

客观主义导论

Introduction to Objectivism

客观主义导论

(Note: bold text will not be read: it is the text for the PowerPoint slides to be shown in English and 中文)

### **Who was Ayn Rand?**

谁是安·兰德

Ayn Rand was born in Russia in 1905. She rejected the ideas that led to the Russian Revolution of 1917 and was determined to leave Soviet Russia for the United States, about which she learned from Hollywood films. She moved to the United States in 1926, and worked in Hollywood for several years before becoming a full time writer. She developed her philosophy of Objectivism to present her view of the "ideal man", man as "he could be and ought to be." Her novels include We The Living, The Fountainhead, and Atlas Shrugged. After finishing Atlas Shrugged, she spent the rest of her life writing nonfiction and teaching her philosophy.

### **What is Objectivism?**

何为客观主义?

Objectivism is the name chosen by Ayn Rand for her philosophy. Ayn Rand described Objectivism as "a philosophy for living on earth" -- a philosophy based in our experience of reality to provide a practical guide to life.

She summarized her philosophy as: "My philosophy, in essence, is the concept of man as a heroic being, with his own happiness as the moral purpose of his life, with productive achievement as his noblest activity, and reason as his only absolute."

### **Why do we need philosophy?**

为何我们需要哲学?

*Philosophy is the field that looks at the most basic, universal questions about existence. While other sciences study certain aspects of things, or certain types of things, philosophy is concerned with the most abstract questions about existence and man's role in it.*

*哲学是审视关于存在最基本最普遍之问题的领域。其它科学研究事物的某些方面，或某种形态的事物，而哲学所关心的是关于存在的最抽象的问题，及人于存在中之角色。*

Philosophy asks questions such as: How can we know what is true? What is our purpose in

life? How should we act? How should we organize society?

You might ask: why do I need philosophy? I live fine without it. Let me ask you this:

Is it because your parents said so, because you enjoy something, or because society needs it? Is your own happiness or obligation to others more important to you? How should you decide? If I tell you that something is good for me, does that also mean that it is good for you? Is the good the same for everyone or different because of culture or nationality or personality? Is something is true, is it true forever, or only for today? When you wake up tomorrow, how can you know that today was not a dream? Are people good or bad? Are you? Why are some people more successful than others? Is happiness and success a matter of luck? What is a good life? How should you pick your friends? Can anyone know any of these things, with certainty, in the same way that we know that  $1+1=2$ ?

We are here to talk about economics, but economics does not tell us what is good or bad. Economics only tells us about the consequences of a certain policy. Is it moral for the government to provide for welfare of people who cannot work? Is it morally acceptable for some to be very rich while others are poor?

Questions like this are answered by philosophy. All human action depends on a certain view of existence. Human actions assume a certain view of existence, causality, and values. We have no choice about whether we have a philosophy. We can only choose what philosophy to adopt. We can subconsciously, passively, and uncritically accept the philosophy we are exposed to or, we can consciously, actively, critically, examine the ideas around us and accept them because they are true, not because we happened to live in a particular time and place.

### **Philosophy is the science of thinking**

哲学是一门思考的科学

Objectivism begins by asking: what can we know and how can we know it? We re-examine the world as if were children discovering it for the first time and accept only that which we can prove to be true.

Why is this important? You might say that you know what is real because you can see and touch it. But not all knowledge is perceptual. If I tell you about an abstract idea, such as justice or integrity, how do you know if it is true? Because you feel it is true? Because others tell you it is true? Because you see it is true? But can you point at a thing that will show what justice is? And can you be sure that something that is true to you is also true for everyone else and at all times?

The point of treating thinking as a science is to arrive at firm principles. You can live without an explicit philosophy if you live a primitive life and hunt animals in the jungle. But if you want to build an airplane to fly you across the world, you need a formal science of physics

and engineering. And to live a successful life as a civilized human being and create a better future than the past, you need an integrated, scientific view of existence provide by philosophy. Philosophy can make even abstract concepts such as justice as clear and real to you as this table.

According to Objectivism, knowledge is hierarchical - we begin with what we can perceive directly and add abstraction to add detail and complexity to our view of the universe. Therefore we start with metaphysics and epistemology: what can we know about reality, and how do we know it?

