

Philosophy of values and ethics in Ayn Rand's axiological objectivism

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Abstract

The paper presents an analysis and interpretation of axiology and ethics as seen by the writer and philosopher Ayn Rand. The author follows the assumption that, in a situation where indifference is observed with regard to values (cf. Simmel, Sloterdijk), a return of philosophical reasoning to the idea of objectivity of values could be worthwhile. Therefore, he examines a specific type of axiological objectivism that can be found in Rand's work. In the present paper, the suggested comparison with Baden neo-Kantism as well as phenomenological axiology serves to capture the specifics of Rand's axiological approach. These lie in placing emphasis on such a relationship between facts and values in which values result from the facts of reality, as well as in the very understanding of the objectivity of values that Rand identifies with long-term life goals and identifies them as an objective necessity for an individual's life. Following the analysis of Rand's axiology, the author focuses on her understanding of ethics, which he places in contrast to Kant's deontology, as well as morality, which he views through the prism of a business relationship based on the exchange of values. The aim of the paper is to, by means of an analysis and interpretation of Rand's ideas, show that objective values can be understood as a necessary prerequisite for consequential ethics and an individual living a happy life without being anchored in transcendence or social consensus.

Keywords: Ayn Rand, axiology, axiological objectivism, values, ethics, morality, rationality, Kant

In lieu of an introduction: Writer and philosopher Ayn Rand

Ayn Rand (1905–1982), née Alisa Zinovyevna Rosenbaum, was an American writer and philosopher of Russian origin. During her active time in the USA, she wrote several screenplays and novels, including the filmed bestsellers *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged* that deal with the moral and value conflict between creative, rational, and purposeful individuals and an oppressive, irrational society. In her literary works, she combined elements of fantastic dystopianism, social novel, and philosophy. Thanks to this, she became (in addition to her literary *nolens volens* activity) the creator of a peculiar philosophical system called objectivism, which is still somewhat influential in (predominantly) American thinking. It is true that, in the European philosophical provenance and especially in its Central European space, Rand's objectivism does not tend to be considered an established philosophical doctrine, as “it is not the result of a consensual agreement of a wide circle of practicing philosophers within the framework of philosophy as an objectively existing institutionalised scientific discipline, as is the case of other, in this approach traditional, philosophical –isms” (Malíček, 2018, p. 105).² Nevertheless, in Rand's own words, she was primarily a writer and only then a philosopher. For her, philosophy was the necessary *means* of her literary activity, with which she wished to create “the projection of an ideal man” (Rand, 1971, p. vii). Still, she wished to provide her ideal-anthropological and fiction-conceived idea with a rational philosophical anchoring, which would make it impossible to label her anthropological ideal as mere fiction. Thus, in her thousand-page novels, ideas of epistemology are intertwined with novel elements, while numerous philosophical-anthropological and axiological observations are also given space, the latter strongly manifested in her conception of ethical egoism. The present paper is devoted to axiological observations and the resulting ethical and moral consequences. Of course, to

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² Regardless of this fact, objectivism as a peculiar way of thinking has been developing in the USA since the time of its creation until the present day. For instance, the *Ayn Rand Institute: The Center for the Advancement of Objectivism* has been operating in California since 1985 while Pennsylvania State University has been publishing *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* dedicated to the philosophy of objectivism for more than two decades.

philosophically legitimise her anthropological ideal, the writer could use ideas of other philosophers, which she would transform into a novel. Even though, as she viewed it, various writers apply philosophical knowledge in their literary work, she believed no ‘foreign’ philosophy could adequately serve her, as her “basic view of man and of existence was in conflict with most of the existing philosophical theories” (Rand, 1961, p. 5). She says: “In order to define, explain, and present my concept of man, I had to become a philosopher in the specific meaning of the term” (Rand, 1961, p. 5). With her literary work, she, thus, inadvertently created a philosophy that is still the subject of uncritically admiring³ but also uncompromisingly critical⁴ analyses. The philosophical basis of Rand’s characters even dominate the novels to such an extent that her *magnum opus* *Atlas Shrugged* in particular, in places becomes an explication of her philosophical views rather than an artistic presentation of a fictional world (which Rand openly admits). This can, for instance, be found in the monologue of the representative of Rand’s anthropological ideal, the character of John Galt, in the extent of several dozens of pages.

Ayn Rand is undoubtedly a controversial figure, be it from the opinion or the literary viewpoint. Her novels are conceived in the spirit of a sharp, artificial duality of what she herself defends and, on the other hand, against which she fights. She does not seem to be interested in the slightest in anything in between; on the contrary. She deliberately sharpens the polarities in order to highlight what she herself is firmly convinced of. One such area is *laissez-faire* capitalism—an opinion for which she is constantly criticised and thanks to which her work does not even get space in the Central European, post-socialist, space.

