

Ayn Rand promoted and is generally given credit for developing and popularizing a philosophy called Objectivism. The four basic tenets of Objectivism, as stated by Rand herself in her essay “Introducing Objectivism”, are as follows:

1. Reality exists as an objective absolute—facts are facts, independent of man’s feelings, wishes, hopes or fears.
2. Reason (the faculty which identifies and integrates the material provided by man’s senses) is man’s only means of perceiving reality, his only source of knowledge, his only guide to action, and his basic means of survival.
3. Man — every man — is an end in himself, not the means to the ends of others. He must exist for his own sake, neither sacrificing himself to others nor sacrificing others to himself. The pursuit of his own rational self-interest and of his own happiness is the highest moral purpose of his life.
4. The ideal political-economic system is laissez-faire capitalism. It is a system where men deal with one another, not as victims and executioners, nor as masters and slaves, but as traders, by free, voluntary exchange to mutual benefit. It is a system where no man may obtain any values from others by resorting to physical force, and no man may initiate the use of physical force against others. The government acts only as a policeman that protects man’s rights; it uses physical force only in retaliation and only against those who initiate its use, such as criminals or foreign invaders. In a system of full capitalism, there should be (but, historically, has not yet been) a complete separation of state and economics, in the same way and for the same reasons as the separation of state and church.

Thus, Objectivism relies on the idea that it is natural for every being to act in its own best interests and that altruism is unnatural and generally irrational. Although autonomy, or the individuals right to self-determined action, is held as the most important and basic human right, personal choice does not necessarily mean right choice. Objectivists believe that through logic and reason man is capable of identifying a rational and universal code of ethics that applies to all men. So although personal preference in action is held above all else, it is still subject to a universal code of morality.