitary awareness of them.

According to Binswanger (1990), concepts only permit a person to hold much more emphasis on the individual consciousness beyond what his sensual abilities would allow. That is to say that one can only see so many objects (a finite number) within his or her range of vision at a given time—he or she cannot see exceptional distant or microscopic organisms by the naked eye, but one can imagine or know of such a thing, for it is the faculty responsible for concept formation that creates the possibility of the individual to handle knowledge of such nature (p. 88). Considering these facts, the ability of the brain to know and think of objects which are not immediately perceptible is not a passive and automatic function of the mind, but the integration and synthesis of concepts and the process of concept formation require a person's active state of mind. This accounts for the reason why Rand explains conceptualization in *The Virtue of Selfishness: The Objectivist Ethics* (1964) as a process of comprehending the sense data a person gathers in conceptual terms, combining all these events with observed information into concepts by way of understanding the disparities and connections in the contents of

perception. These serve as the basis for reaching conclusions or establishing deductions that improve upon the individual's knowledge (p. 22). In sum, the process of thinking is the effort put in place by an individual to learn more and increase his or her base knowledge through inquiry and mental processes which are mainly focused or directed by the rational capacity.

An illustration in support of this idea can be seen in the concept such as a tree. The concept 'tree' is classified as an abstract universal. In the process of the formation of this particular concept, the objectivists would allude to the idea that an individual simply perceives a number of concretes (the reality) and groups all these objects based on their similarities. The individual then integrates the grouped unit into a single mental entity, thus the concept of tree. The same concept formation process would be employed in the case of a metaphysically given like animal. In this case, the rational agent uses the concepts formed from concretes like dogs, cats, chicken and the likes. These concretes, he integrates into one by looking out for the similarities and differences (which he omits so as to arrive at a successful concept). In the end, the rational agent arrives at the abstracted universal concept of animal. Moving to a higher concept, the concept of animals in conjunction with other abstract concepts such as human beings can make a rational agent to form the concept of living things. This outlines the hierarchical order observable among concepts.

Younkins (2004) further indicated that Rand's explanation of concepts suggests that these concepts are not inherently abstract objects that subsist detached from the human mind. They are also not minor products of the consciousness of man which is unconnected to reality. On the contrary, they

are fact-based objects of knowledge. That is to say that the objects of reality in conformity to the consciousness of man generate the concepts. Concepts are abstract amalgamations of realistic facts. This involves a rational process of organisation of facts to generate concepts usually done by man but closely monitored content-wise by reality.

It suffices to say that concepts, in Rand's opinion, are reflections of reality and can never be arbitrary although these concepts are in the minds of the individual. This implies the objective nature of the concepts in the human mind. Consequently, any assertion that an individual is objective in his or her conceptual formation implies that he or she fully adheres to reality. To adhere to reality is to apply certain procedural rules which are based on facts. These rules should also be the proper form of man's cognition. Man, being a rationally conscious being, adapts to objective reality by utilizing reason and logic.

Drawing the implications of the above analysis from Kobzeff (2011), it can be asserted that for humans, the knowledge that comes from sensory perception is a first-order knowledge, that is, a primary level of knowledge, but this alone does not provide humans with enough knowledge to survive. For example, the feeling of weakness due to no food intake for some hours might give a sign to an individual that he or she is hungry. But this alert does not inform the individual as to how one should acquire what to eat. Likewise, dryness in the throat might alert an individual of his or her thirst, but it does not provide him or her with guidelines on how to get fluid to quench the thirst. Furthermore, natural instincts do not provide for humans as they do for animals, so instead, humans must exercise reason or they must think in order to solve their

problem or risk perishing. Thus, everything that a person requires in life ought to be acquired by means of finding it and working towards its acquisition. This must be done based on the individual's personal volition, and by his effort which is guided by reason. Reliance on instinctual action alone is not enough for an individual to survive, for it is by the power of the mind and the power of reason that an individual survives, that is to say, the conceptual faculty that allows the mind to integrate thoughts and memories to produce and create knowledge is that which promotes survival in humans (p. 10).

Conceptual ability as the distinctive feature of man

The comparison between animals and human beings was purposely introduced by Rand in *The Virtue of Selfishness* as a way of building a bridge between being conscious of one's environment and being able to form concepts about your environment. Rand's discourse on the topic explains the possibility of having animals, at least many of them, just like human beings to be conscious. Animals, in particular, have the faculty of sense perception. Through this faculty, they are alert and fully aware of the things they observe in their immediate environment. Some of the animals, according to Rand, are endowed with memories that enable them to learn about the objects they perceive around. The memory also aids them in making use of information from their past encounters with an object to better deal with the same or like object in the present. Judging from this, animals can also apply material learned about one object or situation to others that are perceptibly like it by way of associating these perceptibly similar objects. These forms of skills in animals, undoubtedly, signal a higher form of consciousness in them, however, it also means that the upper limits of the consciousness for human

knowledge extends beyond such skills. Man, according to Rand, does not only gain enormous sums of knowledge about categories of objects which are perceptibly similar but he is able to gather knowledge of objects which are not similar in perception, and also of those that are not perceptible at all. From the human perspective, the world is not a succession of objects and situations that are more or less reminiscent of one another, as it is for an animal. Instead, we have a conceptual awareness of our environment and the world at large.

This ability of conceptualization, in Campos' (2012) view, is precisely what disentangles man from animals. A man's survival is not based on instincts and neither is it based on man's automatic adjustments to his surrounding environments, however by a prolonged process of thought and adjustment to surrounding environments. The import of Campos' proposal is that the sole and specific thing capable of inducing humans into action is reason. The rationality of the human person forms the fundamental measure by which they can live longer. In this sense, it can be said that life has been provided to humans but without a guideline on survival. Likewise, a body is given but without the capability of endurance. Reason is given to him but no content. All these are meant to suggest that for human beings to stay alive, they ought to think or employ reason to promote the survival of the body (Rand, 2003, p. 451). Gathering from Campos' position, a man's survival of cold and hunger is dependent on how he is able to take raw materials that he perceives around himself in nature and can conceive of them as means of protection from cold or as means of curbing the hunger. By so doing, man's conceptual abilities allow him to enhance his way of life by putting available materials together to make clothing and food through hunting and agriculture. Rand's epistemology

is, consequently, observed as the pillar which sets rationality as its main core and the “supremacy of reason” as the epistemological equivalent of the underlying principle of metaphysics, that is, the “law of identity” (Campos 2012, p. 80). This idea suggests that Rand has an established relationship between man’s use of reason and his survival. This would mean that the objectivist epistemology would not consider emotions or feelings as sources of knowledge. They, in certain terms, acknowledge the importance of emotions in human life. However, it is maintained that emotions are merely the consequences arrived at from the conscious and subconscious ideas that are already accepted by the individual involved. Consequently, emotions cannot serve as the means of reaching an awareness of reality. This, in Rand’s words, holds that “emotions are not tools of cognition” (Rand, 1982, pp. 62-63).

Having established that primary sensory perceptions can only make an individual aware of his or her immediate environment and that can be characterized as primary knowledge, it could be said of this primary knowledge that it is the source of the first cue of right and wrong. In any event, when our primary sensations alert us of pain or pleasure, this immediate sensation can be a source of fundamental knowledge concerning what is right and wrong for the individual involved. This can be epitomized in the case of the sensation of heat which is a primary sensation capable of informing the person involved about the extent of pleasure or pain he or she is benefiting from such sense information. This is helpful in life where pain and pleasure serve as sources for alerting a person about the degree to which he or she is benefiting from an action. This is usually essential only at the early stages of life because as a person grows, he develops his rational faculty which allows

him to integrate experiences. It is at this stage of life that an individual experiences pleasure from an act but realizes later that the pleasure from such action does not mean a beneficial end may be arrived at but it can cause great havoc. Likewise, an initial pain sensation from a thing would now be understood as not leading to a disaster only, but could equally lead to a desirable end. Thus, beyond just the use of pleasure and pain as determinants of good and bad, reason is absolutely necessary to determine goodness and badness, and truth or falsity. This is only possible because of the knowledge individuals garner and develop through the formation of concepts and the integration of primary knowledge. The discussion thus far has been to establish that for every conscious being that is able to use the rational faculty, knowledge is the means of survival. This, for Rand, means that every 'IS' implies an 'OUGHT' (Rand, 1964, p. 11).

Is-ought dichotomy

The relationship established between Is and Ought by the objectivist epistemology carries the basic understanding of the idea that every fact stands on the decision of the individual to stay alive. It equally implies in the objective approach that all truth primarily necessitates a judgement, and every judgement certainly presumes the former. So, Rand puts it in the *Virtue of Selfishness: The Objectivist Ethics* that knowledge is necessary for flourishing when it comes to rational agents. This is to mean that to any rational living organism, all *IS* implies an *OUGHT*." (Rand, 1964, p. 11). In all, one has to use his reasons to gain access to nature to ensure the sustenance of his personal survival for this alone can be characterized as the promotion of the value of life. Since the functioning of our senses is automatic, the sense cannot

promote the existence of man. However, the formation and use of concepts are, to a large extent, under our conscious control, and this imposes a responsibility on every rational entity. Galt makes this argument in the novel when describing the development of human consciousness. In his opinion, the awareness that a child gets about the fact that his senses are not enough for his survival and that he must use his material or perceptual knowledge aided by his mind to explore nature marks the beginning of his birth as one who reasons and is industrious (Rand, 1992, p. 1041).

This relationship between rationality, human purpose and selfishness triggers our understanding of Rand's distinction between facts and value, a principle developed with a significant shift from realistic claims to moral claims. Rand (1964) emphasizes that the dichotomy or the distinction between claims on what is factual and claims making prescriptions is incorrect. The reason being that the nature of man raises facts that confirm the values he ought to pursue as a human being. This, of course, absolutely supports the view that value as an idea is, epistemologically, reliant on the notion of life which serves also as the source of value (pp. 11-13). Kobzeff (2011), gave further elaborations on Rand's principle of *IS* implies an *OUGHT* by stating that, if Rand subscribes to or develops a justification for the actions of conscious being based on such a principle, she is in a way suggesting that man is free to choose to ignore his consciousness and volition or he may equally choose to pay heed to this rational capacity that we have as rational beings. He went on to further state that this does not seem to suggest that we are not liable for the outcomes of our actions be it one performed based on compliance with our rational faculty or one performed with disregard for the rational faculty. He notes that, though

man is free to choose, man cannot be said to be free to escape the penalty, that is, the evil or destruction which arises from his unconsciousness or his neglect to employ reason (p. 11). The suggestion raised by Kobzeff (2011) suffices to support Ayn Rand's position that man has a freedom of decision making which allows him to be, in Rand's words, "the only living species that has the power to act as his own destroyer." Therefore, because humanity has the capacity to destroy itself, humanity must act preventatively in order not to destroy itself. From Rand's perspective, there must exist a set of goals to guide humans from acting contrary to their welfare and interests; these goals or guidelines are established within and by the field of ethics. This leads to her definition of ethics as an unbiased metaphysical necessity for the survival of man (Rand, 1964, pp. 40-41).

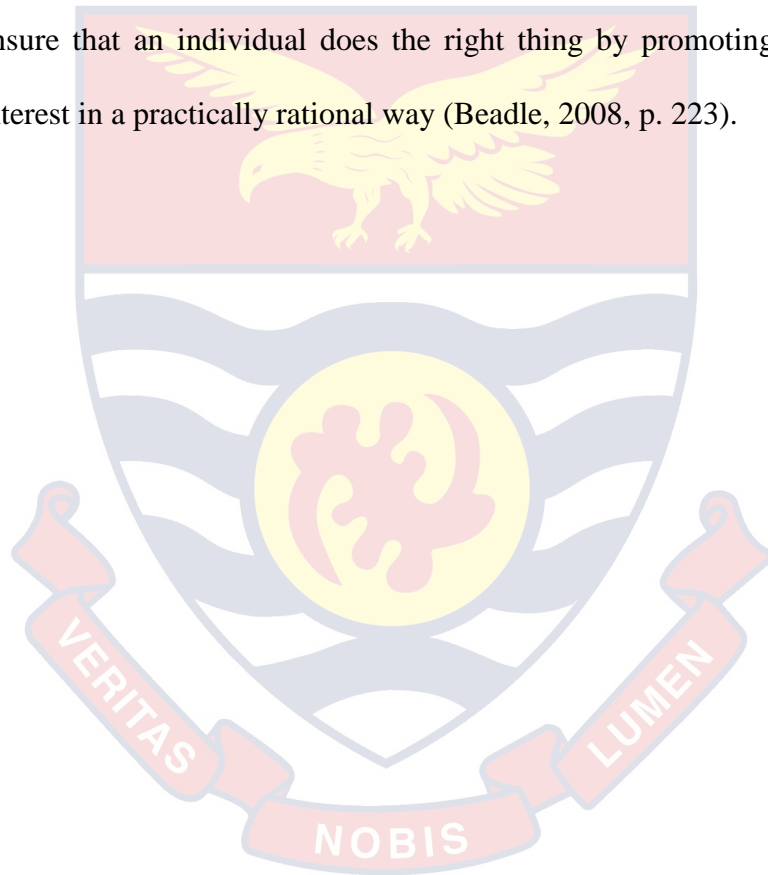
As has been outlined, it is a person's use of reason that would enhance his existence, that is, man, being a rationally conscious agent, the best way he can act in line with any existence that is objective is through the use of reason. For the sustenance of life, a man ought to acquire rationality as his instrument of knowledge. Hence, objective, in Rand's opinion, points to the working of concept formation as well as the result of such a process. Through the use of the appropriate procedures of rationality and in conformity to the principles of logic, the consciousness of man is able to access objective knowledge of existence.

Conclusion

This chapter of the study is expository rather than argumentative or critical. It rests on the assumptions that one is only able to meaningfully

criticize a theory when one understands it well. Also understanding a theory requires understanding how it is like in contradistinction to its antithetical theories. In view of this, the preceding sections have examined the basic principles underpinning the Rational Egoism espoused by Ayn Rand. The objectivism, as Rand sought to advance, aims at developing a multi-disciplinary continuum. This continuum, which has been extensively divulged in the foregoing paragraphs, ranges from metaphysics to aesthetics. However, the discourse has so far examined the two significant disciplines which necessarily pave the way for the third discipline. In this sense, this chapter has established that her efforts to systematize Objectivism ends up producing also a kind of tree of knowledge. In this tree of knowledge, it is claimed that the conclusions reached in one supporting discipline would function as true premises for the next practical discipline. The ethical theory of the objectivists begins with the premise established from the conclusion reached in the objectivist epistemology and metaphysics. The other disciplines which have not been discussed into detail are observed to dwell on the ethical theory. Hence, the answers provided for the metaphysical question; what is the meaning of reality, give the grounds for explorations into the question; what distinctively separates man from other entities. These two philosophical questions have consequently established the foundations upon which the objectivist moral theory is founded. Hence, the ethics of the objectivist is a consequence of both metaphysics and epistemology or ethical principles otherwise are the outcomes that arise from a peculiar model of logic and man's intellect.

