

# Objectivism on the rise?

**Q.** *What is your definition of Objectivism?*

**A.** Objectivism is the name Ayn Rand chose to designate her philosophical system. There are a lot of different ways in which the name Objectivism relates to her philosophy. I think most immediately that her philosophical system is for objectivity as opposed to subjectivity, as opposed to the idea that our whim and wishes determine the facts. It is also opposed to mysticism, which is really another form of subjectivity in that it takes the view that truths, moral truths, absolute truths, the good in itself, all exist intrinsically out there in some higher level of reality which is known through intrinsicism, i.e. whim. So, initially the name Objectivism stands for objectivity. She has defined the essence of her philosophy in four words. In metaphysics (the branch of philosophy which deals with the ultimate nature of reality)—objective reality. In epistemology (which deals with the nature and means of human knowledge)—reason. In ethics, self-interest. In metaphysics (the branch of philosophy which deals with the ultimate nature of reality)—objective reality. In epistemology (which deals with the nature and means of human knowledge)—reason. In ethics, self-interest. In politics, capitalism. Her philosophy basically argues that reality exists in itself as an objective absolute, which Man can know through the use of reason.

Reason is Man's only means to knowledge and only guide to action. Every man is an end in himself as a morally sovereign entity. Man should pursue his own rational self-interest by following his mind and finding the principles and values that his life requires. He should seek his own happiness as the highest moral purpose of his life. This is rational egoism, self-interest informed by rational principles.

It is a philosophy advocating laissez-faire capitalism which is a social system in which one deals with others voluntarily through exchanges on the market. Nobody seeks to dominate others through the use of physical force. Government is a social institution which has a legal monopoly over the use of force, which is to be used only in retaliation when an individual's rights are being violated. The sole function of government is to have a police force to deal with internal criminals, to have an armed force to deal with external threats and a court system to deal with complications that come up in the process of everyday life. Government has no morally legitimate economic functions whatsoever. Objectivism is advocating a total separation of state and economics just as it advocates the separation of state and church.

**Q.** *There seems to be a problem with the definition of Objectivism, for example, ideology versus philosophy. What place does Objectivism hold in society?*

**A.** First of all, let me address the question of philosophy versus ideology. That distinction I think carries with it a peculiarly twentieth century connotation that is associated with the term ideology. Usually what someone has in mind is that you have some set of personal beliefs which are ultimately subjective to you. What they are really saying is that people who have ideologies are people who are trapped in some set of beliefs for which there is no rational demonstration. That they are veiled from the real truths and that their beliefs are nothing but personally subjective views or class-created viewpoints or economically created views.

The term ideology implies that all of these fundamentally philosophical ideas are ultimately rationalizations either from one's personal preferences or from one's classification. They lump everyone who has any kind of philosophical outlook at all into one group. Now, Objectivism is not arguing for philosophical principles in that way. Objectivism is arguing that philosophy is a fundamental requirement of Man's life. Objectivism is arguing for the identification of certain fundamental truths, certain fundamental principles which are absolutely crucial for the guidance of our life, for the discovering of principles from which we can then subsequently choose our actions in life and that these principles can be true in reality. That is a philosophy as opposed to an ideology. When people say that Objectivism is an ideology they are trying to put all fundamental viewpoints, whatever they are, into one grab-bag. It is meant to be demeaning to people who have those viewpoints.

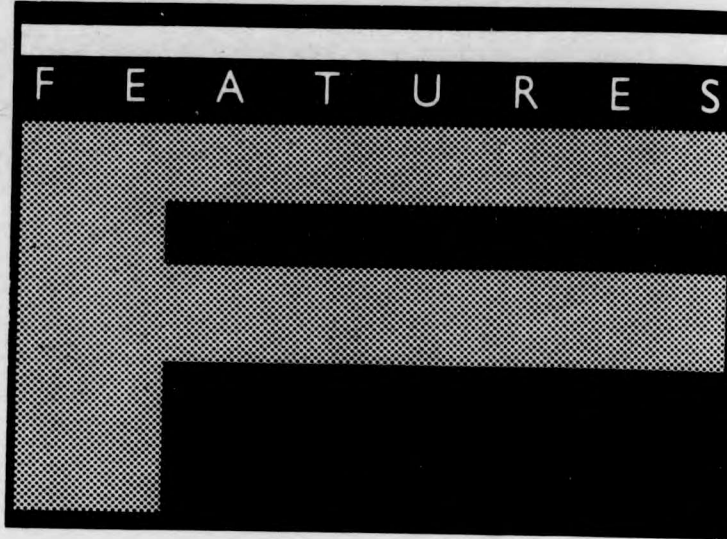
Objectivism certainly stands against the implication that philosophical systems are nothing more than mere subjective preferences. It in fact argues for the crucial role of philosophy in the living of life and the destruction that will follow in individual's lives and in culture if a rational philosophy is not discovered and followed. That whole point is demonstrated in Ayn Rand's book, which she basically released for university students, entitled *Philosophy, Who Needs It*, a book I heartily recommend that all students read.

**Q.** *What does Objectivism offer that makes it so attractive to you?*

**A.** Basically the combination of its seriousness and its rationality. It is a serious attempt to discover the philosophical principles that we can use to guide our lives successfully. It is very pro Man, pro Man's mind, pro the rational life. The Objectivist heroes are the people who use their rational minds to produce the values that their lives require. In our present culture, which is economically and politically confusing to young people, if not disgusting to them, they realize that their culture is in trouble. They see in Objectivism a seriously reasoned-out argument for the efficacy of man's mind, for the possibility of living a happy and productive life. The possibility of having a free society as opposed to what we have today is an attractive image.

**Q.** *Do you think that this aspect of Objectivism leads it to be attractive to many university students in particular?*

**A.** By and large that's true. I think that you could say that it is always primarily the young people in the culture whose minds are open to differences and challenges. It is common for people as they get older to become less and less interested in putting in the effort to think about things, let alone to put themselves in the position to challenge their culture and then have to pay the social costs that you do for being an idiosyncratic member of



*Recently Ayn Rand's philosophy of Objectivism has been enjoying increased popularity on campus. Rand's vision was first popularized in her novels Atlas Shrugged and The Fountainhead where she envisioned a capitalist utopia based on a radical individualism.*

*This philosophy has been espoused by York Professor John Ridpath of the Economics Department, who spoke with Excalibur's Naomi Pascoe about the fundamental principles of Objectivism and its relevance to contemporary issues.*



**Pictured above, Ayn Rand, the founder of the philosophy of Objectivism. Her writings gained a large audience, but have failed to be regarded as legitimate philosophy within academic circles.**

society. The young people are not yet entrenched in any particular philosophical viewpoint. They are looking ahead and taking their lives seriously; looking for answers to the questions they see themselves confronted with. With regards to Objectivism, and not only here at York, it is in fact the good students that are increasingly interested in Rand's ideas and are reading her on their own. They are seeking for greater understanding of her philosophical system. In less than thirty years her ideas are being discussed quite widely. There is a growing network of student study groups on campuses. The quality of the students who are interested has always been the very best.