The present paper does not strive to conduct a literary-aesthetic analysis of Rand’s work, nor does it try to argue with her political-economic views. An interested reader surely finds enough relevant resources for this purpose. Instead, the present paper focuses on the analysis and interpretation of Rand’s objectivist axiology, which the author tries to extract from her work,⁵ in order to contribute to a deeper understanding of what constitutes the foundation of her ethical thinking—both admired and criticised. As part of her axiology, Rand presents such values as an objective necessity for life, which is an idea worth one’s theoretical and empirical attention. Ever since Simmel, the assumption that people in modern society are losing the capability of evaluation and making informed choices has been running through philosophical thinking. This modern phenomenon in contemporary philosophy is critically reflected on by Sloterdijk, according to whom the most fundamental modern event caused by the democratisation processes was “the de-radicalization of the ethical distinction—or, if one prefers, the de-verticalization of existence”, indicating the loss of the ability to hierarchise values (Sloterdijk, 2013, p. 371). If this is the case, then any philosophy emphasising the objective necessity of

³ Nevertheless, some admirers of Rand’s philosophy can still be found in Central Europe. Let us mention but one, the Czech economist, and translator of Rand’s book *The Virtue of Selfishness. A New Concept of Egoism*, and editor of the internet portal <https://aynrand.cz/>, Jiří Kinkor.

⁴ Of all criticisms of Rand’s philosophy, let us at least mention the exhaustive book *Objectivism and the Corruption of Rationality. A Critique of Ayn Rand’s Epistemology* (cf. Ryan, 2003).

⁵ The present paper draws on Rand’s book *Atlas Shrugged*. However, due to its scope and literary form and in order to preserve the philosophy of the topic in question, particular depictions of her philosophy in the actions and thinking of all the main characters of the novel cannot be discussed. Therefore, the paper is limited to the final monologue of the character John Galt, in which Rand’s own objectivist philosophy (expressed throughout the story) is condensed. Moreover, in the given context, it is not necessary to describe the plot of the book; thus, the words of the fictional character Galt and Rand will not be differentiated between, as she herself often explained her philosophy with references to this monologue. This was, for instance, the case of the book of lectures and essays entitled *The Virtue of Selfishness*, on which the present paper is also based. Rand’s works referenced here also include a book endorsed by *Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand* by L. Peikoff, Ayn Rand’s intellectual heir, of which she herself said the following: “Dr. Peikoff’s course is the only *authorized* presentation of the entire theoretical structure of Objectivism – that is, the only one that I know of my own knowledge to be fully accurate” (cf. book cover (Peikoff, 1993)).

values and the need for their hierarchisation is of immense importance, as it has the potential to rock the boat of blasé people and direct one's attention to such values that are actually worth striving for. This also applies to Ayn Rand's philosophy wrapped up in literature. Of course, this does not mean one is, without a second thought, to adopt their principles or philosophy as a whole; rather, one should get to know it and be aware of it, if for no other reason, then at least for the sake of expanding their axiological awareness. At the same time, *a priori* rejection is not the way to go either, deeper insight than this paper attempts to provide is advisable.

Facts, values, and long-term goals

Even though Nietzsche might have made values a topic of philosophical interest, it was in Rickert and Windelband's Baden neo-Kantism that axiology acquired its systematic-philosophical form, since it was they who laid the foundations of the philosophical understanding of the term 'value'. It was under their auspices that axiology was formed in those times when exact sciences, looking for their methodological *typus* in physics, were gradually excluded from philosophy. As a result, a *horror vacui* arose in philosophy with regard to its immanent object of investigation, as the scope of former objects of philosophical reflection began to narrow down considerably under the influence of the particularisation of sciences. Due to this, value became a new object of Baden neo-Kantians' philosophical interest which, additionally, enforced a type of investigation different from that used to study physical objects. "The axiological reinterpretation of philosophy was done using references to the achievements of modern natural science and had the ambition to not only succeed its methodological function, but to also create a spiritual complement to its mathematical ideals. [...] Nevertheless, a by-product of defending the positions of the spirit was the deepening of the value-fact dichotomy" (Sisáková, 2001, p. 32).

Striving for methodological autonomy of philosophical inquiry, value has become something different from fact. This difference corresponds to that between *what should be* and *what is*; in other words, between the sphere of the axiological universe (i.e. not only the universe of values, but also of norms, principles, and ideals) and natural phenomena. According to Windelband (1915, p. 60), this difference manifests in one's mental life in the following way: "[T]here are two laws to which our mental life is subordinated: the laws of what we must do and those of natural events; and the laws specifying what are to do and define ideal determination", which is an echo of Kant's opposition to causality and freedom. Rickert (1926, p. 86) delineated a different ontological status of values and realities (facts) by means of the difference between *being* and *validity*: "Values are neither physical nor psychological facts. Their essence does not lie in them being valid but rather being *real*".⁶