In all, Rand's novel *Atlas Shrugged* affords the readers with depictions of moral agents whose use of reason is both informed by a unified philosophical principle and constantly applied to their choices and judgement. This is, of course, a truism that Rand connects everything to the function of the mind in the existence of man, the unifying subject of the novel (Rand, 1975, p. 81). The philosophical elements found in the fiction coupled with the ideas outlined in *The Virtue of Selfishness* provide fundamental principles that ensure that an individual does the right thing by promoting his or her own interest in a practically rational way (Beadle, 2008, p. 223).



CHAPTER THREE

OBJECTIVITY AND RAND'S RATIONAL EGOISM

Introduction

Discussions in the previous chapter ended on the note that there is a conformity of the mind to reality, a mind-independent entity. It was also established that the theory of conceptual functioning forms the basis of objectivity. Metaphysics, as has been established, is the branch of philosophy that studies the nature of the universe as a totality. Epistemology is also identified to be concerned with the relationship between man's consciousness, reality and with the operation of reason. A theory of knowledge, as teased out from Younkens (2004), necessarily includes a theory of concepts. The theory of concepts further determines one's theory or concept of value. This preliminary sets the stage for the discussion of ethics. The crucial element for understanding ethics is in the concept of value. Thus, ethics ultimately is located in epistemology and metaphysics. Using an approach that is different from what was done in the second chapter, the purpose of this chapter would be to tease out the Rational elements in Rand's Objective Egoism. Rand's philosophy is a systematic and integrated unit y with every part depending upon every other part. The greater portion of this chapter deals with the related areas of value theory and ethics because those are the fields in which Rand's ideas, right from metaphysics to epistemology, all cash in and can be seen to tie together.

Value Theory

According to Rand, all concepts are derived from facts. These concepts encompass the concept of “value” as well. All concepts, the concept of value inclusive, are aspects of reality in relation to individual men. She also maintains that reason is responsible for determining our ends as well as our means. Given this, values are epistemologically objective when they are discovered through objective conceptual processes and are metaphysically objective when their attainment requires conformity to reality. Rand, in an attempt to give a response to what fact or facts of reality give rise to the concept of value, reasons that there must be something in perceptual reality that produces the concept value. She argues that it is only from observing other living things in the pursuit of their own lives as well as an introspective observation of oneself that a person can perceive the referents of the term value. For example, people act to attain various material and other goods and determine their choices by reference to various goals, ends, standards, or principles (Younkins, 2004).

According to Raham Sharaf and Seyyed Hassan Eslami Ardakani (2015), it took Rand the study of the nature of living creatures to determine the criterion of moral value. This makes the concepts of values, good and evil applicable only to living creatures. Careful consideration of their opinion suggests that Rand’s assertion that the concept of value is a derivative of the concept of life means that she regards the life of living creatures to be the main criterion in determining their moral value and the likelihood of a thing being good or bad

is necessitated by life. A further implication from Rand's statement can be that living creatures face choices that make possible the fulfillment of the concept of value. Because of this, life or death serves as a living creature's most basic and significant dilemma. Therefore, in Rand's system of thought, the only thing that is valuable in itself is a creature's life. Other issues are valuable only if they are in line with the creature's life. That is, the normative aspect of reality arises only with the appearance of life.

Undoubtedly, Rand believes that the concept of life is deeply connected to the concept of practice. In her opinion, living creatures are able only to preserve their own lives by engaging in a sort of activity. To this end, if a creature fails to put in place appropriate actions to survive, it will die because the creature's life is a process of self-sustaining and self-generating (Sharaf & Ardakani, 2015, p. 33).

Ayn Rand considers a purpose that is conceived and pursued over time by a man as a value if that term is suitably appropriate for the man in the sense in which it is conceived. Based on this, Galt, in his speech in the *Atlas Shrugged*, defined value as "that which one acts to gain and/or keep" (Rand, 1992, p. 1012). A value is an object of action since it is something that is endeavored to be achieved and also preserved. The concept of value is, in Rand's opinion, not primary. However, primacy is given to *whom* and *what* the value is meant for. John Galt further mentions that "value presupposes a standard, a purpose, and the necessity of action in the face of an alternative, so where there are no alternatives, no values are possible" (Rand, 1992, p. 1034). This, thereupon, suggests that the concept of value necessarily demands an

actor, more specifically, an animate actor who has the capability of reasoning. The crux of it all is that there must be a choice to be made, and more significantly, there is “one fundamental alternative in the universe: existence or non-existence” (Rand, 1964, p. 10-11). This alternative only applies to living beings. It follows that a rock or a mountain is merely a unit of matter with no volitional consciousness. Stated otherwise, a mountain and a rock are perishable entities that cannot engage in the act of making choices. In view of this, these units of matter are not able to make choices between the ultimate alternatives so they are not capable of being destroyed but simply reduced and changed. Since according to Rand, these matters cannot cease to exist, they lose nothing even in their reduced or changed form. In short, the constant alternative of life and death is faced only by living organisms. Hence, life is the only fact of reality that makes value possible.

Rand explains in *The Virtue of Selfishness* that the range of actions required for the survival of each living organism varies. This is because the activities of an entity are paralleled with the entity’s consciousness. In view of this, the series of activities that necessitate the survival of higher organisms, in comparison to lower organisms, is wider. Consequently, plants would have a narrower range of activities for their survival than that of human beings with wider scopes. This is because of the difference in the level of consciousness between plants and human beings. Plants are among the simplest living creatures and so their automatic and involuntary actions suggest that plants only grow upward toward the sunlight in a manner most effective for their survival.

Animals, in comparison to plants, have a much more complex mechanism that aids their survival. Animals, in contradistinction to plants, possess instincts and sensations so they act differently for survival by reacting to external stimuli. It is through their sensations that animals are drawn to things in nature which they think can promote their well-being as well as things which can affect their lives negatively. Taking the lion's hunting life as an instance, it will be observed that when it seeks for its prey it does so as though it is aware of what it seeks, that is, its goal. This awareness of the lion may be in the form of an image in its mind. This would help him pursue its prey. However, it would not be able to consciously pursue good nutrition for it is limited to the perceptual level. The lion simply does its things as though it is being directed by genetically programmed desires or acquired habits that unconsciously cause its pursuance of various perceptible goals. These goals and actions, unbeknownst to it, cohere into a self-sustaining way of life.

However, humans are different. Humans possess sensations just as animals but they possess more than just the ability which allows them to react to their external environment. Instead, man's peculiar distinction from all other species is volitional consciousness. To talk of human beings as having volitional consciousness then the reference is being made to the idea that mankind has the power to actively engage in decision making and choices independent of external forces. This further proves that whereas the immediate environment in which animals find themselves together with their sensory reactions to these environments limit or bound them up, humans have the capacity to suspend their instinctive reaction or act in contradiction to their own good.

Taking up the *Objectivist Ethics*' treatment of the topic, a further import could be drawn from Rand's explanation that it approves of a hierarchical scheme for consciousness that is available to a particular living entity but not to the other. She explains that sensation, the lowest level of consciousness, is limited or accessible to only creatures with the five senses. Immediately above sensation is what she calls perception. This is also available to animals as well as men. Perception constitutes a higher level of consciousness. It takes place when a set of sensed affairs collected by the brain is analyzed. Perception helps in guiding a living creature to go beyond the senses and have a general awareness of single separate affairs. The animals' ability to perceive enables them to have particular skills such as hunting. This explains the highest form of value which is exclusive to animals. It follows that the criterion of value to creatures such as animals is limited to perception. Although animals are not endowed with the power of will, they always act to survive and are unable to voluntarily destroy their own lives. Rand considers man to be a much more complex entity that possesses the third and highest level of consciousness—that of conceptualization. Conceptualization, as has been established in the earlier discussions, involves the integration of perceptions into concepts and ideas. The process is what Rand calls association or thinking. To her, it is not automatic or instinctive. Man, in this way, has the freewill to choose between thinking and avoidance of it. He is considered to do the right thing if he chooses the former. But if he chooses to neglect thinking he cannot escape the consequences that come along with his choice (Rand, 1961, p. 11). Rand believes that man's nature is designed in such a way that he can choose to think and be aware or avoid it, but if he

avoids thinking, he has stepped towards his own destruction and committed an immoral act (Rand, 1982, pp. 12-13). In this way, Rand thinks of rational living as a successful way of life.

Also, the values formed by people are from their initial stages not material or physical. They come about as concepts in the minds. In the *Atlas Shrugged* these concepts are considered as spiritual values. However, the fullest application of the mind to the quest of attaining a value by means of conceiving and choosing is what makes its pursuit worthwhile. In simple terms, one sees a goal before him, he moves purposefully towards it, and then reaches it. This affirms that value is that which one acts to gain and/or keep. It equally affirms the position that actions are directed towards a value. Considering the fact that our actions are physical or bodily, to gain a value would mean the reduction of the value into physical reality. The novel's substantive treatment of values as situated in the physical reality occurs in connection to Dagny Taggart. This is seen in her explanation of her childhood goal to Galt, "that the world was mine to shape in the image of my highest values and never to be given up to a lesser standard, no matter how long or hard the struggle" (Rand, 1992, p. 812). This was a goal she valued as a child until she attained the capabilities as an industrialist to put it to birth. The moment of her greatest achievement, as she rides in the cab on the first run of the John Galt Line, gives what I think is the novel's explanation of a physical materialization of her goals, that is, to reshape the world in her value's image. As a response to Dagny's achievement, Galt explains, "anyone who doesn't act to give his values expression in material form is a cheap little hypocrite whose existence is unrelated to his convictions" (Rand, 1992, p. 1029). In

essence, productive work epitomizes value. To take mastery over matters and to make one's environment accommodating, there is the need to devote one's life to production, and this is only possible when one applies rationality to his or her values. According to Gregory Salmieri (2009), the only form of value that cannot be given material expression is an irrational value. Hence, these irrational values are not attainable, and this totally contradicts the assumption underlying the definition of value as that which one acts to gain and or to keep. In his estimation, the claim that there are such self-contradictory values is simply an attempt to evade the necessity of conceiving and pursuing rational values and the existence of those who pursue rational values. Amongst the characters of Rand's novel that have a perverse form of motivation toward irrational values are James Taggart and Lillian Rearden.

In this sense, we can agree with Younkens (2004) that everyone pursues values. This, in his view, includes any goal-directed behaviour. A mention of the term, value, can in a general or descriptive sense point to what is observable. This idea relates value to reality and this is a precondition to an objective and normative perspective on value. It is observed that people go after things. However, we initially do not consider whether or not people are properly employing their free will when they pursue their values. According to Younkens (2004), at the very early stage of our life, we indirectly get the idea of value, first, from observation and introspection. With time, there is a move away from the idea of describing value toward a normative definition of value. To talk of normative characterization of value, Younkens seeks to suggest that it involves the notion that a legitimate value is one that serves the life of the one involved. In essence, exposure to reality is the means by which we come

to encounter what we call rational value since reality serves as the sole source as well as the standard of these rational values.

Values are derivatives of a chain of value in which all values serve both as an end and as a means to other values. The only value which exceptionally does not serve as a means to other values is the ultimate value. A thing qualifies as a value on the grounds that such a thing is good for someone or something. Life, for instance, is a fundamental value to man because it is conditional and requires a particular course of action to maintain it. Hence, the objectivist metaphysics has established that for a living entity, the life of such an entity is that which lies at the end of the chain of values. Even so, human beings have survival as an end with the means being values and virtues that serve the purpose of promoting their survival. Younkins (2004) points out,

Values and virtues are common to, and necessary for, the flourishing of every human person. However, each individual will require them to a different degree. Values and virtues are necessary for a flourishing life and are objectively discernable, but the exact weighting of them for a specific person is highly individualized. (p. 3)

That being the case, man is observed to go through life such that he ascribes different values to different things. This culminates into the situation where man establishes a sort of hierarchy of values, with life at the top. Hence, life is the ultimate value for which all other values are means. Life is pursued for its own sake but not for the sake of something else. In order to achieve this ultimate goal, self-interest pursues other values that are both the means and the actual realization of the ultimate value.

Values and virtues

In Objectivist ethics, there are three values immediately under the top level in the hierarchy of values. These are reason, purpose, and self-esteem. In order to achieve these values, man acts to gain and/or keep them. Since value is characterized as that which one acts to gain and/or to keep, the actions towards gaining the values are known in the Objectivist ethics as virtues. To achieve the value of reason, there must be the use of rationality. Hence, rationality is the virtue for reason. For purpose and self-esteem, the virtues to practice must be productivity and pride respectively. It follows that a man's life is fully achieved or attains happiness and preserved if, first of all, reason is valued through a continuous exercise of rationality. Secondly, if life is valued through constant productive work. Last of all, if one's self is valued through an incessant sense of pride in one's personal production (Campos, 2012, pp. 81-82).

Chris Matthew Sciabarra (1995) notes in relation to the above that it is the harmonious relationship between the virtues of rationality, productivity, and pride as primary virtues that will establish Rand's ethical good. He suggests that Rand conceived of the three virtues as an indissoluble whole, that is, one whole virtue which is however constituted by seven virtues. These seven virtues are rationality, productivity, pride, honesty, independence, justice, and integrity. Of these virtues, the first three are prioritized by Ayn Rand as the basic (p. 224). In the brief introduction to her work, *Objectivist Ethics*, Rand stated "I am not primarily an advocate of egoism, but reason. If one recognizes the supremacy of reason and applies it consistently, all the rest follows"

(Rand, 1964). Her idea of the supremacy of reason furnishes us with the reason why she considered rationality as the basic virtue. The embracing of reason is the root of an individual's moral stature since the act of embracing reason can be construed as the virtuous act of rationality. This serves also as the root of mankind's progress, including the struggle for freedom. The rejection of reason is the source of an individual's evil and history's many centuries of stagnation, retrogression, and oppression (Rand, 1964, p. 127).

The idea of the virtue of selfishness came up from the understanding that rational self-interest is in threefold form, as opposed to the thesis of altruism and of all ethical ideals that force man to put the good of others before and above his good. Campos (2012) confirms that the advocacy of selfishness as a virtue by Rand implies not mere conformity of an action or of a character to an ideal good, but rather the actual production of something tangible for the ideal good. Following from that, the objectivist ethics does not allow for a distinction between facts and values. This means an action is an ethically good action since it is one that actually makes the valued good a reality, not the one that can simply be described after the fact as being in accordance with a valued good (p. 82). Living beings have to attain certain ends in order to sustain their lives. This is reality's basic fact which necessarily gives rise to the concept of value. Talking of facts that concern the enhancement or hampering of life, they are founded on the fact of reality and grounded in cognition, and so they are considered as objective.

The above elaborations have explained the long-term use of rationality in building one's system of values. This long-term use of rationality for

producing one's ultimate value captures the core of Rand's ethics—rational self-interest. In view of this, the objectivist ethics propounded by Rand shall be examined in the coming section.

