

THE PHILOSOPHY OF ALL OF US: THE MEANING OF LIFE ACCORDING TO AYN RAND



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ABSTRACT

Ayn Rand states that everyone has a philosophy called the sense of life that acts as an automatic evaluator of all thoughts, emotions and actions of individuals. The objective of the article is to present this concept, demonstrate its practical application and expose what are the philosophical issues involved. Methodologically, the article performs a theoretical analysis of the works of Rand and her main collaborators. The article explores how the sense of life is formed subconsciously and how it influences the subject's perception of reality and self-esteem. Knowing about the meaning of life is fundamental to all men, as ignorance can lead to an existence guided by unexamined and contradictory ideas, which leads to negative emotions and the passivity of actions. The conscious confrontation of the philosophical questions that Rand presents is the process that all men must go through in order to achieve a more harmonious, self-confident, and fulfilled life. Finally, the article emphasizes that it is only through philosophy that man can develop a benevolent sense of life, which recognizes reason as an absolute, reality as knowable, the human being as good, and happiness as a goal.

Keywords: Philosophy, Ayn Rand, Objectivism, Sense of Life, Self-esteem.

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INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ayn Rand, a Russian-American philosopher and novelist, known for having developed the philosophy of Objectivism, states that every human being has a type of philosophy that guides their thoughts, emotions, and actions. Regardless of cultural background or educational level, each individual possesses what Rand called a "sense of life"—a subconscious emotional evaluation of existence, man, and morality. This implicit and unarticulated philosophy is such a fundamental human characteristic that ignorance of it is one of the main problems of humanity and one of the causes of cultural and philosophical decadence. According to Rand, most men are deliberately ignorant of the sense of life. In this context, Rand proposes that the understanding of the meaning of life necessarily involves reflection on three fundamental questions that every individual must ask himself, but that most men avoid. These three questions underlie your entire life, thoughts, emotions, and actions: "Where am I? How do I know that? What should I do?" These three questions are pertinent to all men, but "when they reach the age of understanding these questions, men believe that they already know the answers." (Rand, 1984).

According to Objectivist philosophy, the sense of life is something so crucial in man that it is present in all his expressions, posture, speech, choice of words, thoughts, clothing, art and romantic love. One's sense of life can be perceived almost instantaneously by interaction or in reactions to situations that occur in the moment, such as an immediate event in the context of a conversation, a news story about politics, or an appreciation of a cultural product.

This article seeks to present an introduction to the concept of sense of life created by Ayn Rand. Also in demonstrating how this concept works in practical form, in exposing what are the philosophical questions identified by Rand that form the sense of life and how the answers to these questions result in a benevolent or malevolent sense of life. Since the sense of life is a generally neglected human characteristic, the article seeks to argue about the importance of becoming aware of one's own sense of life and how this knowledge can contribute to a life that is more harmonious with one's values, convictions and actions. Ultimately, it is Ayn Rand's argument about how philosophy is fundamental and the primary cause of human experiences.

THE INEVITABILITY OF PHILOSOPHY

According to Ayn Rand, human beings have no choice as to the need for philosophy in their lives. But they have choices as to whether the philosophy that will guide their lives is defined consciously or unconsciously. Whether by voluntary choice or by accident, by a rational and disciplined thought process, or by osmosis of various concepts accumulated, and potentially contradictory, over the course of random experiences in his life (RAND, 1984, p. 6). The result of a formed philosophy, whether consciously by choice or subconsciously by avoidance, is variation in the individual's self-confidence, in how he will determine his values, the extent of his ambitions, and the kind of emotions he will feel in each situation. The philosopher Leonard Peikoff, Ayn Rand's main follower, her intellectual heir and the one responsible for systematizing and promoting Objectivism, explains that for Rand, philosophy

it is the fundamental factor in human life; it is the basic force that shapes the minds and character of men and the destiny of nations. It shapes them for good or for bad, depending on the kind of philosophy that men accept. A man's choice, according to Ayn Rand, is not whether or not he will have a philosophy, but only what philosophy he will have. Their choice is whether their philosophy will be conscious, explicit, logical, and therefore practical—or random, unidentified, contradictory, and therefore lethal (PEIKOFF, In: Rand, 1984, p. 2).

Philosophy is an indispensable human need, because even before having any kind of technical knowledge about philosophy or abstract ideas, man will make choices or be silent, have opinions or be indifferent, will feel emotions of confidence or fear, will have moments of joy or sadness, will have desires and dreams or avoid having ambitions. The origin of all these experiences lies in the sense of life. What varies is whether man is aware of his sense of life or not (RAND, 1984).