Although Rand, in her literary works, does not refer to neo-Kantians, she revitalises the neo-Kantian dichotomy of facts and values. However, in her view, the relationship between them does not express their different ontological status, but rather has the form of an implication. Peikoff (1993, p. 207) states that, according to her, "facts—certain definite facts—do lead logically to values. What 'ought to be' can be validated objectively" [*his inverted commas*]. According to Rand's works, values are a logical derivative of facts that one, as a conscious organism, acquires by perceiving the reality of which they are part of, all this in accordance with their physical constitution. As Rand (1964, p. 12) claims, "[t]he fact, [sic] that a living entity *is*, determines what it *ought to do*" [*her italics*]. In other words, "to a living consciousness, every 'is' implies an 'ought'" [*her inverted commas*] (Rand, 1964, p. 15). Similarly, in Rand's understanding, the *ought* embraces what is called value. However, in her concept, the perception of something as a value is enforced by the facts of reality.

To explain the relationship between facts and values, Rand uses the concept of a *fundamental alternative* to which all living organisms are exposed. It concerns "the alternative of life or

⁶ For more of this topic see (Bobko, 2020).

death” (Peikoff, 1993, p. 209), meaning that every organism has a choice in principle as to whether its life will last or perish. However, the life of an organism is conditional in its nature (Gotthelf, 2016), which is why, on the one hand, there are actions that promote the continuation of life, and, on the other hand, others make its continuation impossible. In living beings, the choice is based on the mechanism of feeling pain and pleasure, which “serves as an automatic guardian of the organism’s life. The physical sensation of pleasure is a signal indicating that the organism is pursuing the *right* course of action. The physical sensation of pain is a warning signal of danger, indicating that the organism is pursuing the *wrong* course of action” [*her italics*] (Rand, 1964, p. 12).

Based on the above, Rand considers value to be that which enables the survival of an organism in accordance with its natural characteristics. Thus, *sui generis* values also occur in non-human organisms. Thanks to the pleasure-pain mechanism, such organisms are controlled “by an [sic] automatic knowledge and an automatic code of values. Its life is the standard of value directing its actions” (Rand, 1964, p. 13). The relationship between values and facts is based on the fact that reality makes an organism choose between alternative types of action, and by acting in favor of preserving life, the organism (including humans) creates, preserves, or acquires values.

Nevertheless, the human axiosphere is not only generated by animal physiological mechanisms. If it were so, man would never overcome the infantile value awareness, instead, it would preserve its purely vital character. Rand, naturally, is aware of this. Although, in her view, it is the life of an organism which is the fundamental value criterion and it is its values that serve to preserve it, humans, unlike animals, are a species so different that, for their preservation, they also require other types of values and different ways of achieving them (in humans, values are also created), or other referential mechanisms. This is because animal mechanisms “are not sufficient for man. Man’s actions and survival require the guidance of *conceptual* values derived from *conceptual* knowledge” [*her italics*] (Rand, 1964, pp. 13–14). In this way, an anthropinum called ‘rationality’ enters the thinking of human values. Perceptions and physiological mechanisms, as well as desires or ideas, can cause a person to feel the need for something that can be considered a value from the viewpoint of preserving life (it can be as basic as food, but also an abstract value like meaningfulness). However, it is rationality (and the knowledge based on it) that is the feature (Rand (2005, p. 1052) calls it a virtue) in a person which allows them to create or acquire a given value.

Moreover, the concept of meaningfulness brings one’s attention to the fact that, in addition to vital values, there are also spiritual values that do not have a *direct* impact on the physical preservation of the human body. These are, for instance, such values as love, career, hobbies, science, or art, which a person can physically do without. “Though he would not die immediately if the value were removed, losing it would significantly and permanently impair his ability, and will, to live” (Gotthelf, 2016, p. 90). Thus, in humans, even such values that do not *directly* serve the preservation of life serve, in a secondary, mental or emotional, sense, the same goal, which is individual in one’s specific (but no less objective) scope of reality. It is even in the creation, acquisition, and preservation of these values that rationality serves a person, rather than *momentary* feelings or emotions, which Rand (1964) calls whims.

If one, for instance, wishes to preserve their career or prevent the loss of the love of their life, they must not succumb to *temporary irrational whims* that are in conflict with their central values, i.e. those that sustains one’s life on a *long-term* basis in a mental, emotional, or spiritual sense. A temporary feeling or the anticipation of a short-term feeling cannot decide whether a momentary emotional outburst is in line with or against one’s long-term observed value, since it prompts us to indulge in it. It is rational thinking, which will abstain from temporality and take into account the *long-term perspective* of one’s life, which must decide on this issue. In this sense, Rand’s philosophy identifies what used to be differentiated in classical axiology,

namely knowledge and evaluation. In the Central European area, and more specifically in Slovak philosophy, Váross (1970, p. 172) pointed out this distinction, according to which knowledge is an “analytical-abstract process and a ‘desubjectivised’ investigation, or definition, of a given state. On the other hand, in its effect, evaluation is an understanding of the meaning, significance, expediency, pleasantness, etc. of the given subject according to the criteria of which the subject is the bearer”. As will be presented in more detail in the following part of the present paper, for Rand, evaluation (determining value) is equivalent to cognition.