The Objectivist Ethical Theory

Atlas Shrugged as a novel dramatizes Rand's understanding of the need for the prime movers of the world. These prime movers she also refers to as the rational and productive individuals in the world. In view of that, the novel portrays philosophic themes that hinge on the philosophy of egoism and individualism. These themes, in Rand's opinion, require a demonstration of the nature of the prime movers (rational individuals), their mode of functioning in the society, and why they do the things which make them qualify to be referred to as such. The novel further explores a philosophical perspective which is not a direct theme. This aspect of the theme examines the rival agents (the second-handers) to the rational agents, as well as their motivations and reasons for working against the rational individuals. *Atlas Shrugged* brings to bare three main issues regarding Rand's ethics. It talks about rationality as the principal moral virtue. It also projects the proper means by which a moral standard gains validation and the role of choice in morality. An additional implicit theme is seen in the actions of a number of characters that dramatize issues relating to exploitation, the principle of altruism. Following from these issues in the *Atlas Shrugged* are the barest essentials of her system, explained in *The Virtue of Selfishness*. These essential elements, in Rand's estimation, sufficiently present the manner in which the objectivist ethics is the morality of life in contradistinction to the

other ethical systems. I explore each of these issues more fully in the subsequent paragraphs.

Objectivist value

Rand renders her definition of ethics as a code of values used to rationally guide man's choices and actions that determine his purpose and course of life (Rand, 1964, p. 13). Objective value is the fundamental component immanent in the ethical philosophy of Ayn Rand. It is believed among the objectivists that reality does not allow for subjective or whimsical or arbitrary emotions. This is basically due to the fact that reality is unyielding in its nature. To explain this, Smith (2006) writes that, "what is good for a person, what is in his interest, is not simply a subjective projection of that person's beliefs, attitudes, tastes, or desires for these are not adequate guides to meeting his life's requirement" (p. 25). As an inference from this, Kobzeff outlined that Rand was only suggesting that value is always good to someone and for some end. But not that value exists as an unattached feature inherent in the external world. To him, material stuff, as a matter of fact, have neither value nor disvalue; they only get to acquire meaningful value with respect to a living being. This is observed, particularly, about serving or hindering man's goals. He explained further that Rand's explanation of value as that which one acts to gain and keep forces Rand to uphold value as an object or goal of some form of action. Thus, a value can be that which some entity's action is directed to acquiring or preserving. This particular definition raises concerns about the behaviour of an individual. This has to do with the view that a goal-driven action or behaviour is necessitated only by an entity's action, that is, the

entity's pursuit of a certain end, which can make a difference to the outcome. Therefore, the concept of values is made possible only by living organisms. This one way or the other suggests that they are entities confronted with the fundamental alternative of life or death (Kobzeff, 2011, pp. 12-14). Galt stated in the *Atlas Shrugged* that living entities that are volitionally conscious ought to be cognizant of their individual values. This is to help them in maintaining their individual lives. They should also ensure to be right, for to be wrong about any action denotes danger to one's life. Being evil or having a wrong personality also translates into one's inability to be part of existence (Rand, 1992, pp. 1056–57).

On the whole, the objective value considered as the fundamental assumption in the objectivist ethics can be fingered out as the life of the entity in question. This is so because every action an individual engages in is considered by Rand as having repercussions on the life of the individual engaging in the act. Thus, the most foundational element of Rand's argument in ethics is founded on the tenet that man exists and must survive as man (Rand, 1964). This section of the paragraph examines the first part of the principle, that is, man exists. The existence of man is seen as a given that presupposes that human beings are part of nature. She further explains that it is only the alternative of life and death, the dichotomy of existence and nonexistence that creates the necessary position and context for value-oriented action. To best examine the alternative of life and death, Rand contextualizes it in an example of a robot in *The Virtue of Selfishness*. This machine is considered as imperishable and so it needs no effort to sustain itself. It, simply, does not need to eat, drink, sleep, or even move, for there is nothing that can either harm or work to preserve it. The

absence of the possibility of life or death takes away the possibility of need satisfaction or need frustration from the machine. The bottom line of the illustration is that the ultimate goal which serves no other goal beyond itself for all conscious creatures is to remain in the realm of reality, that is, to stay alive. Ultimately, individuals who are goal-directed do not exist in order to pursue values. They pursue values in order to exist (Rand, 1964). Life is a value gained and kept by a constant process of action—that is, the preservation and sustenance of life is the ultimate goal (Rand, 1986). As such, by the very nature of value, life is the foundation and necessary means for value and any code of values must hold life as the ultimate value. It is on this principle that all of the Objectivist ethics rests (Rand, 1964). Rand's elucidation of values presents the view that an individual's primary moral obligation is to achieve his own well-being. It is for man's life and for self-promotion that an individual ought to adhere to a moral code. The objectivists' ethical egoism is a consequence of setting man's life as the moral standard. This explicit understanding gained about existence and its relation to our actions pushes Dagny, Rearden, Galt and the many others considered to be the prime-movers to engage in actions that promote their life. All of these characters have the same stance such that they all share in the understanding that there is always a choice to be made in every situation. They struggle to make themselves fit for existence but not to make existence fit for them. On the whole, Rand's evaluation of the foundations of morality in her two works leads her to the need for morality in the survival of humanity. However, this also culminates in the making of choices to value one's life. The decision of the characters (more specifically the protagonists) to uphold existence and

promote their individual lives is a matter of choice. This ended up with Rand's conclusion that is important to the life of Dagny that the need for morality dwells on the fundamental decision to live.

Volition and rationality in objectivism

The choice to live in the face of the alternative between life and death translates into the second principle of the objectivist ethics. This is known as the principle of volition. This can be seen in the statement of Rand that man exists and ought to survive as man. The second aspect of this statement which suggests that man must do what it takes for him to sustain his life gives a fair idea of the basic principle of volition. It signals that human beings have a distinctive nature from other creatures. To talk of the tenet outlined by Rand, there are a number of suppositions that are lumped together and are deducible from the above principle. The first concerns man's existence, that is, it holds that man exists. The second admonishes or requires from man to work or act towards sustaining his existence, and the third talks about the desire to survive corresponding with actions that are harmonious with nature. The first part which has been dealt with extensively presents to ethical theories human beings as a given, hence they form part of existence. The second aspect talks of volition and this shall be the main focus of the discussion that would usher in the third part that has to do with rationality. The principle of volition, according to Rand, presents two distinct options, the choice to live and the choice not to live. The choice to live is explicable as the decision of an individual to embrace one's existence as a goal whereas the choice not to promote one's life is seen as the choice to neglect one's existence. This

position of Rand raises the question, why must we accept to ensure we survive, and why is survival an ultimate goal that has all supposed ethical actions attuned towards. Rand is likely to respond to the first question by simply appealing to the desirability of survival to man since it is self-evident. It would only take the individual to whom survival is not self-evident to deny accepting survival as a goal.

Using the comments of John Galt in *Atlas Shrugged* in a more detailed context in the *Objectivist Ethics* Rand spells out her understanding of volition and how human beings go about it. Galt's statement summarily is that every individual, in every hour and every issue in which they find themselves, has a basic moral choice to make between thinking and non-thinking. Humans have the ability to act as their own destroyers. The primary focus of man's freewill is in the choice to think or not to think. Rand terms these two states as the state of focus on the goal of life and the state of drift away from the goal. Hence, there is a fundamental alternative between the state of focus and of drift. This ability is a result of the decisiveness or indecisiveness of the human agent to be virtuous in the use of their volitional or rational faculty. This significantly points out that for the reason of being rational in one's choices, survival ought to be raised to the level of the ultimate goal which can then be used as the standard for examining the morality of our individual actions. Approving this thought in her work, Rand explains that "man requires a rational decision, a principle that holds that I wish to survive—my survival is desirable. Such a principle is understood and consciously approved" (Harriman, 1997). This introduces the third aspect of John Galt's statement which borders on Rationality.

An individual's nature as a rational being is the only surety that he would survive. Survival of any moral agent hinges on the ability of the agent in question to act in accordance with his or her nature. This implies that individuals ought to be rational in their choices. Reason, in this sense, is the natural talent that is employed in the identification and integration of the materials made available by the senses. This is a logical process of identifying a state of affairs through the process of non-contradiction. Reason is, therefore, a natural talent that aids in the flourishing of life (Rand, 1964, p 20). The use of the consciousness of the mind can never make an individual to undermine his or her life. The heroes identifiable in *Atlas Shrugged* are people who characteristically focus their minds and deploy the resources of reason in engaging with the environment to ensure optimum outcome for a successful life. To these individuals, it is unnatural to take the decision to ignore the use of reason. Man must choose to engage in the process of thinking or not. The rationality of the heroes is all over *Atlas Shrugged*. Reason is best embodied in the actions of Dagny, Rearden, and Galt. These characters and a number of the industrious characters are consistent with the full use of their minds, placing facts above emotions and uncompromising about what they know. By contrast, James Taggart and other characters like the inhabitants of Starnes Ville are associated with actions such as refusal to think, evading the facts out there and replacing them with emotions (Rand, 1992). Based on this distinction between the heroes and the villains and how Rand renders the term in *The Virtue of Selfishness*, rationality is believed to be the primary means of human survival. Reason, the distinctive feature that differentiates man from other creatures, grants, to an individual, the power to shape their behaviour, to develop their

character, to alter their habits and to control their actions. However, it is perfectly possible to have an individual who would prefer to engage in irrational behaviour. This, consequently, parallels his or her eventual destruction. Hence, the act of engaging the mind in rational thought and behaviour is entirely up to the will of that individual since thinking or rationality is not an automatic function. Thinking requires a state of full, focused awareness. The act of focusing one's consciousness is volitional. Man can focus his mind to a full, active, purposefully directed awareness of reality or he can equally unfocus it and let himself drift in a semiconscious daze. In this situation, one is merely reacting to any stimulus of the immediate moment, at the mercy of his undirected sensory-perceptual mechanism and of any random, associational connections it might happen to make. All consequences of an individual's actions are products of reality. Hence, these consequences are inescapable (Rand, 1964, p. 22). Reflecting on this assumption that the outcomes of an agent's actions are products of reality suggests, as epitomized by Rand in the words of John Galt that A is A, and no amount of contrary thoughts will ever alter that fact. Since to think otherwise is an attempt to refute reality or wipe it out (Rand, 1992, p. 142).

Avoiding the use of rationality, according to Peikoff (1993), is an act of irrationality. Acts of this nature are characterized as evasion. Evasion involves the practice of blanking out some facts of reality which one dislikes in order to escape a certain particular reality. Evasion of reason is a moral vice in objectivist ethics for it is the objectivist equivalence of mortal sin. This, to him, is so because it makes possible every other form of moral corruption. Peikoff's idea seems to project the nature of the looters as presented by Rand

in the *Atlas Shrugged*. The impervious reactions of the looters to reason show that they are irrational entities who have rejected the prerequisite for successful and life-promoting actions. This is an act of evasion of facts acknowledged by Dagny and Rearden as self-defeating means of dealing with the world. What is evident in all this is that Rand recognizes that man is faced with a single alternative, to think or to perish. This supposes that she subscribed to the idea of taking rational steps to make choices. However, man is not limited to rational choices only. He is open to the choice of exercising his rational faculty or not. This can open him up for errors in his moral assessment. This also allows him to act against his own judgment or suspend it. In view of this, *Atlas Shrugged* presents what is said to be bad or evil as that which has the power to have an influence on the good if only it is empowered by the good. This means that it would take the decision of the moral agent to decide to ignore facts thereby empowering the resulting consequences to have effects on him or her. Francisco, in an advice to Rearden, explains that no evil thought erupts in the thought of an individual except the refusal to think. Evildoers are only engaged in the act of pushing out thoughts which they detest but tend to crave the indulgence of their emotions (Rand, 1992, p. 418). The novel's depiction of the antagonists as individuals who would, at a time to come, concede their mistakes denotes the respect Rand exhibits towards reality by attributing to these characters their ideal natural states as rational beings. This shows that she expects A to always be A, hence their nature as non-A, irrational beings, is expected to change to conform to A, which is the nature of rational beings. Should this be the case in all living entities, then all individuals would have a real desire to live and their motivation would always

come from their love for the flourishing of every individual. Considering Rand's development of her system, the promotion of life provides a proper standard for moral choices between the alternative of life and death, as well as ethical assessments. To validate these choices as the proper moral decisions, the mind must be used as a guide to our survival. One can only be an existing being if they work with the dictates of the mind or reason. In developing these basic assumptions, Rand takes into consideration the fact that the mind or rationality is an attribute of an individual. The acceptance of the position that humans are characterized by reason grants the position also that independence is its basic requirement. That is to say that it requires of an individual to be independent in the making of decisions that are guided by reason. It implies also that it takes reason to identify the favorable conditions for an individual's personal flourishing. Tying the well-being of an individual to the use of reason creates the source of moral necessities. This is to mean that the formation of individual judgements and living according to the directions of reason creates one's primary moral obligation. In a somewhat univocal voice, Smith (2006) and Peikoff (1999) seem to assert that the above identified principles establish the ground for our profound need for morality. Rand is believed to have explained her egoistic ethical system by way of alluding to two options; the option of life and death for man, and her thought that a selection of one of these options marks the starting point for moral values and principles. A man who has chosen his life as having the highest value has implicitly accepted that he cannot put other people's lives before his own and cannot sacrifice his desires for others' desires. Thus, in order to preserve his own life, one must put his happiness at a higher priority than the happiness of others. According

to Rand, the most important characteristic of an ideal man is that he considers existence to be an independent goal. In other words, an ideal man never uses his existence and desires as a means to achieve other things (Smith, 2006, pp. 24-25; Peikoff, 1999, p. 301). In sum, Rand's egoism begins with the full understanding of a rational volitional choice for life instead of death. A choice which can be reached by the exercising of the mind. The mind happens to be an attribute of humanity exclusive to each individual. Hence, the choice to promote life is not a communal decision but an individual choice. All these round up into a complex system of abstract principles by which one monitors their lifestyle. This marks the beginning of Rand's rendition of egoism.

Objectivist egoism

The prescriptive nature of an ethical theory is determined by the standard of value to which the theory subscribes. Each individual has a value to which they devote their actions or use as a guide for their efforts. These values are also used as that against which one measures all other values. This is known as the highest value. An ethical theory's main concern is to examine the highest value of a moral agent. Unraveling the concept of value of an ethical theory implies an examination of the primary features of the ethical theory. These primary features underpinning an ethical theory are entrenched in a number of questions. A theory's feature tries to find out what the self is. By this means it attempts to explain what the self should be identified with. Is the self to be established as the mind, body, spirit, reason, or emotions of the moral agent? The feature also talks of the self as fundamentally individual or otherwise. The capacity of volition and interests also forms part of the

embedded underpinning principles of an ethical theory. In this sense, it examines the integral interest of a moral agent by looking at the possibility of it being universal to the species or it being peculiar to one individual, as well as the subjectivity or objectivity of these interests. The assumption at the crux of these questions is the desire to take a look at the cognitive means by which the individual becomes acquainted with their interest, and also at the possibilities of the interest of the individual-self becoming the standard of value. In order to determine the full elements of ethical theories, these series of questions have to be responded to. A united and well-integrated set of responses to the questions fall into two main categories, that is, egoism—the concept of self and altruism—the concept of others. According to Hicks (2009), the concept of self and others stand as two major opposing sides of ethical theories in the history of ethics (p. 254). Considering the self, the ethics of self-interest advocates for the pursuing of one's interest exclusively. It holds that one's own self is one's highest value and that one should measure all other values in terms of their impact on one's self-interest. All such ethical theories are egoistic, a concept that is derived from the Greek word *ego* meaning *self* or *I*. Ego-ism is thus principled on “self-ism” (p. 254). On the other end of the contention is the ethical theory that rejects self-interest as the highest value. As a way of prioritizing others over the self, this class of ethical theories usually substitute the interests of others as the highest value, and also hold that one should dedicate oneself primarily to the interests of others. In this way, the theory measures all other values in terms of their impact on the interests of others. All such theories are altruistic theories. These are theories

principled on the Latin term “*alter*” meaning others. Hence, Altru-ism, based on inference, is founded on the concept of “other-ism” (Hicks, 2009, p. 254).