Objectivism divides philosophy into five distinct branches:

- *Metaphysics* questions what the nature of reality is  
形而上学
- *Epistemology* examines how knowledge is gained and interpreted  
认识论
- *Ethics* asks how one should act  
伦理学
- *Politics* looks at the proper interaction among people  
政治
- *Aesthetics* attempts to define art  
美学

### **Metaphysics: Reality is an objective absolute**

形而上学：现实是一种客观的绝对

Objectivism begins by asking: what fundamental truths is all our knowledge based on? What can we be certain about simply by being aware of existence? Ayn Rand identified three axioms that form the basis of all higher knowledge. They are: existence exists, consciousness is conscious, and existence is identity.

#### **Axiom 1: Existence exists**

公理 1：存在是存在的

"I am **conscious**": First, before we learn anything specific about existence, we are aware that there is a reality to be conscious of. In short: Existence exists.

#### **Axiom 2: Consciousness is conscious:**

公理 2：意识是自觉的

"**I** am conscious": The second thing we are aware of is that we have a tool to perceive reality: our mind. We are aware of our own ability to perceive reality.

### **Axiom 3: Existence is identity:**

公理 3：存在是自相

"I am conscious of **something**": We are conscious of specific things in reality. They are entities that we perceive in a particular way, which can be differentiated from other entities by their attributes. Everything in existence has a specific nature, or identity that makes a thing what it is.

To summarize: we are directly aware of reality, and of our mind, our means of perceiving reality. We are aware that reality consists of entities, which have a particular identity and act according to that identity.

The three axioms of Objectivism: existence, consciousness, and identity cannot be proven true. Proof is the process of logically reducing a conclusion to sensory evidence. The axioms are implicit in all knowledge, and must be assumed in any attempt to deny them.

### **Consciousness is the agency of perceiving reality**

意识是觉察现实的工具

The most important issue in philosophy is the relationship between our minds and reality. According to Objectivism, consciousness (the mind) is the agency of perceiving reality. In other words, reality exists, and the function of the mind is to perceive and identify it. We are aware of reality through our senses, which perceive reality according to their particular nature and the nature of the entities we perceive.

The question therefore is: how should we use our minds to reach true conclusions about reality?

### **Epistemology: Reason is a tool for discovering reality**

认识论：理性是发现现实的工具

If the mind is the agency of perceiving reality, then valid knowledge of reality is only possible by perceiving, identifying, and integrating sensory data into a correct mental model of reality. Truth is the product of the recognition of the facts of reality. To be certain that all our knowledge is true, we must be objective, which means: to voluntarily adhere to reality by the use of logic. Logic is the non-contradictory identification of reality. The method by which we confirm that our abstract ideas correspond to reality is reduction to perception, which means: that ultimately, all our knowledge, from that which is directly observed, to that which is many levels abstracted, can be reduced to sensory evidence. Claims that are not based on sensory evidence are neither true nor false - they are

arbitrary and have no bearing on reality.

Man is a rational being living in an objective, absolute reality. How should he act?

### **Ethics: life is the standard of value**

伦理学：生命是价值的标准

Ayn Rand's philosophy of Objectivism proposes a radical new theory of ethics: an objective, scientific theory of rational self-interest. How does Ayn Rand justify her theory?

### **What is a moral code?**

何为道德准则

Morality is a *code of rules or principles to guide one's actions*. Before deciding which principles man should live by, any moral theory must first explain why it is needed at all. Is it an arbitrary invention, or does it have some basis in reality? Is it universally true or different for every person? According to Objectivism, morality is objective: it is derived from our nature of human beings.

### **Life is the standard of value**

生命是价值的标准

All living entities must satisfy certain requirements (food, shelter, air, etc.) to remain alive. This is what sets life apart from inanimate matter. Life is a continual process of self-generated, goal-directed action. Only living things face the possibility of death and therefore the need to achieve values to remain alive. Only for living things can something be good or bad. The fact that life is conditional is the basis of values.

### **Values are automatic for non-volitional beings**

对无意志的生命来说价值是自动的

The values needed for life are specific to the nature of each being: fish need water and worms; man needs food, clothes and shelter. Animals have claws, fangs, fur, and other traits to allow them survive in nature. These are their means of survival. For non-human animals, values are automatic: their instinct tells them that they must act in a certain way (hunt, run, reproduce) in order to remain alive. Animals neither need nor are capable of morals because they act according to instinct. Their instinct tells them that they must act in a certain way (hunt, run, reproduce) in order to remain alive.