It follows from Váross’s definition that even short-term benefits resulting from immediate enjoyment can, from the viewpoint of axiological subjectivism, represent values in all circumstances. However, according to Rand, they can only be considered values provided they have a supportive relationship with central life values, which Rand identifies with *long-term goals*. It is because she sees man as a “long-term creature” living with a view of the future, which is in contrast to a “cyclical creature”, i.e. an animal. In her view, man “cannot survive, like an animal, by acting in the range of the moment. An animal’s life consists of a series of separate cycles, repeated over and over again” (Rand, 1964, p. 16). On the other hand, a person’s life is a coherent whole, in which individual life episodes follow one another and influence each other. Since every momentary decision and action based on it can have a far-reaching impact on one’s future, human life requires a specific type of action. In view of long-term survival, a person “has to choose his course, his goals, his values in the context and terms of a lifetime. No sensations, perceptions, urges or ‘instincts’ can do it; only a mind can” (Rand, 1964, pp. 16–17, *her inverted commas*). That is why the animal mechanism based on pain and pleasure does not suffice in navigating through life-supporting values.

Values, without which one cannot imagine life lived to the fullest, have the character of *long-term goals*. For this reason, Rand’s axiology is sometimes considered teleological (Wright, 2011). Setting these is one of the most important tasks man’s life, as long-term goals are the principle that organises other, subordinate, values and goals that a person creates, acquires, or sets for himself in the course of his life and does so particularly with these in mind. From the viewpoint of human life, long-term life goals thus play the role of supportive values. In view of this, Rand (2005, p. 1046) states that if a person wants “[t]o remain alive, he must act, and before he can act he must know the nature and purpose of his action”. The purpose, or goal, of one’s actions should be present at all times during their activity: “Every act of man’s life has to be willed” (Rand, 2005, p. 1095). It is, thus, long-term life goals, which, according to Rand, are what sustains man in time, since it is thanks to them he exists. Planning one’s life with long-term goals in mind is, however, only possible provided rationality is involved, as it constantly guarantees the awareness of *causality*, acting in the background of one’s long-term goals as a guiding principle for thinking, evaluating, and choosing one’s actions (Rand, 1984), evoking the following question: Is my current action contributing to the realisation of my long-term life goal?

Nevertheless, it is neither rational action with a long-term perspective on its background, nor a purposeful character of life that can be taken for granted. In contrast, there are people who live their lives in an animalistic, i.e. cyclical and short-term way, guided by their current whims, without looking at the long-term consequences of their actions. If they are not protected by the rational and goal-oriented actions of other people on whom they depend, their lives (from a long-term perspective) become rather complicated. Since, according to Rand, value is what supports life rather than what complicates it, she does not believe anything that a person irrationally thinks of at a given moment can be considered a value. Value is not an object of desire for a momentary whim.

Axiological objectivism

As was mentioned above, Rand’s axiological views differ from Baden neo-Kantism in their solution to the relationship between facts and values. Moreover, their emphasis on rationality

and the identification of cognition and evaluation also makes them distinct from Scheler's phenomenological axiology,⁷ which was based on the assumption that values "are not determined by the intellect or what is knowable, but rather by the 'world of value essences' and its own a priori relationships" (Sisáková, 2001, p. 61), as well as on the fact that "man is given values and relationships between them in his feelings, or he gets them by 'sensing' them" (Sisáková, 2001, p. 61). This idea contrasts with Rand's view, according to which values in terms of long-term goals are determined by rationality. This contrast is all the more interesting considering the fact that both views emphasise the objectivity of values.

According to Váross's (1970, p. 109) definition, philosophical theories that describe values as something that can be attributed objective existence are called objectivist and, as such, "prove that value is an objectively given part of extra-subjective reality. Values and value hierarchies have an ontological basis, they are permanent and are themselves a criterion for the correctness of evaluative attitudes and judgments. [...] external, or supra-subjectively given, and real values affect the subject with cognitive actions like any other real object". Váross's definition is partially based on phenomenological axiology, which approaches values as Platonic ideas (Holzhey & Röd, 2017). In this understanding, a value is a value regardless of the axiological subject, who may or may not be aware of it, or consider it a value. Scheler (1973) emphasises this form of axiological objectivism as part of his value ethics. What, however, in Váross's definition, does not correspond with Scheler's (1973, p. xxiii) approach is the fact that objectivism is associated with "emotional intuitionism" rather than rational cognition. Thus, the positions of axiological objectivism differ in some aspects—for instance, the issue of mediating values.