It is from this background and a consideration of the earlier identified principles that Rand extrapolates the original feature of her ethical theory. That is a strong defense of selfishness as an ethical principle and a corresponding opposition to altruism. In *The Virtue of Selfishness*, she presents a conception of selfishness which is different from the meaning ascribed to it in popular usage. Selfishness is mostly likened to the image of an individual who finds delight in walking over others to achieve his goals without caring for any individual and is only interested in pursuing the satisfactions of mindless pleasures of any immediate moment (Rand, 1964). In her attempt to make selfishness a virtuous act, she collapses the distinction between selfishness and self-interest. In lieu of the popular understanding of selfishness, selfishness here concerns the production and protection of one’s ultimate value in the most effective possible way. It involves a process of rationality for conceptualizing the best possible way of achieving and preserving that ultimate value. Undeniably, every theory of egoism tie selfishness with the term self. In view of this, these theories attempt to give the meaning of man’s self. Rand’s concept of self was developed by her in the form of an amalgamation of man’s values and mind with the concept of self. Rand presented the theory of egoism as one that has a pivotal role in man’s intellect and values (Bernstein, 2008, p. 14). To create that deep relation between rational fundamental moral values and ethical egoism, Rand identifies her concept of self with reason. The self, in her elaboration, is essentially an individual with the capacity of volition with all his major interests being

objective. The self is considered as part of reality so the interest of the self is considered as the standard of value. This, consequently, wraps up Rand's ethical system as a system that does not allow for conflict of interest in the pursuit of one's interest. This, according to Taylor (1969), seems to specify that she is claiming that in one's actions one ought always to seek one's own good. This proposal by Rand, however, has the implicit assumption which prohibits man as a rational being from either looking out for others to the disadvantage of the self or totally disregarding the interest of others. Hence, her projection of significant distinctions between her rational egoism and the subjective egoism.

Consider again the system of principles developed by Rand; what is observable about this system is that it has drawn much attraction to it. The attraction of the objectivist theory comes from its principles that are integrated to give meaning to Rand's advocacy of egoism. In tandem to these principles outlined by Rand as the foundation of her egoism, she regards the best motive for actions and moral evaluations to be the interest of the individual self. It follows from this that man is in charge of his life and he is to enjoy it as he pleases. She seems to expressly state that value can never be appreciated by an agent as a genuine value if the value was not chosen by the agent. This constitutes her strong idolatry of volition in her objective moral theory. This, however, is not the totality of what Objectivism encompasses. Freedom does not come without consequences. Hence, in living as one pleases, one should be mindful of the consequences which they would bear full responsibilities for. Just as Rand explains concepts in her epistemology to be the product of the cognitive function of man, the idea of good was explained in a similar

context. To define the good, Rand relates it to man. “The good is an evaluation of the facts of reality in relation to man” (Rand, 1966, p. 22). It is her further explanation of the evaluation of the fact of reality that points to the idea that the life of the individual man is the standard of evaluation. If it is so that Rand’s theory projects human life as the standard of evaluation, then her ethics, literally and quite deliberately, makes values objective. In general, as has been discussed, the values serve as identification codes of an individual’s survival needs. “Values,” Rand says, “cannot exist outside the full context of man’s life, needs, goals, and knowledge” (Rand, 1966, p. 23).

As part of Rand’s effort to enhance the individual self as self-responsible and as both ends in themselves and the means to their own end, the development of reason is the promotion of the creativity in the nature of man to transcend beyond merely engaging in hunting and gathering from the environment or depending upon others for survival. The result of this is observed in the social relations of the individual. As shall be well established later, the principles of Rand’s Objective egoism provide a non-confliction of interest in relation to others and also promote the commitment to social relations with others on the basis of a win-win trade. These features are, on the whole, established on the individuality of the self. This act of being individualistic is what Rand referred to as selfishness. Rand’s ethics is, fundamentally, about the maintenance and development of oneself. Hence, the concept of selfishness is a means of developing the self-value but not some other value beyond the self. This climaxes Rand’s Objective theory as addressing the proper beneficiary of one’s action. She notes, from the onset of her theory, that the standard of value should be the individual’s life. This supposition, nevertheless, does not in

itself specify the beneficiary of the value. Accordingly, one should set life as the standard of value in the pursuit of his or her happiness. It is from this that it is rationally inferred that the self should be the standard of value in the pursuit of values. The core of Objectivism, then, is that one should rationally pursue self-interest and maintain a policy of selfishness. As egoism has as a principal premise that the individual agent should be the beneficiary of his or her own action, the objective egoism moves further to specify that the individual's actions should be in his or her rational self-interest.

In the desire to be guided by the mind or the faculty of rationality, individuals may declare that any action they choose to take is moral if they choose it. Here the agent is only bent on considering actions as moral because he or she deems it to be. The primary error identifiable in this mode of reasoning is that it assumes that the agent's personal judgment is infallible, and with such assumption, an egoist strays away from the only element that vouches for his act as a rational egoistic one. The objectivist selfishness of Rand sees this development as an antithesis to her principles. Rand responds to such a situation that, the judgment of an individual is not the validation that is required to determine the morality of something, however, the individual's assessment is only a means. In Binswanger's words, "Rational judgment is the only way of achieving moral ends, but it is neither a moral criterion nor a moral validation: it is only referencing to a demonstrable principle that can validate one's choices" (Binswanger, 1986, p. 448). This idea can be expounded that the justification of action within the context of the objective reality can properly be done solely with regards to objective values. The objectivist principle of rational self-interest gives the right to humans to act in

ways that would promote individual interest. This right arises from the nature of humanity and the functions of moral values in human life. Accordingly, the only context in which the right will apply is in a rational, objectively established and corroborated moral code that defines and determines the individual's self-interest (Rand, 1964). The implication resulting from this is that one is obliged to act in accordance with metaphysical reality and values that are objective. By so doing, one is acting based on what is in his or her interest objectively but not what is felt or thought to be in their interest. Reason is observed to curtail or regulate the actions an individual can consider as being in the self-interest. It denies individuals the liberty to do as they please. Moreover, it precludes the notion of the selfish brute and it denies the morality of value-oriented action by any individual which is motivated by irrational emotions, feelings, urges, wishes, or whims (Rand, 1964).

To make essential meaning of these principles as objective principles, we first have to take into account the nature of objectivity itself. In a general scope, objectivity involves the establishment of conclusions from inferences drawn from relevant facts or reality. It is broadly conceived of a conclusion as objective insofar as its claims are guided by the facts out there devoid of any individual's subjective disposition about what is in reality. In any ethical system, the facts that are considered to be significant gain their standing on the purpose of the ethical system. Accordingly, the objective principles supporting Rand's rational egoism designate an ethical system that strongly promotes the purpose for which she developed that theory. All the principles of the theory are called for and developed by processes that carry no countervailing implications. The principles underpinning Rand's system establish the

parameters that guide the content and form of the theory. For Rand's principles to be strictly objective, she retains their function within the scope of their goal, which is to promote the individual flourishing. She also ensures that the principles do not portray ideologies that undercut their abilities to function appropriately. Her theory examines the premise that man is an end in himself (Mayhew, 2009). This denotes volitional abilities in man to weigh facts and pursue logical implications to achieve what is best for the self. It follows that the use of the mind by an individual enables him to act as required by his life (Mayhew, 2009). This process of ethical development in her theory creates the right condition for which the principles can be evaluated as objective principles.

Considering the nature of objectivity, Rand's use of reason to explain the prescriptiveness of right and wrong creates a connection between the empirical facts of reality and moral judgements. This significantly implies a correlation between the development of moral judgements and the disposition to appeal to some relevant empirical fact. Should it be accepted as true that the individual's experience of moral obligation grants a rational connection between any moral situation and our moral obligation, then it will not be far from the truth to hold that individuals are faced with necessary universal obligations. Furthermore, to grant the Randian ethical theory the tag of universal validity is not to create the impression that the theory applies to everyone under every condition; it rather purports to reiterate that the theory is valid for everyone to whom it is relevant.

On this note, it can be said of an objective person as someone who forms his or her opinions and moral assessments based on the essential evidence at his

or her disposal but is however mindful of circumstances that might affect the reliability of his or her perception or thought process. Such individuals genuinely become objective only because of their sensible evaluation of relevant information that is not affected by emotional or psychological distortions. The objectivity of Rand's theory makes a difference to the ends, methods or progress of the theory's form of inquiry. This is simply because the theory's objectivity provides modes of inquiries, arguments, and assessments that are not merely modes of self-expression or personal principles. Humans engage or entertain their personal principles that are formed from subjective domains with others on the shared assumption that all humans address and participate in a common world. It could be understood from this standpoint that the maxim of the rational egoist has a strict adherence to the rubrics that make any ethical theory objective. A theory considered to be objective has its principles developed first as personal maxims. This maxim, though seen as one that is in a subjective domain, is developed based on the innate ability, that is, the rationality available to the moral agent. This grants the principle some merits as having the potentiality to be objective. In addition to this potentially objective status is societal assent, universalizability and then finally prescriptiveness. All of this work together to ground a personal maxim as an objective principle.

Also, the objectivity of the theory gives a form of integrity to mankind's mode of assessment and reasoning. Tackling this normatively, it can be said that when all individuals accept that reality, that is, the human life is the yardstick for determining that which is good for mankind, they all tend to establish a common mode of practical reasoning. It is in view of this that any sort of

argument between them becomes a practical argument that can only be resolved by appeals to evidence, principles and common experiences. These are the types of disputes that make reasonable progress—a progress that involves at the very least narrowing our differences and more often approaching some measure of agreement. The significance of such practical principles is that they offer justification or at least legitimacy to our actions. This translates into the integrity and intersubjective validity of our modes of reasoning.

The value of objective principles is evident mostly in the principles' service and promotion of the life of the agent. We realize that the principles of rational egoism offer to man the foundation that supports his survival demands. That is, by advocating for a self-interest that is rationally chosen, the moral agent is granted the chance to enjoy the fruits of his rational choice of life instead of death since without a rational choice he cannot flourish or exist. Rand's insistence on objectivity is meant to assure that the mandate of her ethical system is not misplaced. In the objective ethical system, the substance of the underpinning assumptions is restricted entirely to measures that would help promote the theory.

As a result of the above, self-interest in Rand's theory has been made mutually satisfiable socially. Considering the mutual satisfaction of self-interest in a social context means the examination of the pursuit of self-interest and its relation to the self-interest of others. Rand's theory does not perceive any conflict between the pursuit of the self-interest of an individual with that of others. Neither does the pursuit of my personal interest leave others affected.

In essence, there is harmony, socially, if agents in a social setting employ the use of reason in attempting to satisfy their self-value. The use of life as the standard of value creates a common moral value and this value is attained by rational means. The use of reason, which is common to all human beings, to point out life as the ultimate value creates a common moral principle. For all to accept this common moral principle, it would mean that is the basis for mutual gain and respect. This comes only through a common moral principle that has been established. Any ethical system that proposes principles that deviate from objectivity with respect to the theory's form or content amounts to the neglect of the moral agent's well-being. This elaboration on the ethical theory adored by Rand creates the platform on which she examines other ethical systems. It is in view of her dislike for the approaches of other systems, especially altruism, that she raises the issue of the exploitative nature of altruism in *The Virtue of Selfishness*.

Altruism as an Inadequate Ethical Theory

As a means of reinforcing her unrelenting support for rational egoism, Rand ventured into the quest of proving the immorality perpetrated by Altruism as an ethical theory. Altruism, based on Rand's evaluation, seems to provide the answer to the question, whether concern for one's own interest is good or evil. The altruists opt for the latter instead of the former. Their option is an indication of the brute image they perceive of the egoists. This is due to the assumption that concern for one's interest is evil, and that this sort of concern is the activity engaged in mainly by the brutes. In Rand's estimation, the assumption of the altruist has only succeeded in responding to two ethical

questions with a single answer, thinking both questions have been responded to. Basically, the altruists fail to define a code of moral values by only identifying who the beneficiary of an action should be (Rand, 1964). Altruism, in this sense, would only be in the business of enjoining individuals to take actions for the sake of others as they abandon their personal interests. Consequently, the beneficiary of an action is the only criterion of moral value. The import of Rand's position on altruism can be seen in these forms; first, the altruists use their ethical principle to promote the policy of collectivism for the purpose of reciprocated self-support. Here, one is enticed to promote the ideology of collective assets, camaraderie, and conformity so as to feel that one is doing the right thing. Secondly, altruism serves as a tactic exploited by the weak to protect themselves against the strong. This is demonstrated in the words of Ellsworth Toohey when he was campaigning to the masses in *The Fountainhead* (Rand, 1993). In *Atlas Shrugged*, altruism is accepted by the looters. We see them engage in actions that suggest a morality that serves the interest of others by way of self-denial. This form of morality paves the way for these looters to seriously antagonize the prime movers as a way of raising objections against selfishness, and with the aim of promoting the general good. Altruism, in this respect, functions as a tool for the exploitation of characters like Dagny, Rearden, and Galt who are all prime movers. Following from this, the altruists do not only seek to protect themselves against the strong but also to gain support or favor from them. This is evident in *Atlas Shrugged* in the strategy used by Rearden's mother and brother to gain the continuous support of Rearden. They constantly employed the language of obligation, pity, and compassion to force his hands into doing what they

wanted (Rand, 1964). It is without doubt, from the above elaborations, that any system of morality that demands from a person to sacrifice to another person something which is of value to himself is on the surface looking only at the beneficiary of an action and rather disregarding the value of the action involved. It is for this reason that Rand decries altruism.

Last but not least, altruism encourages comparative judgments as a fundamental means of determining the worth of the self. It occurs when an agent's morality is assessed based on the benefit his actions would give to others. This situation would definitely mean a total disregard and disrespect of the self. This creates an unavoidable consequence of second-handedness, that is, the inability to make rational decisions on one's own volition. As a consequence, individuals are unable to appreciate their potentials. The inability of an agent to recognize his potential implies a lack of commitment to achieving it. This breeds dependency among humans. Rand, coming from a background that considers the measure of the good life as a matter of making one's own independent choices, stands against a comparative means of determining a good life. These rudiments of altruism as an ethical theory make the theory erroneous, in Rand's perspective. For a theory to advocate for the relegation of the individual interest to the background for the benefit of others, that theory makes the mistake of promoting the likelihood of self-denial. A careful examination of altruism through Rand's lenses would mean the consideration of the tenets of altruism as immoral acts since they perpetrate vices against the individual self.

