

Objectivism gives Atheism a Bad Name

As it turns out it's not just Theists that have {In:cults}. Atheistic groups can have cult properties as well. One such group is called Objectivism, a philosophy pioneered by author Ayn Rand. Objectivism has it's good points and it's bad points. On the plus side Ayn Rand pioneered several controversial positions for her time. On the down side she made several serious errors, like extolling the virtues of greed and demonizing generosity.

The cornerstone of Objectivism, as the name implies, is the belief in objective reality. Objectivists are Atheists and they don't believe in the supernatural. They advocate reason and logic. These are values that we as realists share as well. And we as realists especially endorse her as an advocate for reality as it really is.

Unfortunately however, much of her philosophy extends beyond the concept of objective reality (feature creep), and under the banner of Objectivism she extols the virtues of being selfish, greedy, and all but worships capitalism. At the same time, Altruism is described as "evil", as culture Objectivists look down their noses at generosity, giving, sharing, selflessness, and community concepts. Objectivists claim to be rugged individualists and advocates of individual freedom. We also support individuality and individual freedoms, however we don't see community as the opposite of individuality.

Objectivists are not entirely monolithic in their beliefs. One Objectivist named David Kelly wrote an article titled Generosity and Self-Interest where he acknowledges that "dichotomy between self-interest and generosity is a false one." However, Objectivism has been called an Unlikely cult because the Ayn Rand followers have adopted her personality quirks which includes extreme arrogance. I would hope that we learn from this, because the First One of the Church of Reality is definitely NOT a personality role model to follow. Maybe we should find someone who is and appoint them the official role model to emulate.

I know that some Objectivists are going to take offense to what I'm writing, but so be it. I do feel that Objectivism has done a great disservice to Atheism in regards to selfishness. We in the Church of Reality, and perhaps other Atheists agree, the concept that "selfishness is good and generosity is bad" is just dead wrong. I feel that this concept has not only given Atheists a bad name, but also contributed to the Theist fear that if Atheism prevails, society will degenerate into greedy selfishness, Anarchy and Chaos. Which is also far from the truth.

What you do speaks louder about what you believe than what you say.

First, the Ayn Rand Institute is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization funded solely through contributions. Non-profit flies in the face of their strong stance for greed and capitalism. To solicit donations is to invite people to indulge in Altruistic behavior through selfless sacrifice. The reason for donating is to merge the efforts of the donors collectively and achieve the Altruistic goal of freely educating the masses for the purpose of improving society. This is an organization that is living a lie.

Not all Atheists are selfish people. We are as caring and generous as Theists. We pride ourselves as being good upstanding members of the community with good reality based moral values.

However, what can be learned by the Ayn Rand Institutes plea for money, is that there is an advantage to Atheists to be giving and generous people, acting in behalf of the common good to achieve a noble Altruistic goal. I believe that what people do, speaks louder about them than what they say, and the fact that Objectivism is supported solely through Altruism tells me what they really believe in. And through their conduct, but not through their dogma, they make an important point that Christians need not fear Atheists as a greedy selfish lot, that the values of community, generosity and taking care of one another, are values that we Atheists share as well. If a Theist decides to become a Realist, they do not have to give up being good hard working generous upstanding members of society. Our moral values and our sense of right and wrong are every bit as good or perhaps better than what you have now. Our values are based in reality for which there is no higher authority.

Objectivists abuse the word "Selfish" substituting it for self interest. The common understanding of "Selfish" includes greed, implies acts of taking more than your share, and a disregard for the interests of others. It is true that everything we do is because we get some sort of advantage from it, whether you be Theist or Atheist. It makes us feel good to give. We want to live forever. We are afraid we are going to burn in Hell. By sharing knowledge with others we can explore reality together. We contribute to the {In:Tree of Knowledge} because we want to get information back from it. No matter what you do there is a way to find some reason that you are doing it to benefit yourself. But - so what?

The Objectivists dogma that greed is good and generosity is bad has given Atheism and Realism a bad name. The Church of Reality strongly denounces that position. We believe that generosity is a good thing and that greed is not.

Objectivists have a bad habit of definition creep. They take words that have a common meaning and twist the definition to mean something similar but significantly different. Then then make a claim about the words in the context of their twisted meaning and try to apply it to the common meaning. Here is a really good article that details the the misuse of the words Selflessness and Altruism.

Because everything has a self interest component to it they twist the definition to say that everyone is naturally greedy, and that is somehow a virtue. Similarly Altruism is twisted to be equated with the collectiveness doctrines of Communism and that generosity leads to death camps. Therefore generosity equals slavery.

They also seem to think that because they believe in objective reality and call themselves Objectivists that they are right about everything. We challenge Objectivists to be a little more humble, accept scrutiny, quit the definition twisting, and evolve forward. Ayn Rand was a starting point. It's now time to fix the mistakes and look towards the future.

For those who are Objectivists reading this and are worried about the Church of Reality, let me state a few positions clearly to relieve some of your fears.

- We believe in individual freedom. That's why we have the {In:Principle of Freedom} as well as the {In:Principle of Personal Privacy}. What we do as individuals counts. That is the basis for the {In:Principle of Personal Responsibility}.

- We believe in Reason and Logic. That's why we have the {In:Principle of Exploration}. We are explorers finding reality. That is why we ask the {In:Sacred Question}, "What is Real?"

- Morality is important to us. That's why we have the {In:Principle of Wisdom} and we ask the {In:Sacred Moral Question}. Our {In:Principle of Justice} speaks to our belief in a fair and just society.

- We don't believe in the supernatural. That is why we have the {In:Principle of Bullshit} stating that bullshit is bullshit no matter how many people believe in it.

- Socialist Capitalism as practiced in America is an interesting step, but nothing to get too excited about.

There are however a number of difference between Realist (as defined by the Church of Reality) and Objectivism. Besides some disagreements, we also add some elements that are missing in Ayn Rand's philosophy. These include:

- We are a humble people. We believe that ego gets in the way of understanding, that ego is an expensive habit to maintain, and that we can best explore reality without an inflated sense of self importance. Thus we have the {In:Principle of Humility}.
- We recognize that the very essence of the human race comes from the {In:Tree of Knowledge} which represents the sum total of human understanding. We believe that we explore reality collectively and it is necessary that we advance our quest for the understanding of reality the way it really is, through the advancement of society in general. We see ourselves as maintainers and we provide technical support for humanity. We are a generous and giving people because we know that it is in our self interest to take care of everyone else. We give freely so that we might receive freely.
- We are one planet, we are all here together on this speck of dust in the universe. Our moral values therefore support the {In:Principle of Inclusiveness} and the concept that we are going to cooperate as much as possible and figure out how to make the best of what we have to work with.
- We know that we will make mistakes so we commit to being a forward looking religion as opposed to looking backwards at the writing of the founders. We call forward the {In:Sacred Direction} and we are a {In:doubt} based religion. You are required to criticize and scrutinize the writings of this Church. It is our goal to look back in pride at all the things we got wrong initially that have since been fixed. We embrace our own evolution. What that means is, if an Objectivist has a good idea that is supported in reality, and can stand up to scrutiny, we'll adopt that idea. If "the First One" makes a mistake, it gets corrected.
- We strive to emulate an open source model allowing everyone to contribute and participate in the formation and the evolution of this religion.
- We offer a {In:religious identity} so that one can say, I am a Realist practicing Realism, and we consider it a sacred duty to preserve the integrity of that, so that being a Realist really means something.

And - in accordance with self scrutiny, we invite feedback from Objectivists. If we have it wrong, let us know.