### **For humans, our conscious, rational mind is our primary tool of survival**

对人类来说，我们的自觉的、理性的意识是生存的主要工具

Human beings live by using our mind as the primary tool of survival. We pursue long-term

goals to achieve the values needed for our life. Imagine a human being trying to live without choosing his values, like any animal: he would act on whatever he felt like doing from moment to moment. He would experience the drives to eat, reproduce, fight, and fear. But humans have urges, not instincts — it is up to our minds to decide how to achieve values. For a human being in nature, living without long-term goals is suicide.

### **Ethics provides a framework for long-term goal achievement**

伦理为长期目标的达成提供了一个框架

To consistently act towards long-term values, we need a consistent set of principles for living: a moral code. We need to recognize the facts relevant to our nature as human beings and live according to them over a lifetime. To recognize and act in accordance with reality is rationality. Morality is a means to an end — the end being life. *If you want to live, then you must be rational.* The *purpose* of morality is to fulfill and enjoy one's own life.

### **Rationality is the primary virtue**

理性为德之首

The Objectivist ethics recognizes rationality as the primary *virtue* for man and productive achievement as his central purpose. To remain alive, we must focus on the facts and act accordingly. The choice to think and act rationally is the basis of virtue and life, and the choice to evade reality and abandon reason is the basis of evil. The primary virtue, from which all other virtues derive, is rationality, and the proper beneficiary of values is oneself.

### **Happiness is man's highest moral purpose**

快乐是人的最高道德目的

According to Objectivism, each person should act to achieve the values required for his own life, neither sacrificing himself to others nor sacrificing others to himself. Productive achievement is the central purpose of life, which integrates all his other values. Virtues such as productivity, independence, honesty, integrity, and justice are aspects of rationality: living according to the requirements of life as a human being. Happiness is the result of successfully achieving values, and man's highest moral purpose.

If each man acts in his own selfish interest, how can we cooperate and coexist peacefully in a society?

### **Rights: life requires liberty**

权利：生命需要自由

### **Man is the rational animal**

人是理性的动物

As I have stated, it is man's mind that allows him to understand the values his life requires, and then act to achieve them. Every value we enjoy in our civilized, comfortable, existence is the product of the application of man's mind to reality.

### **There is no "collective mind"**

不存在“集体意识”

All creative effort, every invention in history, was created by the mental effort of individual men and women. When they worked together, their knowledge was increased by the work of predecessors, but each advance they made was their own. The mind cannot be received, shared, or borrowed.

### **Man requires freedom to live**

人类存活需要自由

To live, man must achieve the values necessary to sustain his life. To achieve his values, man must be free to think and to act on his judgment. Restrictions on freedom force man to focus not on the absolutes of reality, but on the arbitrary ideas of others. In a free society, a man can choose to not associate with those who do not respect his judgment – by finding a new job, new friends, or a new lover. Even if there is no one to share his ideas, every man is still free to present his own vision – by publishing his ideas or becoming an entrepreneur. However, as soon as he faces the threat of physical force, the possibility of any such alternatives becomes irrelevant. The initiation of force renders the mind useless as a means of survival.

### **Freedom requires rights**

自由需要权利

Rights are moral principles defining man's freedom of action in society. The purpose of establishing individual rights is to protect man from man – to define the basic conditions necessary for social existence. All rights derive from a man's right to his own life, including the rights to life, liberty, property, and the pursuit of happiness. Whether it is by a theft, force, fraud, or government coercion, man's rights can be violated only by the initiation of force.

### **Rights are inalienable and non-conflicting**

权利不可与人分割且不相冲突

Rights are not guarantees to things or obligations placed on others, but only guarantees to freedom from violence (the right to life), freedom of action (the right to liberty), and the results of those actions (the right to property). In a free society, men deal with one another exclusively by trade, voluntarily exchanging value for value to their mutual benefit. The

only obligations one's rights impose on other men is to respect the same and equal rights of others – the freedom to be left alone. A man may have his rights violated by a criminal or a government, but morally he remains, in the right, and the criminal in the wrong.

Ayn Rand rejected the idea that men who pursue their own interests must end up in conflict with one another. Objectivism holds individual rights to be the mechanism by which men can pursue their individual interests without being in conflict with one another.

How can we form a society that respect individual rights?

### **Capitalism: a social system based on individual rights**

资本主义：一种基于个人权利的社会制度

A capitalist society is based on the recognition of individual rights, especially property rights. Under capitalism, all property is privately owned, and the state is separated from economics just as it is from religion. Economically, capitalism is a system of laissez-faire, or free markets, where the government plays no part whatsoever in economic decisions.