Conclusion

The focus of this chapter has been to examine the link between metaphysics and epistemology and use such link as the basis of examining the value theory of the objectivist egoistic ethical theory, as well as the basic elements that form the central tenets on which Rational egoism is founded. To achieve this the objectivist conception of value, and virtues were examined. It was established that value presupposes an agent who engages in acts that are in accordance with value to achieve a virtuous act. The objectivist ethics gives man the freedom of volition to make choices between the two alternatives of nature: life and death. Rand believes that human life is the foundation of our moral values hence, an ethical action is that which leads to survival. A moral agent, in this regard, is supposed to preserve and promote his or her own life and has no duty to preserve the lives of others. Given this, the life of the moral agent has been established in the objectivist ethics as the standard of evaluation. In addition to the principles of the Randian ethics, the principle of volition is considered to be operational within the domain of rationality. Accordingly, rationality is another important principle of the objectivist ethics. Rationality is seen as a competent guide to getting accustomed to reality. It is also the fundamental tool for enhancing survival and it is the distinctive feature that differentiates man from other creatures. The rational principle culminates in the principle of selfishness. Rationality, according to Rand, provides human nature with distinguishing features but proper use of it requires individuals to come into terms with the idea that rationality requires them to act on the understanding of their own best interest as rational beings. The relationship between rationality and selfishness is such that the definition

of each implies the others. This explains why the Objectivist ethical egoism states that the individual should act in his or her own rational self-interest.

Based on this analysis, the individual self is pivotal and inherently valuable, in the objectivist ethical system, while others are not, for they are instruments that become valuable only when they benefit the self. The acceptance of the principles underpinning the objectivist ethics implies a commitment to the completest awareness of reality and the continual development of one's knowledge. It also means a commitment to the principle that all our convictions, values, goals, desires and actions must be based on, derived from, chosen and validated by the process of rationality. The principles, equally, presuppose that one's acceptance of the responsibility of forming one's own judgments and of living by the work of one's own mind. This is constituted as a true mark of independence. Further implications include the virtue of integrity, that is, the resolve not to sacrifice one's convictions to the opinions or dictates of others, and finally, the virtue of honesty which demands of us not to fake reality in any manner and host of other virtues (Rand, 1964). To sum it up, Rand's principles of egoism present a system of morality that does not yield to changes. This is because the prescriptive elements of the theory were developed with strict adherence to reality. Since reality is constant and unchanging the theory is reinforced as non-contradictory in its principles, and the tenets make the theory mutually consistent.

CHAPTER FOUR

IN DEFENSE OF RAND'S RATIONAL EGOISM

Introduction

Ethical egoism, in general, has come to lose traction in philosophical circles since it is tagged as an ethical theory that endorses wicked actions, provided those actions benefit the person who does them. Consider engaging in an action such as that of a pharmacist who desires to increase profit, hence he fills a prescription for a cancer patient using watered-down drugs. The action illustrated here gives a vivid instance of a person who desires to arrive at some gain for his individual self by way of undertaking the specific action he undertook. Supposing the pharmacist could get away with the action he has undertaken, then ethical egoism possibly would count this action as permissible. This act of granting a seemingly wrong action as moral simply because it satisfies the agent's interest seems like an adequate rationale by itself to question the doctrine of egoism. To refute egoism on this basis is, unquestionably, valid. Even so, the dismissal of egoism might be considered to be begging the question against ethical egoism. For the reason that the above illustration is said to be wicked, one might be said to be using a non-egoistic principle in making a judgement about the theory, and this is characterized as circular reasoning. The circularity is evident in the fact that the principle of selfishness is misconstrued as a wicked act and that is used as a basis to criticize the theory that, in the first place, esteems the act of selfishness. It is on this understanding that some critics have attempted raising deeper problems that are mainly logically related problems with ethical egoism.

Rand's objectivist ethics, undoubtedly, came under several similar attacks. These criticisms come about as a result of the different understanding these critics have about the objectivist ethics. The focus of this chapter is to raise some main concerns and show how to respond to them from the Randian ethical perspective. The central concern in the subsequent discussions would be an attempt to present the objective elements of rational egoism as a formidable ground against the critiques of egoism. The subsequent paragraphs shall present arguments that are typical of the refutations proposed against all forms of ethical egoism including Randian rational egoism. The focus is mainly on the argument of inconsistency but the discussion extends beyond it to the others because of the sequential link identifiable amongst them.

Criticisms against Egoism

I begin with a popular erroneous belief that is associated with Rand's rational egoism. This misconception has been mainly connected to egoism and serves as the grounds on which further arguments are raised against the theory of self-interest. *Atlas Shrugged* presents the Randian conception of human nature and the needs that confront humanity. In explaining this, man is expected by virtue of his nature as a rational being to apply reason to make choices on his own accord. It is by such means that the reason identifies that which would best satisfy the self-interest, and prompt the choices they make in times of conflict of interests between agents (Rand, 1961, p. 133). On many occasions, the claim of the objectivist ethicists that agents ought to pursue rationality in seeking the self-interest has been misinterpreted to connote the idea that the agent ought to completely ignore others for he has no need for these other individuals in the society or that the individual's needs surpass that

of others in the society. The resultant assumption from the forgoing premise is that the moral or individual agent ought to live his or her whole life in seclusion. With this misconception grounded as a basis for critiquing egoism, other arguments are presented against egoism and this fate, according to some philosophers, does not exclude the rational egoism of Rand. Ethical egoism is faced with three principal charges. As to whether these charges render ethical egoism as an unacceptable moral theory remains a matter of great debate in moral philosophy. However, these debates that seek to critique ethical egoism thrive on the assumption that all versions of egoism can be crippled with their arguments. This is not the case with Rand's moral theory. To establish the case for Rand's objectivist ethics against these charges, I would first present the cases as made in the three charges then proceed to explain the basis upon which rational egoism addresses such charges.

The first of the argument raised against ethical egoism can be expressly seen in the accusation that it is unable to resolve the conflicts of interest between two sides. To best appreciate the angle of this argument, there is the need to understand why ethical theories assume prescriptive roles. The primary reason why theories of morality prescribe rules and principles is to address the constant disagreements or divergences that are observed between individuals who seek to satisfy their respective interests. Hence, the principles and rules prescribed by these theories are meant to guide our actions by resolving conflictual cases. They also focus on providing solutions to conflicts between two or more agents in a way that everyone concerned gets to live harmoniously afterward. Following this explanation, the argument raised here suggests that ethical egoism does not help resolve conflicts of interest. It is

argued that egoistic principles only leave the problem to be resolve exacerbated. This critique was raised by Kurt Baier in his book *The Moral Point of View* to forcefully establish his point of dissatisfaction with egoism. The example of Baier, with personal elaborations, suggests that supposing Andrew and Michael are contesting for a managerial position in a company and knowing very well that only one out of the two can occupy the managerial position, then from the perspective of the egoists, it will be in either of this individual's interest if any of them gets the job (Baier, 1958). The implication of this is that it may be in the interest of Andrew to get the job but this is against Michael if Andrew gets the job, and vice versa. This is because in satisfying that which is in Michael's interest, the interest of Andrew gets negated. Likewise, Michael's interest would be liquidated should Andrew's interest be achieved. The inability of egoism to resolve conflicts of interest is seen in the fact that Michael ought to ignore the interest of Andrew and consider his sole interest. To refuse to do so would be morally wrong, and vice versa. This seems more as a complication of the conflict in the moral dilemma. The emerging situation in this illustration raises some absurdities that Kurt Baier associates to egoistic principles. This is because theories of morality are designed to address the dilemmas of this nature. However, ethical egoism is seen as not capable of resolving such a problem for all to live harmoniously. On the basis of the claim that ethical egoism is unable to resolve situations of conflicting interests, the egoistic principle is tagged as an unacceptable ethical principle. Kurt Baier's argument opens up egoism to further criticism. It would be examined further to show that his argument gives grounds upon

which further disputations are raised concerning the principles of ethical egoism in general.

The claim that ethical egoism is unable to resolve conflicts of interest raises the further criticism that egoism is inconsistent or involves logical contradictions. The argument seeks to establish that any self-contradictory theory does not qualify as a right ethical theory for it is built on a mistaken principle. This argument in relation to Baier's earlier instance suggests that it is in the interest of Andrew to ignore the interest of Michael so as to achieve his sole interest, and it is equally right for Michael to do the same. Understanding egoism means assuming that Andrew and Michael have the moral obligation to do what is in their individual best interests. It follows that it is in Andrew's interest to deny Michael's interest to gain his. It is Michael's obligation to prevent Andrew from trampling over his (Michael's) interest. Therefore, Andrew's only moral alternative here is to get rid of the interest of Michael to gain what he wants, and Michael's only obligation is to ensure the promotion of his interest by preventing Andrew from denying him of his interest. But it is wrong to prevent someone from undertaking what is his obligation. Hence, it is wrong for Michael to prevent Andrew's interest simply because it would affect his interest which he ought to also promote. Consequently, it is both wrong and right for Michael to prevent Andrew. The problem then is no single act can be both right and wrong. For this amounts to self-contradiction. This conclusion suggests that the beginning premise that each individual has the moral obligation to do what is in his personal interest is flawed. This situation would, in the end, lead to contradiction if Andrew is restrained by Michael from sacrificing his interest (Michael's interest) in

achieving his interest (Andrew’s interest). Such a dilemma presents us with a morally right action and a morally wrong action. This argument is taken up by other philosophers. One out of the many contenders that egoism is inconsistent is W. D. Glasgow (1968).

Glasgow (1968) begins by identifying his argument with similar arguments raised against ethical egoism. He presents his version of the avowals as this.

A		B
I ought to do what is in my own interest (coming out on top).	And	I may or may not care about Tom, Dick, Harry...
And		And
Tom ought to do what is in his own interest.	and	Tom may or may not care about myself, Dick, Harry...
And		And
Dick ought to do what is in his own interest.	and	Dick may or may not care about myself, Tom, Harry...
etc.		etc.

Glasgow simply presents us with a complicated position usually alluded to by egoists. This has to be carefully set out with each claim individually examined to get the import of the argument. In the illustration above, Tom, Dick, and Harry are in their individual domains expected to look after their interests. Tom is an autonomous entity and ought to look out for his interest. Such is the case when it comes to Dick and Harry. The autonomy of these individuals gives them the capability to examine the options an action is likely to produce and the prospects that are open to them in particular situations. This is coupled with their ability to reflect on the options available to them to come out with the actions which their abilities would permit them to carry out. To articulate

such a view is to grant the supposition that aside from the individual moral agent, there are other living beings, humans in this respect, who are autonomous (Glasgow, 1968).

Considering an egoist to be pragmatic means he regards other individuals around him as autonomous in the same way he regards himself as autonomous. In this way, the value of others would be more of instrumental value to him than intrinsic. This is what is emphasized in column B of Glasgow's illustration above. The egoist depicted in column A would also agree that other individuals are autonomous but only in the sense that these other agents make decisions and act based on these decisions as done by the rational man. Having established this, the moral assessments and actions of other individuals are justifiable in the same sense that the individual moral agent's actions are justifiable. The resultant observation from this is that the desires and wants of other agents could serve as grounds or motivation for their actions. In a similar context, the individual agent's wants provide grounds for his actions. In addition to this, to agree that every moral agent ought to look out for his individual interests, we would be establishing the basic supposition that an agent ought to accept or respect the actions undertaken by other individuals and so should their ethical assessments be accepted as well. What this means is that there is respect for the self-sufficiency of the other individuals from the moral agent. Granting the other partner that sovereignty renders oneself as dependent or no longer autonomous, for to respect the autonomy of others is to give up on that sovereign position. It can thus be deduced that the respect for the autonomy of others is not consistent with ethical egoism.

That is to say that there is a point in time when the value of the first person (moral agent) is intrinsic and that of others is instrumental. The import of this is that it is in the best interest of the moral agent to satisfy himself. However, because the value of others is instrumental, the achievement of the interest of others is in relation to the value of the first person for it is through the value of the first person and its relation to the second person that the instrumental value of the second person is attained. This cannot consequently translate into a loss for the moral agent for the value of the second person is instrumental to his value.

The foregoing explanation points out the inconsistency that Glasgow (1968) attributes to all ethical theories of egoism. This situation seems to land ethical egoism into a deeper problem of contradiction in its principles. The principle that all individuals are autonomous sets the ground for establishing that the autonomy of each individual makes each one of them ends in themselves. Hence, they ought to act so as to promote their exclusive interests. However, acknowledging the autonomy of a fellow individual could prevent oneself from promoting one's interest. This implies the denial of the earlier assumption that each individual is autonomous, and the upholding of the position that aside oneself, there are no autonomous individuals who are also ends in themselves. This makes the inconsistency identified contradictory as well.

Rand's ethics and any other theory that puts the individual self first have been criticised for making the individual self the sole beneficiary of an action. In an argument raised by Ryan (2003) in *Objectivism and the Corruption of Reason*, Rand's egoism is accused of using an unreflective

approach in its use of the principle of seeking one's personal advantage or well-being and seeking only one's own advantage in a conflating manner. This to Ryan is because Rand seems to have collapsed every moral concern into self-regard. This ostensibly projects the view that an individual would simply be sacrificing his advantage should it be that he is not the moral beneficiary of his actions. It follows that Rand's conclusion that morally one must be the intended beneficiary of all of one's actions does not follow since it is possible that self-regard, justice, and benevolence set the moral limits within which we ought to act. This consequently, rules out Randian sacrifice without reducing all of our moral aims to self-regard. The argument raised here thrives on the idea of arbitrariness in ethical egoism.

By way of analogy, Rachels (2003) adds that racism, anti-Semitism, and nationalism are some conspicuous instances that show how people are divided into groups and the interest of a faction of the division matter most. Hence, people in the grip of such positions think that their race or believers in the same religion as theirs or those with the same nationality as theirs are better than all or matter most, without any form of rational basis for such opinions. This only results in an arbitrary disregard for the other factions' interests. It is in similar scope that she argues that collapsing every moral satisfaction or advantage into self-promotion creates the avenue for describing ethical egoism as an arbitrary ethical theory. Its arbitrariness develops from the fact that it seeks first to divide the parties in a situation or dilemma into two sects, that is, the individual self and others. It also regards the benefits the first group would derive from their actions as superior to that of the latter class of individuals. But, should there be a reverse of this phenomenon, it would result in a

sacrifice of the individual agent's interest by the standards of egoism. However, is there any difference between the individual self and other individuals that the theory would justify the promotion of the life of the former? A number of similar questions that speak to this issue can be summed up as requesting for what makes the individual agent (self) more special. This idea, on the whole, brings to bare the extent of bias in egoism, and this translates into the theory's arbitrary nature. In brief, the arbitrary doctrine of egoism sets the tone for its refutation as an ethically acceptable theory.

Replies to Criticisms

My assessment of these criticisms is not targeted at stripping validity off the claims of these arguments. It is not meant to show that their claims are unacceptable or false. Rather, I would like to point out that the first assumption which was used as the grounds for raising these objections is a mistaken assumption. This approach would then be used to develop a full-blown defense that separates rational egoism from other theories of egoism. If this is done, then the claims made in these arguments against ethical egoism shall be escaped by the rational egoism of Rand.