Baden neo-Kantism also presented a variant of axiological, namely historical, objectivism. According to this version, values can be seen as objectively valid in that they are valid supra-subjectively, although not absolutely. They only objectively apply in a certain historical era or in a specific society. This is what Rickert (1926, p. 96) meant when he stated that objectivity of values is "a *fact* that can, in principle, be confirmed just as any other fact, that certain goods are generally valued within a cultural community, or that the members of a community are prescribed to take care of the matters in which these values lie" [*his italics*]. In this case, the objectivity of values is the result of a general consensus of axiological subjects.

Another variant of axiological objectivism is to be found in Rand. Her objectivism is also based on the assumption that values can be identified as objective (Peikoff, 1993). She, however, does not think that their objectivity is given by *ideal* being, intuitive *sensing*, or *consensus*. In her philosophy, values do not have the status of objectivity for being something supra-subjective or extra-subjective. On the contrary, values are objectively derived by the subject through a process of rational and logical principle-based cognition of reality and the subject's place in it. Salmieri (2016, p. 67) explains the author's approach by stating that "Rand thinks of objectivity [...] not as the ontological status of existing independently of the mind, but

⁷ By referring to Baden neo-Kantism and phenomenological axiology, I do not mean to claim that Rand's axiological position is comparable to them from a strictly philosophical point of view. After all, Rand's work does not have the philosophical theoretical basis found in Windelband, Rickert, or Scheler. However, these comparisons are methodologically beneficial, as they allow to explain Rand's thinking using philosophical terms and concepts and, in this way, point to her philosophical core (albeit not as refined theoretically as is the case of the above philosophers). Rand's axiology could, of course, also be compared to American philosophies of values, such as those of the pragmatists. Dewey (1943), for example, was also concerned with the relationship between values and ends, and Rorty (2020) with the objectivity of values. However, by referring to European philosophy in the form of Baden neo-Kantism and phenomenological axiology, I want to show that Rand's way of thinking about values may – based on some similarities – also have legitimacy in European philosophical thought. A comparison with other American philosophies of value, while important, might give the impression that Rand's axiology is a non-transferable product of an American mentality that is far removed from European philosophizing about values and I would like to avoid such a conclusion.

as an attribute of certain, chosen mental processes and states—the attribute of methodically corresponding to mind-independent facts. This is the sense in which we use the word ‘objective’, when we speak of ‘objective grading’ or ‘objective reporting’” [*his inverted commas*]. Thus, the status of objectivity is given to values by one’s objective thinking corresponding to objective reality and its causal relations.

Ambrozy and Šagát (2018, p. 218) state that, with regard to values, “[t]he first and most basic question pertains to the possibility of getting to know values. Are values even knowable in their totality?” Rand would probably affirm this since, in her view, the process of assigning value could be understood as a variation of objective, conceptual, *ipso facto* scientific knowledge. In this context, Peikoff (1993, p. 208) states: “Like every concept, ‘value’ is reached and defined on the basis of observation. One must isolate a group of similar concretes, then integrate them into a new mental unit” [*his inverted commas*]. Salmieri (2016, p. 67) also believes that Rand’s assessment represents a conceptual activity, “that can and must be performed by just such a fact-based method. It is in this sense that Rand thinks that values are objective”. After all, Rand herself (1964, p. 14) identifies value with concept when she states: “A ‘concept’ is a mental integration of two or more perceptual concretes, which are isolated by a process of *abstraction* and united by means of a specific definition” [*her italics and inverted commas*]. Rationality plays a key role in the process of mental integration of individualities; it “identifies and integrates the material provided by man’s senses” (Rand, 1964, p. 14).

Although this approach may resemble Platonic dialectic, it is not so. The conceptual identification of values in Rand’s philosophy is not meant to lead to the cognition of abstract ideas as absolute values, but rather to the formation of real—and from the viewpoint of knowledge of causal links, potentially achievable—goals, objectively supporting the life of a rational being, including the hierarchisation of its other values. Thus, Rand’s objectivist axiology is not intrinsic in nature, as it is based on the assumption that “values are not intrinsic features of reality. Value requires a valuer” (Peikoff, 1993, p. 241). According to Rand (1964, p. 10) “[t]he concept ‘value’ is not a primary; it presupposes an answer to the question: of value to *whom* and for *what*? [*her inverted commas and italics*]”.

Despite the implied emphasis on the axiological subject, Rand’s axiology is not subjectivist. Values are an objective derivative of one’s individual, albeit objectively experienced, situation. It could be, for instance, stated that the greatest life value, without which one cannot imagine living a fulfilled life, would be a *career* as a scientist at a top academic institution. It is a determination of value in accordance with one’s desires and ideas, which, however, does not have objective validity in itself. If this value is to be life-supportive, its very designation, or determination as a life goal, will only be reflected as a derivative of reality if it respects its causal links. One can establish it as an *objective necessity*, or a life-oriented value with the potential to *objectively* direct it, only once one rationally examines not only their desires but also their abilities and possibilities.