The cognitive mechanism that integrates all of man's experiences, psychological activities, and conclusions is subconscious. For this reason, he performs integration automatically and emotionally, but not consciously and rationally. That which begins with concrete and immediate particular problems, usually in childhood, is generalized over the whole of existence. This results in a base emotion over all other emotions and experiences. This emotional response is the sense of life that Rand defined as "the preconceptual equivalent of metaphysics, an emotional, subconsciously integrated evaluation of man and existence. It defines the nature of a man's emotional responses and the essence of his character." (RAND, 1971, p. 14). Rand continues:

Long before man is old enough to understand a concept as metaphysics, he makes choices, forms value judgments, experiences emotions, and acquires a certain implicit view of life. Every choice and value judgment implies an evaluation of oneself and the world around oneself—particularly, one's ability to cope with the world. He can draw conscious conclusions, which may be true or false; or it can remain mentally passive and only react to events (i.e., just feel). Be that as it may, your subconscious mechanism summarizes your psychological activities, integrating your conclusions, reactions, or evasions into an emotional sum that establishes a habitual pattern and becomes your automatic response to the world around you. What began as a series of isolated, specific conclusions (or evasions) about your own particular problems becomes a generalized feeling about existence, an implicit metaphysics with the enveloping motivational power of a constant, fundamental emotion—an emotion that is part of all your other emotions and underlies all your experiences. This is a sense of life (RAND, 1971, p. 14-15).

Onkar Ghate, director of philosophy at the Ayn Rand Institute, says that in this passage, when Rand speaks of a "generalized feeling about existence," she

refers to a perspective on the facts of reality—on the various things and events one faces throughout everyday life—that categorizes them into those that really matter and those that don't, those that are essential and therefore must be considered in all thoughts and actions, and those that are accidental and, therefore, must be considered in all thoughts and actions, and those that are accidental and, therefore, they must be left aside (GHATE, 2016, p. 119).

The key word here is "important." The sense of life is a pre-conceptual assessment of what is important within the context of the individual's development. Reality is complex, with a multitude of experiences and interactions of all kinds. Since childhood, man has been in contact with all sorts of possible, random and unpredictable situations. From his parents' rules, to what he consumes on television, what kind of things he listens to in church or on the street, how he is charged at school, what his friends like, etc. Since it is impossible for human cognition, especially that of a child, to understand, select, synthesize, and store all these materials consciously in a discriminated way, a subconscious mechanism will fulfill this role. It will integrate them and form a sense of life that will determine what is considered important to the subject, whether he knows it or not. Nathaniel Branden, a psychologist and one of Rand's main collaborators, explains that the sense of life is like a silent statement such as "this is what I consider important—important for me to project and for others to perceive—this is the world as I see it—this is the essence of things—this is what matters" (BRANDEN, 2011, Kindle position 7553).

Once the individual's sense of life begins to be formed from childhood, he is subject to the influence of everything that happens around him, his family, social and cultural context. All men will have some sense of life until their death, and the same sense of life will

remain unchanged if the subject never carries out a philosophical exercise of reflection and confrontation with his conclusions. To do this, Rand suggests three questions.

THE THREE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

If the sense of life is a pre-conceptual equivalent of metaphysics (RAND, 1971, p. 42), it is important to define what metaphysics means to the philosopher. Peikoff explains to Rand, metaphysics is a branch of philosophy, a category of study that

identifies the nature of the universe as a whole. It tells men what kind of world they live in and whether there is a supernatural dimension beyond it. It tells them whether they live in a world of solid entities, natural laws, absolute facts, or in a world of illusory fragments, unpredictable miracles, and ceaseless flux. It informs them whether the things they perceive through the senses and the mind form an understandable reality, with which they can cope, or some kind of unreal appearance, which leaves them perplexed and defenseless (PEIKOFF, 1982, p. 23).

In this way, metaphysics is represented by the first question proposed by Rand: "where am I?" (RAND, 1984, p. 1). When confronted with the question, most men look around them, shrug off the philosophical implications of the question, and reply, "I'm in a room in New York." It turns out that this question does not deal with the particular – room, city – but with the fundamentals: what is reality? What is there? On a subconscious level, men already have the answers implicit and integrated into their sense of life, even if they don't know it. What they believe, and they may be mistaken, is that they also have the answers on an explicit level, and for this reason, the statement "I'm in New York City" would be enough. So they avoid asking the questions and suffer the consequences of their evasion (RAND, 1984, p. 2).