### **Capitalism is the only social system compatible with the requirements of man's life**

资本主义是唯一与人生需求相协调的社会制度

To pursue the values necessary for his life a society, man requires only one thing from others: freedom of action. Freedom means the ability to act however one pleases as long as one does not infringe on the same and equal freedom of others. In a political context, freedom means solely the freedom from the initiation of force by other men. Whether it is by a theft, force, fraud, or government censorship, man's rights can be violated only by the initiation of force. Because man's life depends on the use of reason to achieve the values necessary for his life, the initiation of force renders his mind useless as a means of survival. To live, man must achieve the values necessary to sustain his live. To achieve values, man must be free to think and to act on his judgment. To live, man must be free to think. To be free to think, man must be free to act. In the words of Ayn Rand, "Intellectual freedom cannot exist without political freedom; political freedom cannot exist without economic freedom; a free mind and a free market are corollaries."

### **Capitalism recognizes the inherent worth of the individual**

资本主义认可个体的内在价值

In a human society – one that recognizes the independence of each man's mind – each individual is an end in himself. He owns his life, and no one else's. Other men are not his slaves, and he is not theirs. They have no claim on his life or on the values he creates to maintain his life, and he has no claim on theirs. In a free society, men can gain immense

values from each other by voluntarily trading the values they create to mutual gain. However, they can only create values if they are free to use their minds to exercise their creativity. A man is better living off on his own than as a slave to his brothers. Capitalism recognizes each man as an independent, thinking being.

### **The individual is an end in himself**

个体本身即作为一种目的

Just as no individual has the right to initiate force against anyone; neither does any group of men, in any private or public capacity. It is immoral to initiate force against any individual for any reason. This includes the initiation of force for "the public good." The "public" is merely a collection of individuals, each possessing the same rights, and each being an end in himself. Any attempt to benefit the "public good" is an attempt to provide a benefit to one group of individuals at the expense of another. In a free society, no individual benefits at the expense of another: men exchange the values they create in voluntary trade to mutual gain. The rule of law in a free society has just one purpose: to protect the rights of the individual.

### **Capitalism leads to freedom and prosperity**

资本主义促成繁荣自由

A free, capitalist economy has never existed anywhere in the world. The closest the world came to a free market was during the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain and during the late 19th century in the United States. The Industrial Revolution was a period of unprecedented economic growth and unimaginable improvements in quality of life. In less than two hundred years, the life of most people in the Western world changed from a short life filled with poverty, plague, and near-constant war to a modern, comfortable existence that even the kings of medieval Europe couldn't have imagined. Since 1820, the leading capitalist nations have increased their wealth sixteen fold, their populations more than four-fold, and their productivity twenty-fold. Annual working hours went from 3,000 to less than 1,700 and life expectancy doubled from thirty to over seventy years.

### **Conclusion: philosophy and the fate of the world**

结论：哲学及世界的命运

I began this talk by showing the importance your philosophy makes to your own life. But what is the impact of philosophy has on an entire society?

Ayn Rand had a unique perspective on the role of philosophy and history. According to Objectivism, philosophy is the ultimate cause of history. What does this mean?

The politics, culture, and economy of any society are formed by the ideas of the people who live in it. If most people believe that it is impossible for them to live without using violence against each other, than their society will be poor and violent. If people believe that whatever their ancestors practiced and believed is good enough for them, then they will continue to live just like their ancestors. A few hundred years ago, most of the world believed that history was just an account of one ruling regime being replaced with another. If anyone believed in a better time, it was in the past, when great empires had existed and fallen.

Today, people had a very different view of history. We believe in progress, in continuous improvement, of fundamental change in society and economy. These ideas have transformative power: during the last 200 years, the world population increased from under 1 billion to over 7. Why did this happen? If you study history, the answer is clear: the European Renaissance created a new, scientific philosophy, which led to the Industrial Revolution, which created the economic wealth to support much larger populations.

European intellectuals rediscovered the philosophical ideas of the ancient Greeks during the Renaissance, and applied those ideas to change the entire world. The world has embraced the scientific and technological output of Western civilization, but the philosophical legacy of the West has been a mix of good and bad.

The philosophies of Classical Liberalism, Marxism, Democracy, Fascism, and Environmentalism have created great trading and colonial empires, evil genocidal empires and world wars, great wealth and also great suffering. Ideas have the power to shape history, even if we disagree what ideas are true.

Ayn Rand's Objectivism offers a unifying explanation of man and his universe and a practical, inspirational, benevolent guide for both individual people and civilization as a whole to achieve values and peacefully coexist.