At the same time, one must choose rational ways of achieving it, not such that distance one from it. All that is not at all automatic. People often keep hold of their desires and are frustrated when they do not own the object of their desire, while not reflecting the fact that, for instance, their nature, abilities, and real possibilities or factual obstacles, as well as the steps they take, do not correspond to the set goal, or, make it impossible to achieve it. An idea based on irrational desire then contradicts objective reality; it does not take into account cause-effect relationships, which represent the *conditio sine qua non* of achieving value. If one sets a value irrationally, without respecting real relationships; it tends to become something that frustrates rather than fulfills them (this means it destructs rather than supports life); it will, *de facto*, be a subjective whim rather than an objective value.

Nonetheless, Rand considers the derivation of objective values by means of rationality an anthropological necessity. Her understanding of man is implicitly reminiscent of the Herderian-

Gehlenist philosophy of man (cf. Gehlen, 1988, pp. 74–75) as a being who has to compensate for his biological inadequacy with rationality and anticipation. Rand (2005, p. 1048) states that man, unlike animals, “has no automatic code of survival. His particular distinction from all other living species is the necessity to act in the face of alternatives by means of *volitional choice*. He has no automatic knowledge of what is good for him or evil, what values his life depends on, what course of action it requires” [*her italics*]. Therefore, one, as man, i.e. a rational being whose life, in terms of its organisation, fundamentally exceeds that of animals, cannot rely on purely animal mechanisms of pleasure and pain. Still, man’s life also needs to be guided by something objective and, since animal mechanisms with regard to human life, can, in some instances, even act subversively,⁸ Rand identified objective values as their adequate substitute. These are objective because they correspond to the facts of reality as a condition for preserving and supporting human life in the long term.

Business ethics

By applying rationality in the process of deriving values, a structure of objective leadership is created, which is relied upon by all rational beings looking for their preservation in a long-term perspective. Rand calls this objective leadership ethics. In her view, ethics stands for the investigation of causal links between individual types of activities and the construction of non-contradictory principles of behavior, both in relation to each other and to reality as such. Ethics understood in this way “is an *objective, metaphysical necessity of man’s survival*” (Rand, 1964, pp. 15-16), which needs it as a system of rational arrangement of values and the determination of steps necessary to create, obtain, or maintain them. According to Gotthelf (2016), ethics, in this sense, supplements vital automatisms in man that keep him alive. At the same time, it fulfills the fundamental axiological function by “defin[ing] a code of values. By ‘code’ here Ayn Rand means an integrated, hierarchically structured, noncontradictory system of principles, which enables man to choose, plan, and act long-range” (Peikoff, 1993, p. 219, *his inverted commas*).

It is interesting that although Rand often refers to rationality, she explains her views on ethics in conscious contrast to the prototype of European rationalist ethics, namely in Kant’s deontology. Kant developed it as a reaction to contemporary empiricism, which *per naturam ipsius* could not provide any satisfactory idea of *universally* valid ethics and morality derived from it. Kant found a unifying element in the human ability called practical reason, which imposes on man the obligation to act in accordance with the moral imperative (Kant, 2002) and despite his affections. This creates a type of action that Kant (2006, p. 12) considers moral, claiming that if a person acts “without any inclination, simply from duty; then the action first has its genuine moral worth”.

Rand believes that the practical application of the above would devalue the axiological consciousness of an individual. If moral action is understood as a matter of duty, i.e. something that one has to do even if they do not want to, it becomes a synonym for unpleasant or undesirable action. Therefore, those people who tend to think about morality against the background of duty and in contradiction to their affections and desires think of morality as “a phantom scarecrow made of duty, of boredom, of punishment, of pain, a cross-breed between the first school-teacher of your past and the tax collector of your present, a scarecrow standing in a barren field, waving a stick to chase away your pleasures” (Rand, 2005, p. 1090). As a result

⁸ When trying to distinguish man from other living beings based on his essence, Scheler drew attention to this phenomenon, according to which the fact that animal mechanisms can harm life conceals the release of drives from instinct, and “in man, this isolation of drives from instinctive behaviour and the separation of functional pleasure from states of pleasure acquires the most horrifying forms” (Scheler, 1991, p. 31). Scheler (1991, p. 21) also states: “The so-called ‘instinctual’ actions of man are the utter opposite of instinctive behaviour, since, when viewed as a whole, they might be completely meaningless (e.g. passion for intoxicants)”.

of these feelings, “resentment of morality—the feeling that morality is an enemy, a musty realm of suffering and senseless boredom” (Rand, 1984, p. 106). Rand considers Kant to be the most tenacious propagator of such this idea of morality and disagrees with the opinion that only such actions that are done out of duty moral should be called moral.