Hence the need to know all the philosophical implications and validate their conclusions. These implications appear in the form of the questions: am I in a natural, logical, and absolute universe or in a chaotic, unpredictable, and incomprehensible universe? Is what I see real or illusory? Do objects exist independently of the observer or does the observer create the objects? Are things what they are or are there contradictions in reality? Does consciousness merely observe, or does it also create existence? (RAND, 1984, p. 3).

This class of questions, Peikoff says, determines the individual's view of his or her ability to live and will directly affect his or her practical choices throughout life. If man "is an effective being in a benevolent universe, then certain choices and actions (expressing self-assertion, ambition, idealism) are appropriate to him; if not, no" (PEIKOFF, 1991, p. 415).

Peikoff explains that Rand's understanding was that these questions are the bridge that connects metaphysics with ethics and that they will determine the foundation of man's values and, consequently, his actions.

Whatever answer is offered to "where am I?", there will always be a second subsequent and necessary question: "how do I know this?" (RAND, 1984, p. 2). Again, most men also shy away from the philosophical implications of this question and claim things like "it's self-evident," "I feel it's true," or "I don't know." They accept that their conclusions are right without questioning them, or they go so far as to claim that it is not possible to conclude anything about anything. However, the "extent of your self-confidence—and your success—will be different, according to the set of answers you accept" (RAND, 1984, p. 3) to the following questions Rand posed: Do I know by reason, by emotions, or by revelation? Are my sensory experiences valid or do my senses deceive me? Is my reason fed by experiences or are there innate ideas prior to my birth? Is my mind competent to deal with reality, or am I doomed to perpetual doubt? (RAND, 1984, p. 2-3). The answers will determine the confidence that man has in himself and the extent of his intellectual ambitions.

A third question, "What shall I do?" necessarily follows from the two previous ones. "Here," Rand says, men "are not very sure—but the usual answer is: whatever everyone else does" (RAND, 1984, p. 2). The result is the emotions of "fear without cause and undefined guilt" and in a practical way, these men "are not very active, they are not very confident, they are not very happy" (RAND, 1984, p. 2).

In order for the man to be able to ask the third question, he must first have answered the previous two questions. To know what is to be done, man must first understand the universe – where he will do it – and himself – who will do it. If man answers that he is incapable of dealing with an incomprehensible universe, he will present a certain class of answers. If man answers that it is possible to understand and deal with the universe, he will have totally different answers. The philosophical implications of this third question are: Do I have free will or am I predetermined? Do I believe that happiness is possible or should I escape suffering? Can I be morally good or will I always be a bad man? Are the men around me my equals or my enemies? Should I act for my goals or for the good of others? Should I dream big or should I be humble? (RAND, 1984, p. 3). The answers will determine the degree of activity or inertia, confidence or fear, happiness or guilt. In other words, your self-esteem.

The confrontation of these three questions "where am I? How do I know that? what should I do?" and its implications are extremely difficult, says Ghate. These questions

they are difficult to formulate explicitly, much less to answer correctly. However, Rand maintains that an individual nonetheless forms implicit answers to these questions as he grows up and reaches adulthood. Faced with numerous concrete issues and problems in their daily life, a maturing child must draw some specific conclusions, form some value judgments, and make some choices. The rationality and precision of these choices will add up in your mind, generating not only a sense of efficacy and self-worth, but also a sense of the kind of world you live in. (GHATE, 2016, p. 119)

Man will always make choices that will represent his estimate of the world and of himself. However, a fundamental choice that is never made is the validation of your conclusions by asking the questions above, discovering your meaning of life, and confronting the answers. One way or another, your sense of life will be formed and throughout life. He will only know it or not.

Just as the human experience is a multiplicity, so the sense of life is a variable spectrum, explains Branden (2011, Kindle position 7558). The sense of life adds up all the individual values that are diffused into a base emotion that is integrated. However, the experiments that can give rise to these values may be random. Avoidance of a sense of life can result in conflicting values and contradictory emotions. Still, the sense of life is as inescapable as philosophy. Man will always make some estimate of the essence of things, will always select the "genius or the psychotic" as the representative of humanity, will always characterize man by "efficacy or impotence", will always understand that the essence of life is "fulfillment and happiness — or failure and misery" (BRANDEN, 2011, Kindle position 7558-7563).