The claim that the Randian theory has no need for others in society or that the individual agent's needs top that of others in society is undeniably mistaken. This is because the assumption brings out the hidden supposition that an individual ought to live his or her life in seclusion, and the assumption together with its main claim does not mirror what Rand subscribes to. The idea endorsed by Rand in her rational egoism is not what the claims reflect. The reason is that the attention of Rand's theory is on how moral agents can be

made to seek their individual interests but with the utmost respect for the ultimate reality. This idea does not seek to do away with other individuals but stresses the need for other individuals in the society. She considers this relationship between the individual moral agent and other individuals in society as a very relevant relationship. The relevance in the need for others is not seen in the individuals themselves but what these individuals can produce (Rand, 1964). That is to say that they must have something to offer a moral agent. In the *Atlas Shrugged*, Francisco's view suggests that any relationship between humans must be based on mutual advantage. It is based on this enlightenment that Rearden acknowledges that the relationship between Dagny and himself is that of mutual advantage, but between him and his wife, Lilian, is a form of relationship that is not mutual (Rand, 1992, pp. 430-431). Mutual advantage according to Rand is the idea that the relationship between two individuals makes both relevant to each other such that both parties in the relationship have something to offer. Hence, the need is not for the individual but what the individual has to offer to the other partner (Rand, 1992). This stresses on a basic assumption in Rand's philosophy that every individual must, one way or the other, be creative and productive to have something to offer. This cancels out any instance of dependency. The main reason for maintaining a mutually advantageous relationship is to bring out the autonomous quality in every individual. Consequently, man puts up the appropriate attitude that makes him or her fit for any relationship with others. It is important to note for further clarification that Rand's ethical system does not support the exploitation of other individuals. Hence, one ought to have something to offer the other partner to be able to enter into a relationship. This

is what Rand characterizes as the full independence of thought and consciousness instead of the misconception that moral agents do not need others in the society or that individuals stand above the needs of others in the society. Properly understood, her theory goes beyond this conception of individuality to address mutual beneficial relationships that promote creativity or productivity. In brief, the assumption identified as a misconception only arises as a result of the misconstrual of Rand's principle of independence of thought as removal or seclusion from other individuals.

This misconception is in part due to the attempt to relate Rand's theory with the traditional or subjective egoism or the thought that they are the same in all respects. This informs the argument among critics that any critique raised against the traditional egoism, in general, affects all versions of egoism, Rand's version inclusive. My position on this is that such an argument may be mistaking, judging from the fact that each of these versions developed different principles as the underpinning principles for their respective theories. My task of relieving the rational egoism of Rand from this criticism can only be fully achieved if the distinction between her theory and the other forms of egoisms (especially the subjective egoism) is kept in view. My task of defending Rand's egoism shall be done alongside my attempt to distinguish her theory from ethical egoism in general.

Differences between rational egoism and subjective egoism

The first point of distinction between rational egoism and subjective egoism is evident in what constitutes their moral package. Ethical egoism, in general, has self-interest (selfishness) and value as basic features. Egoism in

the subjective sense only points out a single aspect of an ethical principle. That is to say that it only tells us who should be the beneficiary of an action, but it does not specify the acts an individual should undertake (Rand, 1964). To define egoism as the act of seeking one's own self-interest is characterized by Rand as the compilation of both the act of selfishness and value as a single moral package. This is what egoism traditionally seeks to promote. Hence, egoism does not determine the value of an act, but it only identifies the one to benefit from an action. In the rational egoism of Rand, reason is used as a standard to validate an action within the setting of reality. It is based on this that an egoist is explained by Rand as an individual who acts for his personal interest, a self-interest that identifies one's motivation and makes choices concerning the alternative of actions which will promote his best interest (Glasgow, 1968, p. 81).

Distinguishing between these two definitions of egoism shows that the traditional understanding of egoism combines value and selfishness into a single ethical parcel. Combining value and selfishness into one item creates the impression that anything an individual considers as good for his or her individual interest is that which can be said to be moral. The rational egoist on a different note breaks down the two separately by holding that egoism or selfishness merely identifies the one to gain from an act, but leaves out what is good or that which should be valued. Because of that, to claim that something is advantageous or beneficial to an individual does not mean that it is that which is good or that it is that which an individual should value. Morality in the Randian sense should be valued objectively. With this understanding of objective value, conflating value and selfishness to say that what is moral is

that which is good for the individual self can only lead to ethical anarchy, the view that helping or assisting others around oneself is possible only when the individual's interest is being pushed or furthered. Ethical anarchism espouses a theory that stands against principles that promote ends that are not to be the benefit of the moral agent. With this understanding, any individual who may be considered as an ethical anarchist is one who in the quest to find means that liberate, promote the interest and goals of others have his personal gains, ends, or liberation at the root of the motivation for his actions (Levinas, 2003, p. 51). In brief, ethical anarchy only gives us a sense of responsibility through our subjectivity. Objective or rational egoism, on the other hand, puts up reality as the point of reference in determining what values are. In this sense, objectivists make reality the ultimate arbiter of morality. Making reality the ultimate judge in moral assessment has its implications when it comes to resolving ethical dilemmas. An ethical dilemma, in this regard, does not present itself as facts isolated from reality but as a synthesis of facts into a unified whole. Given this, Rand alludes to a position when it comes to conflicts of interests. This position is evident in Galt's discussion of conflicts of interest in the *Atlas Shrugged*. The idea in the novel suggests that there cannot be any instance of a conflict of interest among men, neither can there be any of such cases in the individual desires, not in their businesses (Rand, 1992, p. 798). This being the case, it can be construed that there is the likelihood of having differences in the way we perceive facts and consequently use diverse approaches in organizing these facts thereby leading to conflicts. Rand, moreover, thinks that issues that give rise to conflicts of interest normally arise not among rational beings but among those who have

decided to forsake rationality. Rational individuals have a basic understanding of reality as an absolute that cannot be changed or ignored. They also have the understanding that whatever that is not earned can never be had, that whatever that an individual does not merit cannot be given to him or her. If this is the case, a conflict of interest can only occur between agents who are irrational in their decision making. This means that such conflict arises only out of their denial of an ultimate judge. That is their denial of reality as the ultimate arbiter. Hence, egoistic principles that accept reality as the ultimate judge have simpler means of resolving conflicts of interests should there be any because of the universality of the ultimate principle to which these principles subscribe.

Examining the case of Michael and Andrew in relation to Rand's assumption in the *Atlas Shrugged* that conflict of interest is not possible because of the ultimate arbiter, it can be stated that there is only one reality on the ground when it comes to Michael and Andrew struggling to secure a job at a firm. The reality which is absolute is that only one person is meant to occupy the position and that person is the qualified individual who meets the requirements of the job. Working on the basis of this Rand would suggest that the qualified individual should be the one that should, in all respect, be capable of promoting or increasing productivity of the company. With this understanding, the choice between Michael and Andrew is no longer based on personal feelings but the reality out there, independent of their feelings and wants. It is on this basis that the two job seekers cultivate the understanding that it isn't a contest but a selection of the one who best fits the job, hence a negation of any notion of conflict between the two.

Another difference concerns the role of the virtue of rationality in the traditional egoism and Rand's rational moral theory. According to Rand's theory, reason is one of the primary values that can be found in any appropriate ethical system. She considers rationality as a virtue that is attained by the sheer exercising of the value of reason. The means of survival of a person is determined or necessitated by reason. A well nurtured and well-applied reason translates into a useful tool by which individuals can develop themselves and consequently transform their world. Rational egoism further asserts that the appropriate use of rationality helps to guide the passions of an individual. Rand's view suggests that reason cannot be entirely separated from passion, but the two harmoniously function together. Reason is, however, a means of cognition, hence it should override emotions in the case of a conflict between the two. What this means is that reason is the best cognitive grasp of the world, hence our actions ought to be governed by it. The subjective ethical system, by contrast, construes reason as a subordinate source of moral guidance. The reason is that rationality is secondary to emotions and passions. The subjective egoist believes that humanity constitutes a mass of intuitive drives but not reason. These motivations or drives manifest in man as emotions and passions. They consider rational acts to be built on the desires and instincts, thus making the rational capacity unreliable as compared to the capacity of emotions (Hicks, 2009, p. 279). It follows that the theory of subjective self-interest, on the one side, is largely unsupportive of the entire system of rationality but very attentive to emotions. While the theory of rational self-interest, on the other hand, is very considerate of reason and so exalts rationality as a basic component of the theory. So, while a subjective

egoist, so to say, advocates for a subjective self-interest based on instincts, Rand advocates for a self-interest based on reason.

The consequence of exalting reason as a basic component of rational egoism is that the egoistic individual becomes aware of his thought and gets to acknowledge the drive for the components of his thought. Reason promotes absolute confidence in our ethical actions. This is a feel of self-confident independence. The subjective egoist, in contrast, does not engage the use of reason. The implication of sidelining reason in a moral venture is a lack of certainty about the choices and actions of the agent concerned. This is because the vast majority of decisions and actions of his are motivated by mere feelings and emotions devoid completely of reason. The subjectivist egoist accepts the tenet that one ought to promote self-interest and based on that does anything which can help achieve that through the control of his desires and whims. Operating within the regions of emotions and whims, such an individual looks forward to the approval and consent of others to be able to make decisions. It follows that subjective egoists need people. That is, they need the approval of others to affirm the acceptability of what they think or choose or do. This situation only arises when there is an absence of rationality, the sole tool responsible for a cognitive grasp of the self.

Examining the Randian understanding of conflict of interest as a phenomenon that is not likely to erupt among rational agents, it can be said that it renders the second argument, that is, the argument of contradiction and inconsistency less potent against it. To make this point clearer, let us examine the relationship that exists between two agents in the traditional egoism and that of the agents in rational egoism. In his argument from contradiction,

Glasgow points out that Tom and Dick in struggling for the same position may end up running into contradictory situations in the conflict of their interests. The rational principles of Rand's egoism present this scenario to be a trivial one once it is not based on emotions or desires of the two parties. To Rand, it would take two rational individuals to simply resolve this issue. This is because, a rational individual comes to the understanding that whatever he aims at achieving but is unable to attain is not a loss to him, and neither is it detrimental to his personal interest. Relating Rand's idea to the scenario, Tom's gain would not mean a loss for Dick. The principles of rational egoism point out that if this situation would imply a loss to another individual, then this is in no way different from the sacrifice of an individual, a position that rational egoism strongly objects to (Rand, 1964). However, it could be observed that the principles as developed in the subjective egoistic sense call on both Tom and Dick to go all out to satisfy their individual interests. This understanding of personal interest is different from the Randian understanding of personal interest. In the quest to satisfy these individual interests, one person is definitely going to occupy the position or attain the targeted interest. In the event where one person, say Tom, gets to fill this position, the subjective egoist would characterize this as a loss to Dick. The consideration of this outcome as a loss is basically due to the thought by Dick that he desires the position, and because he desires it, it seems to him that it is right if the position is his. This is what brings about disappointment or a feeling of sacrifice if the other person wins. Rand considers this as an irrational and blind claim to the position or his interest with the thought that his desire makes him

want the position, and this makes it good. Rand came to this conclusion in the Part III of her novel when she opines,

If all men can come to the understanding that reality is a definite thing that cannot be faked, also that lies do not function, that the unearned cannot be attained and that what is underserved cannot be had, we would do ourselves good not to bear grudges with others in a competition. (Rand, 1992, p. 798)

By way of implication, the claim by Andrew that this is good to him translates into the consideration of the other partner (Tom) in the pursuit of the managerial position as a threat, hence a conflict with his interest. This only slips into the state of winner-loser situation. This state is necessitated by the fact that human beings have desires and will always aim for that which is impossible or above them because of our freewill. Nonetheless, it takes the understanding that the one who gains is the best deserving entity given that the premises that, reality cannot be altered, lies do not work and only the best gets the benefit, are accepted. Hence the thought of losing to another person can only be seen as a loss when he ignores that reality is an absolute and that truth is all that works. Such a thought could also arise from the misunderstanding that it is only that which one earns that can be attained and that it is only the one who best fits that gets the greater advantage in the quest for something. To engage in such negation of these state of affairs would only amount to a winner-loser situation. We have gotten to the stage of winner-loser because human beings desire and will always aim for the impossible. In this case, it takes the understanding that the one who gained is the best deserving entity given that it is accepted that reality cannot be altered, lies do not work and the

best gets the benefit. This understanding then minimizes any case of contradiction in settling such conflicts. In all, the argument that ethical egoism is contradictory in resolving conflicts of interest, as well as inconsistent has bearing only on the traditional or subjective sense of egoism but not on Rand's objective egoism.

The subjective egoist accepts as a principle that something other than reason is a valid basis for choices. In light of this, other than reason, whims, or passions, or desires are the only sources of determining what is right or wrong in the subjective egoist's perspective. The import of this is, though the subjective egoist may attribute to the individual freewill, the choices made by such individuals that yield to whims, or passions, or desires make them escape the consequences of their actions. On the whole, the subjective egoist may be free in making choices but since choices made are done without clear objective reason, they are not responsible or they may escape being responsible for their actions. The individual, in this sense, denies the responsibility of the consequences of his actions and only pins it on his desires or passions which motivated him in the first place. In this sense, a subjective egoist's sense of responsibility would only point to his personal desires. This possibility and others result from the idea that moral values, in the subjective egoistic sense, are not naturalistic or objective. Teasing out from the *Atlas Shrugged*, this understanding of moral values as unnatural translates into the act of "unfocusing or rejecting the dictates of the rational faculty and creating inner barriers to be able to evade the responsibility of judgement" (Rand, 1992, p. 1017). The rational egoist, on the other hand, knows he can never defy reality by acting in an irrational manner. In view of this, rationalists never

make choices based on anything other than a clear rational understanding of why they make the choices they make, and to give room for other things besides reason to determine their choices is a defiance of reality. Accordingly, the capacity of an individual to make choices makes them accountable for their choices since moral values are naturalistic and objective (Hicks, 2009, p. 278). Rationalists claim the responsibility for the consequences of their actions by way of pointing to how their actions are meant to promote their life.

An equally relevant point of distinction between Rational and Subjective egoism is identifiable in the universalizability of the fundamental values of moral agents. In Rand's ethical system, the principle of individualism and the principle of objectivism are closely-linked principles that seek to buttress her theory as one that promotes the interest of the moral agent. The idea of individuality focuses on the peculiar interest of the moral agent. The concept of objectivism focuses on the standard of assessment of the actions of the moral agent. This standard is limited to the individual's life. By upholding life as the measure of all value, Rand expects this to have a toll on the selfish interest of all individuals where self-interest gets appreciated by all as a guide for every action. Hence, the principle of objectivity in Rand's rational egoism is based on the promotion of life. Subjective egoism thrives on the idea that the concept of that which is good or bad to the moral agent is dependent on the agent's personal taste or mere dispositions. Based on this premise, the traditional understanding of egoism rejects the objective criterion by which moral codes can be evaluated. The concept of justice, for instance, is moral in the objectivist egoist sense if and only if the act of justice in question promotes the life of the egoist, and this was arrived at by rational procedures.

The promotion of the life of the self through a rational means is all that there is, in the Rationalist egoism, for an agent to be moral. But justice is simply a matter of taste when it comes to the Subjectivist egoist. The subjectivist egoist is only interested in promoting the self-interest through reliance on emotions and feelings.

