

The Fulfilled Life

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(originally published in November/December 1990 issue of "In Practice")

1. Introduction

Miss Rand gave us the key to our happiness, a happiness untainted by guilt or apology. She laid the foundation for an ethics of self-interest. For this alone we Objectivists should be eternally grateful. While I agree with this sentiment, I also believe Rand left considerable work to be done in erecting a building on the foundation she laid.

No doubt I will run into some resistance and skepticism on this. Therefore, before I present my case, the first thing I need to do is outline the structure of the Objectivist ethics to show the key premises and concepts that form the backbone of her theory. By doing this and asking some questions I believe I will be able to reveal how, despite its theoretical soundness, the Objectivist ethics does not provide enough specific practical guidance to help us prioritize our values. I am not claiming the ethics are unsound. Rather, I will try to show areas needing further development and will suggest how they should be filled in.

2. Structure of the Objectivist Ethics

The structure, as I've been able to ascertain, is as follows:

Standard of value: Man's life as a rational animal, with life as the ultimate value.

Purpose: your life with happiness resulting from the achievement of rational values.

Means: rational self-interest. You are the primary beneficiary of your actions.

Cardinal values and corresponding virtues:

<u>Value</u>	<u>Virtue</u>
reason	rationality
purpose	productivity: career
self-esteem	pride

Hierarchy of values: ordered by teleological measurement which employs (and returns us to) the Standard of value. Man's life.

This structure shows that the standard of value determines which values are appropriate and which values are more important than others. I could quote Miss Rand for each step of this outline but in the interest of keeping the length of this article under control I'll assume you can find them. There are, however, three quotes which focus on the areas I want to address.

In her "Playboy" interview, Miss Rand said: "A central purpose serves to integrate all the other concerns of man's life. It establishes the hierarchy, the relative importance of his values." She elaborated further in the article "The Objectivist Ethics" in The Virtue of Selfishness: "Productive work is the central purpose of a rational man's life, the central value that integrates and determines the hierarchy of all his other values."

Finally, Rand addresses this issue again in her explanation of teleological measurement from Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology

Teleological measurement deals, not with cardinal, but with ordinal numbers -- and the standard serves to establish a graded relationship of means to end.

For instance, a moral code is a system of teleological measurement which grades the choices and actions open to man, according to the degree to which they achieve or frustrate the code's standard of value. [emphasis added] The standard is the end, to which man's actions are the means.

A moral code is a set of abstract principles; to practice it, an individual must translate it into the appropriate concretes -- he must choose the particular goals and values which he is to pursue. This requires that he define his particular hierarchy of values, in the order of their importance, and that he act accordingly. Thus all his actions have to be guided by a process of teleological measurement ...

Teleological measurement has to be performed in and against an enormous context: it consists of establishing the relationship of a given choice to all other possible choices and to one's hierarchy of values....

In the spiritual realm, the currency -- which exists in limited quantity and must be teleologically measured in the pursuit of any value -- is time, i.e., one's life.

Since a value is that which one acts to gain and/or keep, and the amount of possible action is limited by the duration of one's lifespan, it is a part of one's life that one invests in everything one values."

There seem to be two distinct thoughts in these quotes: one is that our values should be ordered by the standard of value, the other is that our work or career do so. Perhaps Rand would argue there is no contradiction here since productivity involves creating the values that sustain our life and these values still have to be judged by the standard. So my argument will not be based on creating a contradiction in Rand's approach that does not necessarily exist.

I still see problems with this structure. Specifically, how do we choose and prioritize our values? To address this let's consider some questions

many of us have faced or will. For example, a career is supposed to be our central purpose. If so, how do I choose one? Should I become a nuclear engineer, a nurse, or a newspaper journalist? All three careers are legitimate endeavors; none require sacrificing my well-being, all can be rewarding. How then does the standard of value or teleological measurement help me decide? Is it purely up to whim?

If productive work is the "central value that integrates and determines the hierarchy of all his other values," how does it help me decide how much time and energy I should devote to other areas of life, such as family, social relationships, recreation, etc.? It is obvious I can't devote so much to these other areas that I can't work effectively. Assuming I work hard at my profession for, say, eight hours a day, how does my career or productive work help me allocate my time and energy for the rest of my time? Would it be OK to spend all of my time on my career? It seems that using my career as a yardstick is inappropriate for prioritizing my other activities.

It also does not tell me which of the remaining activities are more important than the others. How should I allocate my time between family, social, and recreation? Within each sphere of life are many sub-activities and specific values. Taking just family life as an example there are decisions regarding what I will do with my spouse (play tennis, go out, etc.) and with my kids (take them to the zoo, read them stories, discipline them, and so on). I am not saying we need a cookbook formula which automatically cranks out a schedule for us. I am saying Miss Rand's formulation does not appear as helpful or as definite as a casual reading might lead us to believe.