About the process in which the sense of life is formed, Rand explains:

A sense of life is formed by a process of emotional generalization that can be described as a subconscious equivalent of a process of abstraction, since it is a method of classification and integration. However, it is a process of emotional abstraction: it consists of classifying things according to the emotions they evoke — that is, uniting, by association or connotation, all those things that have the power to make an individual experience the same (or a similar emotion) (RAND, 1971, p. 16)

To illustrate this spectrum variation, it is possible to imagine four different people. The first feels that happiness exists as a certainty and that suffering is only an exception. The second feels that happiness can be achieved with a lot of difficulty and effort to overcome the suffering that is natural. The third feels that happiness is fragile and made up of rare

moments and that suffering is the norm. The fourth feels that happiness is a utopian illusion and that man is trapped in a permanent state of suffering.

These four examples illustrate how the sense of life can vary from person to person. Despite this variation, Rand located the sense of life to two fundamental opposing premises, the benevolent premise and the malevolent premise.

BENEVOLENT AND MALEVOLENT SENSE OF LIFE

The benevolent premise is present in the conviction that "ideas matter, that knowledge matters, that truth matters, that one's mind matters" (RAND, 1999, p. 122). Someone with the benevolent sense of life is incapable of believing in the triumph of evil as an omnipotent and inescapable force. When this subject looks at the events around him, he feels that that "injustice (or terror, or falsehood, or frustration, or pain, or anguish) is the exception in life, not the rule" (RAND, 1999, p. 122) and that even if in its immediate context there is a lot of violence, poverty and suffering, somewhere in the world there are rational beings who live a life worthy of humans, that happiness is within your reach and that good is possible.

Peikoff explains that in this context, benevolence has a different meaning than kindness. The sense of benevolent life is one in which man understands that he must adapt to the universe, and not the other way around. "If it adapts to it," Peikoff explains, "then the universe is 'benevolent' in another sense: 'favorable to human life.'" The explanation continues:

If a man recognizes and adheres to reality, he can attain his values in reality; He can and, on equal terms, he will. To the moral man, failures, though possible, are an exception to the rule. The rule is success. The state of consciousness to be sought and expected is happiness (PEIKOFF, 1991, p. 342).

The practical demonstration of this premise can be seen in aesthetic terms in the story, says Rand. In ancient Greece, the sense of benevolent life predominated. Men were eager for knowledge, art exalted man as a beautiful and heroic being, science advanced for human well-being. In Rand's words, the sculptors of ancient Greece presented "man as a god-like figure" even though there were still men who "can be crippled, sick, or defenseless" (RAND, 1971, p. 26-27). To the Greek sense of life, human frailty and disasters were regarded "as accidental, as irrelevant to the essential nature of man—and he presents a

figure that embodies strength, beauty, intelligence, and self-confidence as the proper and natural state of man." (RAND, 1971, p. 26-27).

As the sense of life is directly linked to the formation of self-esteem, explains Gathe (2016, p. 120), the benevolent premise indicates how the subject answered the aforementioned questions. He believes that he is a rational person, that his mind is effective and that his actions have the potential to succeed in a world that is receptive to human beings – his self-esteem will be higher. Conversely, the malevolent premise indicates other types of answers to the same questions. The subject lacks confidence in his mind, believes that reason is powerless to know a world that is hostile to human beings – his self-esteem is inferior, because the subject will feel powerless, failed and inert. "Self-esteem," says Gathe, "is an evaluation of oneself—in relation to reality; The sense of life is an evaluation of reality — in relation to oneself. (GATHE, 2016, p. 120).

The malevolent sense of life is contained in the conviction that man is naturally "powerless and doomed—that success, happiness, and fulfillment are impossible for him—that emergencies, disasters, and catastrophes are the norm of his life and that his main aim is to combat them" (RAND, 1964, p. 62-63). By looking at its immediate context, the subject commits what Rand claims to be a philosophical error, which is to generalize that all reality is hostile to man, that catastrophes are present everywhere in the world, that man is completely powerless, that reason is flawed, that happiness is merely a utopia, and that good is impossible to overcome and man is guilty of being evil. In Rand's words: "what began as a series of isolated and specific conclusions (or evasions) about one's own particular problems, becomes a generalized feeling about existence" (RAND, 1971, p. 15). Peikoff adds that the malevolent premise "states that man cannot achieve his values; that successes, while possible, are an exception; that the rule of human life is failure and misery" (PEIKOFF, 1991, p. 342).

In a practical way in history, according to the objectivist understanding, the malevolent sense of life was predominant throughout the Middle Ages and is present in today's culture. The medievals, Rand explains, presented man as they understood him, "as a deformed monstrosity." While it was possible that there were "men who are healthy, happy, or confident," the medievals regarded "these conditions as accidental or illusory, as irrelevant to the essential nature of man." The malevolent sense of life of the Middle Ages "presents a tortured figure that embodies pain, ugliness, and terror as the proper and natural state of man" (RAND, 1971, p. 27).