The understanding of the first and second distinction of rational egoism from traditional egoism is that the moral agent is seen as a rational being who has the simple understanding of reality as an absolute phenomenon that cannot be changed or ignored. This further enhances the understanding that whatever that is not earned can never be had or that which one does not merit can never be given to him or her. Can this understanding between two rational agents in a situation result in a conflict of interest? The simple response Rand is likely to use in addressing this question is that conflicts arise as a result of our denial of reality as the ultimate arbiter. This supposition of Rand is not meant to deny that conflicts of interest is not likely to occur between two agents. Conflicts, in her understanding, are bound to occur. Ethical disagreements are contingent on errors, ignorance, prejudices or on the varying approaches we are likely to have in conceptualizing the state of affairs. However, these conflicts do not degenerate into antagonism. This is so in the sense that the imperatives of the objectivists provide constraints to these conflicts through reality, the ultimate judge. This is the essence of objectivism that there must be a continuous conformity to reality as the genuine empirical approach to morality. With this understanding, the criticism that ethical egoism is unable to resolve conflicts of interest is limited only to egoistic theories that combine self-interest and value as one item of morality. This is because it is only these theories that

ignore the objective determinant of morality and hold the individual disposition paramount in determining what is moral. Holding the personal dispositions as marks for morality creates a situation where whatever a person feels is in his or her interest is that which is moral. The resultant effect is the conflict between two or more agents on what is right or moral with each of them spelling out their dispositions as the standard for measurement. Considering the case as spelt out by Baier (1958), both Andrew and Michael would find themselves in a situation of conflict only if they cling onto their personal dispositions as yardstick for what is right or wrong. This is characterized as divergence from the objective standard of assessment. However, the principles of the rational egoism of Rand do not open the theory up to this criticism, since it lays constraints on the possibility of having a conflict of interest between rational agents. According to Rand, the situation as stated in the first situation arises only as a result of the irrationality on the part of the agents. Their irrationality is seen in their disregard for a universal standard that can be used to resolve all conflicts. In her opinion, succumbing and acting per reality prevents the possibility of a conflict of interest. In view of this, Michael and Andrew would be acting according to the demands of reality. Having established the standard for morality to be an absolute that can be reached by rationality, Rand has succeeded in ruling out the possibility of a conflict of interest. Ruling out from rational egoism the likelihood of a conflict of interest goes a long way to cancel out the argument of contradiction. My argument in defense of Rational egoism against the argument of contradiction and inconsistency is that one may be flawed to attribute contradiction to rational egoism. The idea is that Glasgow's argument envisaged a conflict of

interest between individuals when it comes to moral theories. It is based on this that he claims that there is a contradiction when it comes to using the principles of egoism to resolve the problem. The understanding derived from this is that the likelihood of a contradiction is contingent on the phenomenon of conflict. Accepting the premise that inconsistency or contradiction in an ethical theory is contingent on the occurrence of a conflict and granting also that Rand's absolute reality and the principle of reason do not open her rational egoism up to a conflict that can be reduced to rivalry, Rand's rational egoism arguably is not subject to the claims of contradiction and inconsistency as Glasgow labelled. Hence, it would be a fruitless venture to argue against a theory as having inconsistencies meanwhile the theory, in the first place, does not succumb to any idea of conflict. This is not to suggest that the objectivists are not subject to errors. However, it is to mean that in forming opinions and judgements, these individuals are sensitive to the factors that are important to the truth of their opinions and judgements. In this sense, their views may be wrong or mistaken but such views are free from any emotionally induced distortions in the processes they were reached.

My final reaction would be towards the argument of Rachels (2003) that ethical egoism is arbitrary. It is argued that theories concerned with the satisfaction of self-interest collapse every moral satisfaction in respect of that goal. The charge of arbitrariness is seen in situations where one individual benefits at the expense of the other. This situation, in my estimation, is likely to erupt within a theory that is only concerned about reaching its highest good by any means possible and with total disregard for all others that may be affected. Rand's rational egoism can be exempted from this charge because

her theory does not recommend that an agent should take advantage of others. Rand's idea of conflict promotes a form of good-versus-good conflict. The reason is that Rand's explanation of rationality shows that nature generously grants to all the capacity to reason. In view of this, a conflict between two moral agents cannot be a good-versus-evil but rather a good-versus-good. This also means that the conflict is between two rational agents with one of them mistaken about his choice. This creates a situation where it is less likely to have the universal observation of the rational egoist principle rendering everyone worse off. My observation here is that rational egoism possesses a forceful thesis that aims at universalizing individuality so that it can be observed at least by sufficiently many, if not all, as a theory that renders everyone better off. Rational egoism builds mutual advantage between the moral agent and other individuals. This implies that rational egoism restricts its biases such that it creates room for all to be better off in given situations. This is to also imply that the rubrics of rational egoism can be reconciled with demands for mutual advantage. A move away from the middle point, that is, from the point of mutual advantage would result in two different extremes that can make a theory arbitrary. The first side of the extreme can be constituted as self-denial for the benefit of others. This principle as advocated for by the altruists is a wrong understanding of what morality should characterize because it makes the moral agent worst off so as to satisfy others. The other extreme would be the trampling over others to gain what one desires. This is more like extortion by the moral agent where the individual is focused on making himself better off to the detriment of others. Rand's theory, however, frowns upon situations where an agent gives out to others but is unable to

increase benefits for himself or actions that do not require reciprocity from others at the benefiting end. This is to ensure that as the egoist makes efforts to make others better off there must be reciprocal benefits that would make him (the moral agent) better off as well. Consequently, Rand's conception of egoism propagates a win-win situation should there be a conflict. This would rule out the idea of the arbitrariness of rational egoism as argued by a number of critics.

My quest to justifiably establish Rand's theory as an objective theory that surpasses all critiques against ethical egoism, in general, would not make the theory of egoism the most acceptable and viable theory of morality. However, it is meant to show certain objective features of Rand's rational egoism. These are features that give some degree of plausibility to rational egoism amongst the various versions of egoism in ethical discourses. This does not mean that rational egoism in my assessment can be exonerated of some flaws. One basic weakness that stands out about Rand's ethical egoism is its inability to explain the situation of suicide or the choice of death over life or how her theory of value distances itself from the intrinsic property a standard of value ought to have. It could be observed that assuming a number of individuals are faced with the alternative of life and death, and it would require one of them to sacrifice himself for all the others to have a continuous existence, Rand argues that this would characterize a sacrifice of one individual for the greater good. Human being, according to her, ought not to make demands from others requiring them to wipe themselves out of existence (Rand, 1992, p. 529). The problem then would be that assuming an individual consciously decides to give up his life as a way of ensuring the survival of

other members of a community, can his act be characterized as a wrong or immoral one judging from the fact that he came by that decision all by himself? Examining Rand's standard of moral assessment, it could be observed that she made the standard of moral assessment to be one's own life. This is why she opined that man *qua* man has only his life as the utmost value as well as the purpose of ethics. This account of life as the ultimate value may be argued out as flawed in Rand's rational egoism. The flaw shows in the manner that the individual person is characterized as having the freewill to make choices and these choices in Rand's opinion are meant to satisfy the agent's interest. Should this be the case, then the choice to sacrifice oneself for the gain of others would be one that was done based on volition and so would to some extent be a denial of Rand's idea of the promotion of the subject's life as the ultimate goal. This, in my observation, makes it difficult for the objectivists to explain the concept of giving up one's own life for a particular end or fulfilling the interest of the subject.

Rand's theory can escape this defect if and only if the theory's standard of value, that is, life can be explained as having intrinsic goodness that is by no means possible to be reduced to instrumental goodness when it is being pursued. Intrinsic goodness of a thing in this sense would be associated with a thing that a rational individual would, all factors considered, find appropriate to pursue for its own sake but not as a means to attaining additional goals. Hence, life as the standard of measurement should not only be explained as that which one acts to gain and/or to keep. Rather, life is that which a moral rational agent considers as appropriate to be pursued for its own sake. Followers of Rand should argue that life is not meant to be considered as of

instrumental value or end but rather as an intrinsic good. If the life of a person is to be construed as having an intrinsic value then the life of a person is the greatest value which ought to be promoted. Following from this, life cannot be terminated or sacrificed. For to sacrifice one's life, even if done consciously, would imply a negative moral outcome for the rational egoist. This is because whatever a rational egoist values, he makes sure to keep it as an end, that is, he acts to first gain it and keep it. This means that every human being has such an end, their continued existence, paramount.

Construing life as an instrumental good or value connotes a different understanding of life from what it would mean to say it is intrinsic. The instrumental goodness of life would mean that the individual's life has the capability of promoting or furthering the lives of others. This translates into self-sacrifice as the altruists may proffer. Life as an instrumental value means the life of an agent can be used as a means to promoting the life of others. This idea negates the concept of life as an end in itself but it only portrays it as means to further ends. Hence, the idea of self-sacrifice is not captured by Rand in her theory. Hence, as other ethical theories may find it logical for an individual to sacrifice his most treasured good (life) for the benefit of other or majority. Rand, in this regard, gives primacy to life as an intrinsic value over it being instrumental.

The implication of making Rand's standard of value intrinsic is that, life, the ultimate goal or value not only becomes intrinsic but gets grounded as a universal, objective and absolute principle in assessing the activities of a moral agent. What this means is that if life is an agent-relative value for an ethical agent A, and if the state of affairs that A's achievement of that value—life is

not independent of the agent who is valuing, then life as the value is evident to another rational agent as a value worthy of pursuit for its own sake. This can then be used to explain the universality of the concept of life used by Rand as the standard of valuation. The concept of life as a state of affairs that is experienced and appreciated by everyone resonates with the idea that the concept of life as a standard of value can be an absolute concept in determining morality. This is what Rand seeks to achieve when she advocates for rational egoism as the sole determinant of morality. This being the case, it would be absolutely meaningful to say of life as a common goal that is shared by all rational agents and is coherently all-encompassing of all these individuals' end. Hence, Rand's idea of rational selfishness or prioritization of reason and the self-interest does not only suggest that each rational agent has a peculiar set of reasons or goals that motivate their actions, but it further asserts a common goal that is acknowledged by all these rational individuals. The crux of the underpinning principles of Rational egoism is the idea that the interest of an individual moral agent cannot exist separately from the interest of the whole. That is to say that these individual interests and goals form part of the totality of existence. Hence, to be rational, in the rational egoist's contest, is to be engaged in the acts that are self-sustaining. This is not to imply that every moral agent is bound to work towards promoting their personal life or that all individuals would consider their existence as a conscious objective. On the contrary, to make choices that end up deteriorating or terminating one's personal life for the gain of others does not seem to be a rational option to Rand. In view of that, the only component that seems to be missing in Rand's theory is the capacity of the individual rational

agent to develop or have a sincere attention towards the wellbeing of other agents since she finds no logical space for such phenomenon in her rational egoism.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the various criticisms that have been raised against egoism in general. Egoism has been accused of ring-fencing the individual self from the society in which he or she finds himself. This has been used by critics as the foundation upon which series of arguments have been constructed to discredit egoism. The chapter has established that the basis upon which the arguments are extended to all versions of egoism is the assumption that all the versions of egoism have similar underpinning principles. This claim has been disputed in here by clearly stating the differences between ethical egoism and rational egoism. Having drawn the essential distinctions between rational egoism and ethical egoism, the tone has ostensibly been set for the justification of rational egoism as an ethical system that qualifies as an objective system. In essence, the assumption among critics that a person will miss out on the best experiences like love, friendship and companionship in life should he choose to live as an egoist is a mistaken assumption that could not be associated with the rational egoist properly construed. This is because an egoist in the rational sense is poised in doing what he does for his self-interest which in the long run promotes his relations with others in the society.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, APPRAISAL AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

Summary

The preceding chapters establish that Ayn Rand is a strict advocate of rational egoism, and therefore, a hardhearted antagonist of altruism, communitarianism, and spirituality. To successfully build rational egoism as a credible moral theory she links the idea to the concept of values. Rand's theory of values is explicable analogously to her theory of concepts. Her desire to deny the value of selfishness as one that is based on the subjective dispositions of a person is geared towards refuting the conclusion that value is subjective. She maintains that value is objective, more or less, in the same sense as are concepts, be the metaphysical, epistemological or ethical. Value, as she explains in *The Virtue of Selfishness*, is that which one acts to gain and/or to keep. In this sense, a thing becomes a value to someone only if that individual puts in efforts to gain and keep it. However, in explaining that not all that one acts to gain and keep are genuinely good, Rand complements her theory of value with the theory of good. This gives the standards by which we are able to appraise what values we ought to act to gain and to keep. She discusses the "good" in similar contexts as she did to "concepts". She is of the view that the idea of good is an outcome of the rational process engaged in by the human being.

The first chapter presents a relevant background to the entire research, a background from which the research problem was deduced. The problem statement, thesis, objective of the study, and theoretical framework of the

work are outlined in detail in this chapter. In wrapping up the chapter, literature is reviewed to critically explore what various scholars present on the problem under investigation and how such literature can be used to further understanding on the topic.

Chapter two of the work is expository rather than argumentative or critical. The focus of this chapter rests on the assumption that one is only able to meaningfully criticize a theory when one has a good grasp of it. Also understanding a theory requires an appreciation of how it is related to its competing theories. It is based on this assumption that the chapter examines the basic principles underpinning Rand's Rational Egoism. It further establishes that the objectivism of Rand advances a multi-disciplinary continuum. This continuum, which has been extensively accounted for in the various paragraphs of this chapter, ranges from metaphysics to aesthetics. The discourse took time to examine the two significant disciplines (metaphysics and epistemology) which necessarily paved the way for the third discipline (ethics). In this sense, this chapter establishes that Rand's efforts to systematize Objectivism ends up producing also a kind of tree of knowledge. In this tree of knowledge, it is asserted that the conclusions reached in one supporting discipline would function as true premises for the next practical discipline. The premise established in the objectivist epistemology and metaphysics serves as the starting point for the ethical theory of the objectivists. The other disciplines (aesthetics and politics) which are not discussed into detail are observed to dwell on the ethical theory developed by Rand. Hence, the answers provided for the metaphysical question; what is the meaning of reality, gives the grounds for explorations into the question: what

distinctively separates man from other entities. These two philosophical questions, consequently, establish the foundations upon which the objectivist moral theory is founded. Hence, the ethics of the objectivist is a consequence of both metaphysics and epistemology or, stated otherwise, ethical principles are the outcomes that arise from a peculiar model of logic and man's intellect.

In all, Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* is analyzed as a novel that affords its readers with depictions of moral agents whose use of reason is informed by a unified philosophical principle and constantly applies to their choices and judgement. This is, of course, a truism that Rand connects everything to the function of the mind in the existence of man, the unifying subject of the novel (Rand, 1975, p. 81). The philosophical elements found in the fiction coupled with the ideas outlined in *The Virtue of Selfishness* provide fundamental principles that ensure that an individual does the right thing by promoting his or her own interest in a practically rational way (Beadle, 2008, p. 223).