There are two challenges facing us. First, given the different spheres of life, how do we balance our time and resources among them? Second, within each sphere, which values are most important? Here is an outline of some of the major activities in our life.

<u>Career</u>	<u>Family</u>	<u>Social</u>	<u>Recreation</u>
Job	Spouse	Friends	Entertainment
Skill development	Children	Neighbors	Reading
Future planning	Relatives	Associates	Sports & hobbies

For instance, anyone who is a parent knows the challenges of having and raising children. Besides the demands on the parent's time, there can be significant to severe financial and psychological pressures. Often the welfare of the child takes precedence over the parents. How is the decision to have a child justified strictly by using Man's life as the standard, or by your survival? How are the interests of the family balanced with the needs of your work?

Let's consider Joe, who highly values the time he spends with his wife and children as well as his weekly golf match with his friends. Joe's company is bought out by another and in the ensuing reorganization Joe must travel almost all the time. Joe enjoys the challenges of his work, but he is unhappy because he has little, if any, time for his other

interests. How does Rand's advice help him? If his work is his central purpose, how can Joe justify his decision to leave the company to take a less exciting job that requires little or no travel? How does Man's life as the standard of value, rational self-interest, teleological measurement, and having a productive purpose assist Joe in sorting out what he should do?

Here is another example (an actual one). Jim is a plant manager for a local company. He is told by his company that he has been picked to replace the plant manager of another factory located about 100 miles away. Jim wants the job but is faced with a problem. His son is a senior in high school and is the star quarterback for the school football team. Jim knows if he moves his son to a new school near Jim's new job his son will probably not be the quarterback. This means his son will lose out on the chance for getting a college scholarship and may even affect his college football career. Jim chooses to commute 200 miles every day during his son's senior year. Jim therefore chooses to put himself through the strain of a long commute in addition to the long hours he has to put in as plant manager, primarily for the sake of his son. (One could argue that Jim benefits by doing this because of the potential savings in college expenses a football scholarship would bring. Even so, this is a high price to pay. It is also highly unlikely this is the only or major reason for Jim's decision.)

In both cases, the father is obviously using something other than his career as a reference point. What is it? Is it limited time? If so, this leaves unanswered the fact that limited time is a condition of life, not a standard for organizing values. All limited time tells us is: since you don't have enough time to accomplish everything, you have to choose. What is the guide for choosing?

There are many other examples we could consider, but I shall not cover them here. Please see my essay, "Is Self-Interest Enough?" for more discussion on this.

3. A Proposed Alternative

The ethics as outlined does not address the various questions I have posed. It tells us we should choose values which are good for our survival. It tells us: (1) we should use Man's life as the filter for sifting out the harmful choices, (2) we should center these choices by our productive purpose, and (3) we should teleologically measure these choices around Man's life, the standard of value.

Although a number of activities can be life-serving, we still do not know what priority this should take compared to other values. Living in a highly developed society with a high standard of living means just about everybody can obtain enough food and shelter to survive. The values I have been discussing go beyond survival to growth. This leads us to the key questions: in what direction should I grow? And how do I grow? Is there something to help us answer these questions, or are we left to our own devices? I believe a vital link is missing for translating the abstract principles Rand forged to the problems and challenges of our individual lives. Rand showed what general principles Man must

follow to live well; but we need to revise the structure of the Objectivist ethics to help each of us translate these general principles to our individual needs and values.

The structure of the ethics I am proposing is:

Standard: Man's Life.

Purpose: to be fulfilled as a person. To progressively achieve values in accordance with your mission by exercising your identity.

Means: self-fulfillment or self-realization. The process of establishing what you want to be, what you want to do with your life, and following a procedure for accomplishing your purpose. This includes self-interest but it is a broader concept.

Cardinal values and corresponding virtues: essentially the same (see "Is Self-Interest Enough?" for a discussion of virtues).

Hierarchy: organized by mission, self-identity, and future identity which are the three components of self-fulfillment (This includes balancing the various aspects of being a human.) Teleological measurement entails the use of these three components of self-fulfillment

To help explain why I have chosen this alternative structure let's consider the concept of teleology and what it means. I focus on this because this is the final step in Rand's ethical structure, the step which addresses choosing and prioritizing our values. In Rand's formulation teleological measurement refers back to the first principle, Man's life as the standard of value, which is a general principle, not as I have been arguing, one that is particularly helpful for the specific questions each one of us has to answer in living our own life.

The dictionary lists several meanings for teleology. The one most applicable is: "the fact or quality of being directed toward a definite end or of having an ultimate purpose." As you can see in my structure I distinguish between having a purpose and a mission. To accomplish our purpose of leading a fulfilling life we have to successfully pursue our mission which consists of obtaining values that fit our mission, identity, and future identity. This does not mean we can just pick any mission, of course. It still has to pass the standard. The mission organizes our pursuits so that our life amounts to something.

