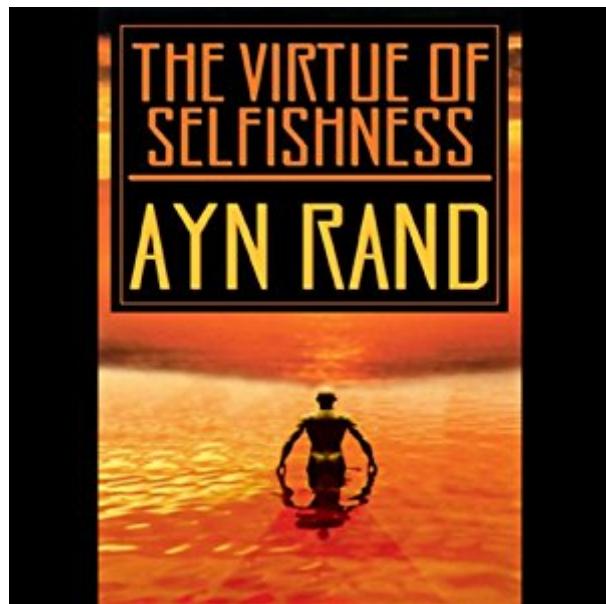


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The Virtue Of Selfishness



Synopsis

The provocative title of Ayn Rand's The Virtue of Selfishness introduces an equally provocative thesis about ethics. Traditional ethics has always been suspicious of self-interest, praising acts that are selfless in intent and calling acts that are motivated by self-interest amoral or immoral. Ayn Rand's view is exactly the opposite. This collection of nineteen essays is an effective summary of Ayn Rand's philosophy, which holds the value of the individual over and above that of the state or any other collective. The thread running through all of the essays is Rand's definition of selfishness as "rational self-interest," with the idea that one has the right to assure one's own survival, to pursue happiness, and to own the fruits of one's labor without having to sacrifice any of these to others against one's will. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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Customer Reviews

To be candid I am not a fan of Ayn Rand and I really do not respect her worldview. however, just as she was frustrated during her lifetime by people who formed opinions of her without ever having read her works, I do agree with that viewpoint and therefore have read her works, even the stuff she wrote for Harper's. This book is ostensibly a collection of writings from the objectivist newsletter which she self published for many years. It also has a very to the point preface which I feel is important when understanding exactly how she viewed the differences between the words altruism and selfishness, because in the preface she makes it very clear that they are mutually exclusive concepts. Whether or not you buy into her version of utopian society, I feel that there is value in

doing it in an informed manner. If you don't want to read her fiction, but at least want to have an educated understanding of her worldview, this is the thing to read.

This collection of essays was not written as a justification for individuals to selfishly rape and pillage. On the contrary. Ayn Rand and Nathaniel Branden merely argue that one is entitled to his own life, the pursuit of his own happiness and to the accumulation of property through productive activity and voluntary exchange in the free market. The authors argue that one must pursue selfish interest with full respect for the rights of others to do the same. Don't let the title of the book scare you. In Rand's own words: "The title of this book may evoke the kind of question that I hear once in a while: 'Why do you use the word 'selfishness' to denote virtuous qualities of character, when that word antagonizes so many people to whom it does not mean the things you mean?' To those who ask it, my answer is: 'For the reason that makes you afraid of it.'" I highly recommend this book. Excellent work.

The headline is for shock value. In the first chapter she defines "Selfishness" after reading her definition I think most people would agree that they are selfish. Each chapter is an easy read and there are some notable chapters like the one on "racism". Her condemnation of Racism is excellent and I think that everyone of every race should read this chapter and practice her advice on respecting the individual. I marvel that Ayn Rand had such foresight that in the 1960's she was able to see where the welfare state would take us. The chapters on compromise and lack of moral clarity are also very informative. I highly recommend this book.

One of Ayn Rand's most important works. It is a great, quick, read that explains one of the most important points of her Objectivist philosophy. A must have!

There are nineteen articles in this volume, fourteen by Rand and five by Nathaniel Branden. The longest is "The Objectivist Ethics," in which Rand explains her philosophy of "Rational Self Interest." The remaining articles are examples of the application of this philosophy. Rand contends that "that which furthers (a living being's) life is the good, that which threatens it is the evil." Thus the basic human value is "rational selfishness...the value required for man's survival." How do people determine if something is "good or evil"? If the person experiences pleasure, it is a signal that the experience is "good" and that the person is acting properly. If the individual has pain, the feeling shows that the experience is "bad." People understand these sensations by using their intelligence, by thinking. Since people are not born with intelligence, they must study about the world and how to

think well so that they can live properly. There are two essentials for survival: thinking and productive work. A person who tries to survive without thinking is no better than an animal. Productive work is the way people sustain themselves, getting food, adequate comfort, and time for study and self improvement. The work should be "the fullest and most purposeful use of the mind." Living by her agenda results in a feeling of pride, the realization that one has achieved the best that one can achieve. This achievement is selfish. The individual is interested in himself, his own life, and not the life of another or of society. The individual deals with others only when he wants to do so, without constraints or directives, unforced, in an exchange that "benefits both parties by their own independent judgment." Society is good when it gives individuals the two things necessary for human existence: knowledge and trade. "The only proper, moral purpose of a government is to protect man's rights." Since a person's life is the top value, how should a person act in the following examples? 1. Should a man save his wife who he loves and feels that he can't live without or twenty strangers? The wife because she is dear to him. 2. Should a man act courageously and take an unreasonable chance to save another person's life? No, his life comes first. 3. Should people devote their lives to help the poor rise from poverty? No, he should devote himself to his own concerns, his life. 4. Is faith and self sacrifice for others correct? No, they are the cause of all evil and the deterioration of humanity. There are three problems with this volume. First, it is very repetitious. Rand's philosophy is contained in the first chapter and the book presents nothing new after it. It only rehashes the message and applies it to various situations. Second, Rand bases her philosophy on ethics, an amorphous subject that many scholars correctly feel is very subjective. She would have done much better to base her ideas upon reality, upon what is "true and false," upon the nature of people and the laws of nature. The result is the same, but the presentation would be clearer. Third, many philosophers would agree that the basic human nature, that which distinguishes them from animals and inanimate objects is their intelligence, and that, as Rand contends, being altruistic is not an inherent part of a human being. Yet, as Aristotle pointed out, man is a social animal, he must live with and interact with people to survive. Thus helping others is necessary, at least to some extent. Rand ignores this when she insists that altruism is evil.

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