Such an action requires a sacrifice that is, from the viewpoint of Rand’s axiological views, unacceptable. This attitude may seem controversial, or even unacceptable, to Rand’s critics, but beneath the surface controversy there are ideas that seem worth taking into consideration. It is because Rand’s understanding of the sacrifice is specific although, in a sense, straightforward and meaningful. If one acts *in spite of* their affections (Kant) for the *benefit of another* person, one sacrifices themselves and therefore loses. For instance, one might sacrifice their time, money, or, in an extreme case, their life. However, according to Rand (2005, p. 1064), sacrifice is permissible “only for those who have nothing to sacrifice—no values, no standards, no judgment—those whose desires are irrational whims, blindly conceived, and lightly surrendered. For a man of moral stature, whose desires are born of rational values, sacrifice is the surrender of the right to the wrong, of the good to the evil”. Whether talking about the sacrifice of time, money, life, or anything else, Rand always considers it a synonym of a value that never exists in isolation from other values but is part of a rational axiological structure within which individual values complement each other. “A ‘sacrifice’ is the surrender of a value, such as money, career, loved ones, freedom, for the sake of a lesser value or of a nonvalue (if one acquires an equal or a greater value from a transaction, then it is an even trade or a gain, not a sacrifice)” (Peikoff, 1993, p. 232, his inverted commas). Sacrifice means resigning to preserve value, which also means betraying one’s life, which is dependent on that value. Should one give up something for the benefit of another person, it either means they do not consider the thing in question to be of cardinal value, or they see the person as having equivalent value or one that exceeds what they are giving up. Thus, by giving up the thing they retain the same or higher value *for them*. This, however, is not sacrifice, but—as Peikoff stated—a *trade*.

By the above, Rand does not wish to discourage her readers from helping other people or taking care of their loved ones. All she tries to do is motivate them to not give up those values that represent the foundations of their lives out of a *formal principle of duty*, due to feeling, or an internalised, albeit unreflected, belief that this is the right thing to do. She encourages them not to give them up without the contribution of their own *thought*, without *assessing* the gains and losses, without *rational hierarchisation* and regardless of the *meaning* of what they are losing in life and what they are gaining by giving up something for the benefit of another person. Rand (2005, p. 1064), thus, exemplifies what, in her view, is and is not a sacrifice. She, for instance, states: “If you achieve a [sic] career you wanted, after years of struggle, it is *not* a sacrifice; if you then renounce it for the sake of a rival, it *is*. If you own a bottle of milk and give it to your starving child, it is *not* a sacrifice; if you give it to your neighbor’s child and let your own die, it *is*” [*her italics*]. This also applies to abstract ideals as life-directing values, such as freedom: “If a man dies fighting for his own freedom, it is *not* a sacrifice: he is not willing to live as a slave; but it is a sacrifice to the kind of man who’s willing” (Rand, 2005, p. 1064). Therefore, for her, sacrifice is an equivalent of giving up value in favour of something that has no value to us (or does not have as much value as what one is giving up). A *principled* self-sacrificing action thus devalues axiological consciousness and causes a person unhappiness and vice versa. It is because happiness represents “the proof and the result of your loyalty to the achievement of your values” (Rand, 2005, 1097).⁹ On the other hand, acting for the purpose of

⁹ The dichotomy of happiness and unhappiness could be understood as an analogue of the physical sensations of pleasure and pain, mentioned in the section “Facts, values, and long-term goals”. In the above sense, happiness and unhappiness – similar to the physical sensations of animals – clarifies for one whether their pursuits are right or wrong; all this, however, from the viewpoint of a long-term, humane, perspective.

obtaining, creating, or preserving value, even if some concessions are necessary, is not a sacrifice in the above sense of the word, because the partial losses are balanced out by the value that one considers central in their life. This refines one's axiological consciousness and, in this way, creates the kind of action that Rand considers *moral*.

In Rand's philosophy, one such ethical principle that represents an alternative to the principles of Kantian deontology is the *trade principle* or the *monetary principle*. In her view, this is the only ethical principle by which people as rational beings with a developed axiological consciousness can coexist. If man were aware of the vital, objective meaning of the values they strive for in the long term, they would have no rational motivation to give them up, and they would also be aware of them and accept the same with regard to other people. A rational person who chooses his life goals and actively works towards them does not willingly sacrifice himself, nor does he expect someone else to willingly sacrifice himself only out of the *principle of duty*, as he understands this would betray his life values. Rational people do not give up values; rather, they exchange them, as is the case in trade where each party freely obtains something from the other. That is why Rand (2005, p. 1057) believes "the moral symbol of respect for human beings, is *the trader*. We, who live by values, not by loot, are traders, both in matter and in spirit. A trader is a man who earns what he gets and does not give or take that which is undeserved" [*her italics*]. Therefore, she also claims that the trader principle is a principle of justice and as such can work as a principle for all human relations (Rand, 1964).