The standard fills a similar function to the guidelines for safe driving and good car maintenance. They tell us to drive on the right so that we don't run head-on into a tractor trailer, but not so far to the right that we plaster ourselves onto a bridge abutment. These guidelines tell us to maintain our brakes, check the oil, and use only tires with enough tread. They ensure we operate and maintain our car properly. They also help us pick routes to destinations. They don't help us pick the particular destination and the particular route.

If our mission is to go on vacation, our choices will be affected by what we want to accomplish. If we want to rest in a warm climate, it would be more appropriate to plan a trip to Bermuda than to Banff: If we want to recharge ourselves by skiing, Banff would be the better choice. Our mission will also influence how we get to our destination. If time is not a problem, we could shun the interstates and meander on side roads to get a sense of local culture. If we have little time, our mission will lead us to fly.

This analogy can be extended to deciding what kind of car we drive. Someone interested in sporty driving might choose a Corvette or Porsche (especially if they're single or don't have kids!). Another person with a family and with no interest in sporty driving might choose just about any station wagon or van. Someone interested in both spirited driving and practicality would have a different set of choices.

Teleological measurement would entail ordering our values by the mission we want to achieve in our life. And this mission falls under the general purpose of being fulfilled. This means more than being happy which connotes a specific emotional state: it means living a certain kind of life in the pursuit of values that make us feel fulfilled when we achieve them or when we're engaged in the process of pursuing them. Merely sustaining our life is not challenging enough. We need to grow to stay challenged; rational self-interest and Man's life as the standard of value tell us which values are OK, but not enough to tell us which are best suited to our particular identity and our purpose.

I am not saying life is not an end in itself. But we need to ask: what do we want to accomplish with our life? What kind of life do we want to lead? Each of us has a certain background, temperament and disposition. We have an overall mission we want to fulfill as well as a specific mission for each of the various roles we have in life, such as engineer, father, husband, philosopher, and athlete. We have to integrate these roles with our overall mission if we want to accomplish our purpose of living a fulfilled life.

I am not claiming people can't get along without a clearly defined mission. They obviously do, some quite successfully. Having a strategy for living improves our effectiveness in pursuing our goals, just as it does in business. (Many businesses now have a clearly defined mission statement. Their purpose still is to make a profit, just as our purpose would be to live a fulfilled life. Their mission statement establishes *how* they will accomplish their purpose by indicating what is important to them.) We become better at allocating our resources and time if we have a clear hierarchy that is organized along our mission in life.

I shall sketch some of my concept of self-fulfillment here, although I recommend two other sources: my paper "Is Self-Interest Enough?" and Steven Covey's The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People which provides clear steps for developing your own mission statement and for translating it into specific goals. (I am also working on a much longer paper using the same title as this article.)

As I mentioned, there are three aspects of the process of self-fulfillment. How we organize our values into a hierarchy will depend on (1) who we are (our self-identity), (2) who we want to become, and (3) what we want to accomplish in our life, i.e.. our mission.

3.1 Self-Identity

Our self-identity is composed of numerous parts and influences: our strengths, weaknesses, temperament, style of thinking ("converger" or "diverger"), values, upbringing, and social contexts. Although I can't elaborate on this list (see my "Is Self-Interest Enough?"), some of the factors are directly the result of our choice; some are influenced by our genetic make-up. Studies of identical twins who were separated at birth have shown that they will develop similar character traits even though they are not even aware of each other's existence. Before setting out on our journey in life, we need to know our launching point: *where* we are. Or, more specifically, *who* are we? To do this we need to look at ourselves honestly to see our strengths. weaknesses. dispositions. interests. etc.

3.2 Future identity (or daimon)

Can we just decide to become anybody we want or are there constraints we have to recognize? The Greeks believed each of us is born with an innate potential self. According to the Greeks, our purpose or destiny in life is to discover who we really are and actualize it. Their philosophy can be summed in two phrases: know thyself; become thyself. Someone else paraphrases it as: exercising vital powers along lines of excellence in a life affording them scope.

While I don't believe a complete self lurks within us waiting to be discovered, I believe the evidence shows we are born with a certain temperament and dispositions which would influence the pursuits that would appeal to us or be better suited for us.

The Greeks named their approach "eudaimonism," which derives from the word "daimon" or genius. The daimon is the potential self we are born with; eudaimonism is the process of discovering the nature of this daimon and actualizing it. The modern term is self-actualization. I prefer "self-realization" to distinguish my approach from the others. (For a fascinating and challenging defense and elaboration of eudaimonism see David Norton's *Personal Destinies*. My paper "Is Self-Interest Enough?" discusses my concept of self-realization in greater detail.)