Chapter three examines the link between metaphysics and epistemology and uses such link as the basis to examine the value theory of the objectivist egoistic ethical theory, as well as the basic elements that form the central tenets on which Rational egoism is founded. To achieve this, the objectivist conception of value and virtues are examined. The chapter analyzes Rand's explanation of how the evaluation of good is done concerning man and how it raises human life as the standard of value of the good. Thus, the quest to enhance the individual or one's own life is the ultimately good value, so if anything promotes self-interest it is considered to be moral. The chapter states also that in rational egoism the values we work with do not come to us automatically, and neither do we pursue them spontaneously. There must be

an act of choice made towards the acquisition of such values. In essence, Rational egoism promotes the idea that whatever one desires as a perfect value for one's life must be worked for, for they can only be of value to the individual who puts in efforts to attain them. This is understood in this chapter to mean having the power of volition. This power ought to be used appropriately, that is, towards attaining or satisfying the self-interest. This is how reality functions, according to Rand. Importantly, the desire to satisfy self-interest does not make morality subjective. This is because the determinant of what promotes a person's life is not the individual's feelings that are divorced from facts of reality, but by the individual's nature as a human being, that is, by the factual requirements of his life and happiness. Given the nature of human beings as complex beings of body and mind, and given that the requirement and happiness of the human lives derive from the integrated nature, we need certain values to live and flourish. Consequently, we must uphold and consistently employ reason, the one fundamental value that gives us the identification of other values and their pursuit, in order to live and flourish. Rationality, according to Rand, provides human nature with distinguishing features but proper use of it requires individuals to come into terms with the idea that rationality requires them to act on the understanding of their own best interest as rational beings. The rational principle culminates in the principle of selfishness. The relationship between rationality and selfishness is such that the definition of one implies the other. This is presented as a basis to explain why the Objectivist ethical egoism holds that the individual should act in his or her own rational self-interest.

In Chapter four, there is an examination of a number of arguments raised against ethical egoism. The misconceptions around the arguments extend further to Rand's rational egoism. Egoism is accused of secluding the individual self from the society in which he or she finds himself or herself. This is used by critics as the foundation upon which series of arguments are raised to discredit egoism. The chapter establishes that the basis upon which these arguments extend to all versions of egoism is the assumption that all the versions of egoism have similar underpinning principles. This claim is disputed in this chapter by clearly stating the differences between ethical egoism and rational egoism. Having drawn the essential distinctions between rational egoism and ethical egoism, the tone has ostensibly been set for the justification of rational egoism as an ethical system that qualifies as an objective system that is developed with strict adherence to reality, that is, the facts that are out there independent of the individual's dispositions. Since reality or the fact out there is constant and unchanging the theory is reinforced as non-contradictory in its principles, and the tenets make the theory mutually consistent.

Appraisal of Rand's Rational Egoism

While explaining her ethical position to Professor John Hospers, Ayn Rand specifies that an agent is characterized as an egoist if he or she acts for the promotion of his or her personal interest. She adds that the ego of a man is his mind. This means that the most crucial aspect of an appropriate moral theory should be the sovereignty and independence of one's own rational judgement and the effort to be constantly guided by these rational judgements (Berliner, 1995). It follows that, an egoist cannot be limited to just an

individual who seeks his or her interest exclusively, nor is it merely an individual who acts in his or her own rational interest, rather, the true egoism comes as a package that involves the already mentioned egoistic features crowned with independence of the egoistic individual. This implies that individuals who engage in immoral acts such as robbing and cheating that are directed to promoting their self-interests cannot be said to be true egoists in the objectivist sense. An immoral activity such as theft or cheating only gives a hint of dependence on others for survival. True egoists, in effect, rely on no one or nothing other than their own mind. They do not exist for other individuals and they in no way ask other men to exist for them (Rand, 1961).

It is important to point out that a morality that is objective comes from our observations, logical principles and the principles of nature. These are the guiding principles by which Rand proposes the underlying principles of her objective ethics (Rand, 1982). I would, on the basis of this, like to establish that Rand's ethical principles with its inherent tenets do not present to our modern discourse issues only in morality but also issues that delve deeper into politics, our social lives and to some extent discussions in economics. Rand's ethics can be summarized as, take what you want and pay for it (Rand, 1982, p. 95). The cogent sum of her philosophy can be explained in all the other fields outlined above. The simple and short of her philosophy is that if you want to achieve a goal, all you have to do is to set the cause into motion. That is to say that there must be a cause of action to stimulate the end to which you desire. However, according to her principle, you have to be guided by a number of factors in making such choices. Hence, given our nature as human beings capable of making choices, we need certain values to guide and set us

on the right path. To live following these dictates of reality would mean an enhancement in our lives, not only morally, but economically, socially and politically. What is implied by “take what you want” in Rand’s ethical system is the fact that our values as moral agents are based on choices. According to Rand, our ethical lifestyle is all about what we want out of life and what ought to be done to achieve such ends. As has been analyzed in chapters three and four of this research, doing what one desires is guided by reason. Reason gives humanity the drive to be able to establish the values necessary for the various aspects of our life. This drive comes, first, from the ability to observe the world around us, be it in economic, social or political life. Having observed the nature of things around us, we use our knowledge of our surroundings to form concepts, identify the causal relations between the series of events in our lives and form principles about what is appropriate or not for our life. Taking what one wants does not rule out the possibility of making an error. It would be a mistaken assumption to think that being rational means never erring. This is because we are fallible beings capable of making sporadic and irregular mistakes. Rather, to be a rational being denotes our commitment to detecting the existing and pertinent facts concerning our choices in life, to acting on the best of our assessment given what we know at specific times, and to correcting any errors committed if and when we discover them. “Paying for what we want” is used by the objectivists to explain the idea that our goals can only be achieved if we put in efforts to achieve them. That is if we work to see them come to pass. The objectivist’s understanding of causality explains this further that, to see the desired goal, one has to enact the relevant cause. This is basically the morality prescribed by the objectivists. Our understanding from

the progression of this research from chapter to chapter indicates that the roots of Rand's objective philosophy run deeper as compared to any other theory of egoism. Seen in this light, proceeding rationally, as advocated by the objectivists, is not restricted only to individual entities, but societies are expected to proceed in their dealings rationally. There is a causal relationship between using rationality and the resultant effects of its use. Using reason sustains and advances the individual's life. All things being equal, just as an individual who resolves to disregard reason by acting irrationally will stagnate, suffer, and perish, society or nation that refuses to depend on rational approaches to challenges would, in a similar manner, stifle the nation's progress making it stagnate, suffer and perish. This same causal principle would apply to any organisation or institution. It follows that the fundamental objective virtue is relevant in all fields.

This understanding of the objectivist egoism presents it as a viable theory with great prospects. The prospects of egoism are evident in the fact that the theory enhances personal development. It is an undeniable fact that the rational egoism of Ayn Rand, just as the other versions of egoism, expresses particular biases towards the individual-self. Nonetheless, rational egoism goes beyond merely satisfying the self-interest to develop the potential of the individual as an independent and productive agent. This is the beauty of the objectivist ethics. The quality of being inventive and productive is the blueprint of Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* where it is reflected in the role of the characters especially the heroes. These characters who are mainly engineers, inventors and businessmen are used by Rand to explain the possibility of translating the theoretical products of our rational faculty into the practical

requirement of life. This is to mean that the theme of *The Virtue of Selfishness* and *Atlas Shrugged* do not only focus on individualism but attempts to explain how a person can be noble in his or her individuality or selfishness. This can only be achieved by being productive. An individual who is productive and independent comes to relate well with others around him or her. The productivity exhibited by an individual by being independent is a personal enhancement or development. This results in a conscious development of the virtue of justice where people are judged rationally as well as treated as they deserve. This is, as described by Biddle (2018) in *Understanding Rational Egoism*, the basic principle of rational interaction amongst selfish individuals. Rationally, one comes to the understanding that we all have the character we have, and we are responsible for it. We also come to terms with the idea that we are affected by our behaviour whether good or bad. This understanding of the role of the mind can be applied to the most basic relationship involving friends. The objectivists argue that an individual should develop his mind in a way that can lead him to the formation of goals that are self-promoting. An individual is expected to possess a great deal of thinking, planning and coordinating skills such that he would be able to harmonize his values and goals. In addition to this, such an individual must at every turn apply the necessary knowledge, use his best judgment, and act accordingly with respect to the full context of his values. This, consequently, translates into an enhancement in such individual's material production. If one is able to achieve this, then he stands fit and capable of establishing mutual relationships with other people. Note that a mutual relationship to the objectivist is one that the parties involved all have something to offer their partners. Anything less than

that would mean either there is exploitation, that is, from the one who is always at the giving end, or that there is disrespect for the partner always at the receiving end. Always being given by a partner without you giving back is according to the objectivist egoists a disrespect because the one always giving you perceives the receiver as one who is not capable of producing anything on his own and would forever require the help of others. This characteristically shows an individual considered to be of good character is one who can generate innovative ideas, create life-promoting products to enhance acquaintances or become a truthful politician.

Employing this in any industrial economy of a country, say Ghana, would mean that she has to do all things possible to keep the economy afloat. To achieve this, she must look at the role of the mind in the sustenance of the lives of her citizenry. Such a nation should also consider how reason can help in material production. Introducing the principles of the objectivists into a broader scope of a nation would imply that just as an individual makes efforts to improve his life to achieve the ultimately best his life can ever be, a nation on similar scores can improve the lives of her citizens through the harmonious use of every resources and capacities available to the state. To do this as a nation is to aim towards a highly complex goal that in the long run promotes the span of all individuals' entire life. In view of this the objectivists consider the best interest of a nation as the egoistic endeavors that need to be pursued. Achieving this ultimate interest of a nation would mean mechanisms ought to be put in place to unify all the choices, values, and goals of such a state into a single harmonious whole. For this to be a fruitful venture, there is the need to apply a great deal of thinking, selecting, prioritizing, coordinating of all the

goals and values of the state. It is only by this means that Ghana as a nation can stand tall amongst her cohorts and be free from any form of extortion from any supposed superior nation. In addition, this approach to activities rids a nation of exploitative mentalities so as not to subdue other nations. According to the principles of the objectivists, a relationship that requires only one side to be making provision for the other partner implies two things. First that the partner always at the receiving end is exploiting the other partner. This is because that partner who is always receiving does nothing to promote the life of the one constantly giving out. Hence a nation who is always at the receiving end is considered to be overly dependent on the one at the giving end. Secondly, it promotes a sense of inferiority in the one who always receives. This consequently make the one who is always receiving to stagnate in terms of productivity since she has in mind that she would be receiving from someone else. Allowing rationality to play a part in pursuance of life-enhancing goals indicates the purpose driving the nation and this, in the long run, raises the esteem of such a nation. This is what justice constitutes for the objectivists. This sort of state is what Rand considers as a capitalist state.

Just as all ethical theories have political consequences, Rand's rational egoism presents capitalism as the only political system that promotes the development of the individual minds and a consequent increment in the material production of the entire nation. Capitalism, in her opinion, is a social system that recognizes the rights of their individual members and makes room for private ownership. In this system, human relations are voluntary in the sense that the individual members can deal with one another only by means of reason (Rand, 1967). This ethical system that prioritizes rationality and individuality gives

grounds for the principle of justice. Justice constitutes an essential element of capitalism, according to Rand. This means that there is a voluntary and conscious effort of the individual citizens of a state to engage in trading activities that are mutually beneficial. This system guarantees that one enters into trade systems or agreements that would benefit him or her equally as the other partner will. A circumstance that fosters harmony and mutual relations first among individual members of the state and then between the state and other ally states. The government of the capitalist political system plays a unique role, differently, from that of other political systems. The capitalist system simply examines the requirements of human life in a social context and what people should, in principle, do or abstain from to observe some sort of decorum in a civilized manner. The government of a capitalist system acknowledges that the citizens need to develop their rationality and act in light of that by making judgements.

In brief, the entire system of the capitalist society, in the Randian sense, is suffused with the objective view of value. In view of this, what is considered as good ought to be discovered by a man's mind since goodness is determined by the nature of reality. Hence, a free market signifies the social application of an objective theory of value.

Concluding Remarks

Having made all these points, I am convinced, as I hope my reader is, that what I have done with this study is to find a place for Rand's egoism as an objective theory with its absoluteness deduced from the facts of reality but not from any supernatural being. I have clearly laid the cards as they are about the

kind of guidance objective egoism communicates. Reflecting on the chapters examined thus far, Rand's morality propagates the basic assumption for humans to live, and this can be summarized in the words of Galt in *Atlas Shrugged* that "I swear by my life and the love of it—that I will not live for the sake of another man, nor ask another man to live for mine" (Rand, 1992). This means that we need to pursue live-promoting values and give similar respect to others who decide to do same. Put simply, one ought not to sacrifice himself for others, nor sacrifice others for his gain. This is what acting for self-interest implies for Rand. However, she justifies the promotion of self-interest by latching it onto the principle that one's life as well as happiness depends on these actions which would promote the self-interest.

Doing actions that are meant to further the self-interest implies that these are actions that are undertaken by a conscious method or by rational means where one examines the state of affairs that would help further one's happiness and life. In brief, rational egoism gives reverence to the individual's mind. The core of morality is rational independent thinking. This sort of conception of life makes everyone better off since every one struggles to get the best for himself. It is on the basis of the structure of Rand's rational egoism that it can be asserted that rational egoism best responds to any criticism of contradiction or it best addresses the argument that it is self-defeating. What I have done in this work is to show that, coupled with the acknowledgement of the rationality of the individual, Rational egoism also directs all actions and value to conform to reality. This makes the theory's principles absolute rather than relative to each individual. In essence, while Rational egoism fosters the development of the individual's mind, Altruism does otherwise since it allows an individual to

be decided for by another disguised as a helper. In view of this, the more you help others as a gesture of promoting their life, you end up thwarting their ability to use their rational capacity to think through situations. The result of not developing one's rational faculty is the inability to have a full grasp of reality and make judgements in that regard. Hence, one is forced to settle for actions that satisfy their personal desires detached from reality. This sort of desires are short-term desires which end up not enhancing life. A further import that can be drawn is that one's incapacitated state renders him incapable of discriminating what is good (that which is life enhancing) from that which is bad (that which would deteriorate life) since such discrimination has to be done by someone else who would have to help him. If the purpose of altruism is to promote the interest of others but making other people the object of one's charity attracts a number of disadvantages as listed above, then the theory becomes self-defeating. This is because the inability of the receiver to develop his individual mind but rely on others implies a degradation of their self-repute. The individual's mind grants him the dignity to rationalize issues but is robbed of this when always provided for by another. This makes a person passively dependent on others. This is actually a distortion in one's natural make up in the attempt to help him as proffered by the altruists. However, as a way of ensuring everyone becomes better off, Rational egoists stress on the concept of mutual advantage—the idea that rational egoism fosters a relationship between individuals where the parties involved equally benefit. In this sense, man is seen as a sovereign entity in possession of his mind, life, work and it benefits but may choose to go into any relationship with others who offer something in return for yours. The individuals who have

something to offer in term of any relationship are people Rand considers as virtuous and they are the appropriate individuals to engage in any form of transactions with. It is only a criterion like this that can lead to deliberations only in terms of or by means of reason.

In light of all the principles examined in this work, consider for a moment how rational egoism answers the numerous questions that hung over the head of ethical egoism. Consider also how the theory addresses a great deal of guidance we need in decision making and acting based on this guidance looking at numerous values that are required to promote life and happiness. This necessitates principles that are conducive to the goal of living fully and happily. In response to this ethical need, rational egoism provides a whole system of integrated and noncontradictory principles to guide our lives. In brief, the ethical theory of the objectivists enables an individual to develop an independent mind that recognizes no value higher than their judgement of truth. This boosts mutual confidence, cements friendships with others, facilitates the dispatch of economic activities, and hence, increases the wealth of the society that practices it.

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