Even though the expression 'trader principle' may sound materialistic, cold, or even vulgar for some, Rand assumes it is an *abstract principle* applicable in the spiritual realm, in which values would be exchanged just as fairly as in the material realm, i.e. without their principled sacrifice. The morality of a 'merchant' would be characterised by man not willing to casually provide "the values of his spirit—his love, his friendship, his esteem—except in payment and in trade for human virtues, in payment for his own selfish pleasure, which he receives from men he can respect" (Rand, 2005, p. 1057). For Rand (1964, p. 22), these values represent "the spiritual *payment* given in exchange for the personal, selfish pleasure which one man derives from the virtues of another man's character". Therefore, in human relationships based on the 'trader principle', an exchange and sharing (Gotthelf, 2016) of values would be concerned that enrich each of the parties involved and are not exchanged undeservedly (on principle). In this way, *morality* is a sphere of *value enrichment*. Since, in these actions, one always pursues their personal benefit which takes the form of obtaining or preserving something valuable *for them*, Rand's ethics is called egoistic. Thus, while for Simmel (1950, p. 414), who was referred to at the beginning of the present paper, trade and monetary economy were the generator of metropolitan blaséness, by which he meant that "the meaning and differing values of things, and thereby the things themselves, are experienced as insubstantial", for Rand, trade and monetary economy are, in contrast, a symbol of axiological consciousness.

This is also the reason why she considers *laissez-faire* capitalism the most suitable political system, which she, however, understands as an *ideal* political system stemming out of axiological objectivism. Still, Rand's preference for capitalism as a political system does not refer to any historical era or its manifestation in any specific state entity. In Rand's (1964, p. 23) words, "[a] pure system of capitalism has never yet existed, not even in America". Capitalism is not to be merely an economic-political but also *moral* system, which derives its philosophical legitimacy from the ideas of axiological objectivism; from the ideas of the creation and preservation of life-supporting (including spiritual) values, which man does not give up in principle, and if so, only in exchange for another, equivalent, or higher, value. With the enormous problems brought about by variants of capitalism, Rand's thoughts are easy to shake one's head over and condemn *a priori*, without trying to penetrate and understand them. One should, however, bear in mind that Rand, in her works, glorifies neither specific wholesalers nor the limitless exploitation of the working classes. Fraud, speculation, and

corruption, currently witnessed in such contexts as contemporary capitalism would have no place in her axiology, ethics, or morality. In capitalism as a moral system, there would always be a voluntary exchange of values (material or ideal) between rational actors. This is certainly not the case of fraud or corruption, where, for example, one group cannot rationally evaluate what it is losing or acts under pressure that prevents it from making rational decisions. Looking at capitalism through the prism of the problems that are associated with it, it is possible to understand sceptical views of Rand's philosophical beliefs. However, this should not define the approach of a philosopher who, first, strives to understand what he is about to criticise. Perhaps, Bourdieu should be mentioned, who spoke of economic capital merely being one type of capital. Perhaps, it is also time to consider 'capitalism' and its transformation in a broader sense. One such approach is represented by Rand's axiology, which, by means of the *symbol* of the trader and the *principle* of business ethics, could teach a lesson or two even to the representatives of contemporary, problem-generating, capitalism.

In lieu of a conclusion: A possible contribution of Rand's axiology

The trade principle defended by Rand is synonymous with the hierarchisation of values based on a developed axiological consciousness, resulting from the teleological character of one's life. From it, the philosopher derives an ideal based on the values of a rational community, for which she, however, chose a name that is overly ideologically charged. Nevertheless, this should not be a reason for an *a priori* rejection of her views, which may still have some relevance today. This is especially so because she plays up the theme of the objectivity of values, which should resonate more and more loudly with the first signs and numerous developed manifestations of value indifference, relativism, and blaséness.

Of course, Neo-Kantian philosophy also followed this aim in reaction to "Nietzsche and various other forms of subjectivism and voluntarism" (Sisáková, 2001, p. 50) which was of course pursuing this goal. This also applies to Scheler's phenomenological axiology, who was sensitive to the fundamental transformation of values (Holzhey & Röd, 2017) and responded to it with *sui generis* axiological objectivism. However, while it might be true in the environment of postmodern relativism and scientist-oriented philosophy that "the theses of the material ethics of values justifying the *a priori* objective existence of values and the intuitive way of understanding them are difficult to justify" (Sisáková, 2001, p. 67), the same cannot be said of Rand's axiological objectivism.

A specific understanding of the objective necessity of values in the life of every man, values that do not originate in an ideal world but are derived from reality, an emphasis on objective knowing of causality and the rational formation of a value structure with regard to a rationally determined life goal, all these are principles that are not detached from the real life of contemporary man living in capitalist society. In contrast, they can serve as a practical philosophy that will drag man out of the lethargy of relativism and indifferentism and encourage him to believe that the objectivity of values might not merely be a matter of metaphysical speculation or religious faith and that it, instead, might be a prerequisite for living a quality and fulfilled life in accordance with the requirements of reality and the current world of which we are a part. Moreover, they do it in an accessible, albeit controversial, fictional, form whose philosophical core I tried to explicate above, in order to show it as something that could be meaningful for critical discussion and creative transformation or modification in the environment of Central European philosophy, which is yet not sufficiently familiar with Rand's thinking.

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