Our future identity is based on taking our current traits and projecting into the future who we would have to become in order to have a fulfilled life. In other words, we have to make sure we grow in line with our mission. The self-identity, future self and mission should ideally line up. Growth is a necessary part of life. Setting a mission and thinking about what we want to evolve into are part of preparing for growth. They set the direction for our growth. As we progress towards our goals, we improve our skills and understanding which in turn might

mean revising our image of our future self. This process is similar to throwing a magnet out ahead of ourselves and letting it draw us towards it. Change is a natural outcome of pursuing goals in line with our overall, long-range mission. This change does not have to be unplanned. We can look into the future to estimate how we will have to grow in our abilities. We need not let life wash over us.

3.3 Mission

The values we want to obtain are shaped by who we are, who we want to become, and what we want to accomplish. Self-identity, our daimon, and mission act like sights on a rifle which aim our energies towards our target -- a fulfilled life resulting from pursuing and obtaining worthy values. Yet this mission has to be broad enough to cover the various roles we have in life. It involves ensuring who we are fits with our mission. It is possible that a career we pick requires such a profound change in our self that we no longer feel like it is an appropriate activity. We could also feel (unjustifiably) unworthy of the goal, or we could feel ill at ease on the path we have chosen. The three aspects mentioned above have to be integrated to produce a life in which we enjoy where we are going and how we are getting there.

Having a mission presents three advantages. It directs our attention outward towards values and accomplishments rather than inward on virtue. Consequently, we focus on and keep in touch with the outside world. Lastly, a mission can give us a balanced focus on the present and the future and past the allure of immediate gratification.

Earlier I questioned how appropriate it is to use our career as the means for setting the hierarchy of our values. My proposal includes replacing career with mission. Our work would still be a central part in our hierarchy but without dictating control over decisions in other spheres of our life. It would be a Part of the whole.

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People by Steven Covey is an excellent book that details how to develop one's own mission statement and then how to apply this to each role in life and to goal setting. I can only touch on the major points here, so I recommend interested readers to refer to the book. The basic steps in developing a mission statement are:

1. define what you want to be and do
2. determine the various roles of life (i.e., father, career, spouse, citizen, etc.) and develop a brief statement of how you would like to be described (as if someone were reading your epitaph) in each role.
3. draft a personal mission statement that incorporates the key traits from step 2.
4. find mentors or real life examples of people who exemplify what you value most in each role.

3.4 Hierarchy of values

To implement self-fulfillment on a day-to-day level, we look again at our key roles and write out several key goals we want to work on during the next year, then determine what has to be done this week to help you achieve those goals. To ensure we stay balanced, Covey recommends (as well as I) scheduling time each week for activities that cultivate your physical, mental, spiritual, and social/emotional abilities which are needed to help you achieve your goals.

4. Summary

Self-realization consists of assessing who we are, what we want to accomplish using our talents, and who we want to become. Self-realization incorporates self-interest, although we might do things which express our "vital powers" without the benefits of these actions accruing directly to us. We could create values for others, not out of duty, but as an expression of our character.

Recall the father who took a job involving less travel and the one who chose to commute 2 hours each way to his new job. Each chose to rearrange his life, possibly at significant expense, to achieve a value. Did the value contribute to their long-term self-interest? (i.e., was the father the sole or primary beneficiary?) If we mean the decisions affected their "survival" as rational beings, a yes answer seems to stretch the concept of self-interest quite a bit. If we mean the values tie in to their self-realization or fulfilled their mission, the answer seems more plausible. Both fathers could be achieving part of his overall mission to support those he loves most. This might entail actions that *appear* altruistic, but aren't since the value achieved provides some benefit to the father (even though the kids and spouses might feel they benefited more than the father and aren't paying the price in taking a less demanding job or commuting long distances). There is also the idea, which I can't expand on here, that the process of valuing means the value becomes part of your self. Thus if you love someone, you make them part of your self. Helping them means you help yourself in an indirect way.

This brief sketch is not meant to provide enough information to apply to daily life. I include it to illustrate the importance an overall purpose and the process of self-realization play in helping us choose and prioritize our values, something which I have argued is not provided in Rand's ethics as currently structured.

Miss Rand correctly identified the vital importance of having a central purpose in life and of values. Unfortunately her formulation places too much emphasis on career and on the standard of value as means for choosing and prioritizing values. (Not to mention that the structure of her ethics appears to be circular!) The gap at the bottom end of her ethics makes day-to-day decisions and application of her general principles to individual lives difficult (In addition her concept of moral perfection seems to focus us on virtue rather than values.) I believe my suggestions help fill in the gap and supplement self-interest with self-realization. In doing so I hope this will allow us to tap the full power within us as well as tap the power of Rand's ideas.

At the very least, even if you disagree with my proposal. I hope my questions have caused you to re-visit your understanding of the Objectivist ethics.