In the context of today's culture, the malevolent sense of life is present in a kind of nihilism. Peikoff describes it as follows:

They seek the excitement of the new; and the new, for them, is the negative. What is new is annihilation, the annihilation of the essential in each field; they have no interest in anything that will replace it. Thus, the uniqueness of the century that is behind us: philosophy blissfully free of system-building, education based on the theory that cognition is harmful, science proud of its inability to understand, art that has driven out beauty, literature that boasted anti-heroes, language "freed" from syntax, verse "free" from meter, non-representational painting, atonal music, psychology of the unconscious, Deconstruction in literary criticism, indeterminacy as the new depth in physics, incompleteness as revelation in mathematics — an emptiness everywhere hailed by the avant-garde with a metaphysical laugh. It was the sound of triumph, the triumph of the new anti-ideal: of the unknowable, the unattainable, the unbearable (PEIKOFF, 1991, p. 457-458).

These examples by Peikoff serve to illustrate how the ultimate consequences of human actions begin with the role that philosophy plays in man's life. Although many intellectuals are completely clear about their implicit and explicit ideas, this does not exempt them from those fundamental questions that Rand posed. A sense of life that has originated in the conclusion that the universe is unknowable is unlikely to result in explicit ideas that sustain reason as an absolute, that exalt the search for truth and conclusions, that seek order in the universe and recreate order in art and in life – and in this case, Peikoff's examples are demonstrable.

SENSE OF LIFE IN PRACTICE

On an individual level, a benevolent or malevolent sense of life will translate into everyday details and preferences. The more benevolent his sense of life, the more self-confident the subject will be, the more attracted he will be to the idealized view of man and the more repelled by man as a vulnerable being. Conversely, the more malevolent his sense of life, the lower his self-confidence, the greater the attraction to the view of man as a frail and flawed being, and the more repelled by the view of man as a successful being.

In Rand's words, someone with a benevolent sense of life will be drawn to "a new neighborhood, a discovery, an adventure, a struggle, a triumph [...] a heroic man, the New York skyline, a sunlit landscape, pure colors, ecstatic music" (RAND, 1971, p. 16). Someone with a malevolent sense of life will be attracted by the quiet of "next-door neighbors, a memorized recitation, [...] a familiar routine, comfort [...] a humble man, an old village, a misty landscape, grayish colors, folk music" (RAND, 1971, p. 16). All of these

preferences depend on the answers presented to the three questions at the beginning of the article. Rand continues:

For a man with self-esteem, the emotion that unites the elements of the first part of these examples is admiration, exaltation, and a sense of challenge; The emotion that unites the elements of the second part is disgust or boredom. For a man who lacks self-esteem, the emotion that unites the elements of the first part of these examples is fear, guilt, and resentment; the emotion that unites the elements of the second part is the relief of fear, the comforting reaffirmation and the security without demands of passivity (RAND, 1971, p. 16).

In human relationships, even though people have different lives, they can have a compatible sense of life. For example, one person can choose the library and another the soccer fields. And both can believe that success is possible by continuous practice, that man can be skilled, and that he is free to choose his career. In an opposite example, someone who is more intellectually educated, who maintains that life lacks meaning, who thinks that reality is incomprehensible and that man is an evil being, has a sense of life compatible with a depressive subject, who has given up learning, creating, producing and feels that the act of sleeping is a momentary relief from the pain of existence. In any of the above examples, the man will need a criterion that will structure his emotional abstractions. The criterion, Rand explains, is a veiled, nonverbal statement of "what is important to me" or, "The kind of universe that is suitable for me, in which I would feel at home" (RAND, 1971, p. 17).

Gathe reinforces Rand's argument with two more examples. A person who actively seeks knowledge will value understanding. When he obtains knowledge, he feels that this result is real and true. When there is an error in knowledge, it will assess that it is a correctable accident and then act to correct its mistakes. On the other hand, a more passive person will lack a sense of effectiveness. While knowledge and understanding may be values to some degree to her, they will not be important. When obtaining knowledge about something, the assessment is that this would be accidental, because the failure to obtain the knowledge that is the expected thing (GATHE, 2016, p. 120).

As the sense of life is an implicit philosophy, it can be in contradiction with the explicit ideas of the individual himself, who will suffer from constant internal conflict and possible catastrophic consequences. To illustrate this point, Rand describes a real person she met. Mr. X was a young man who possessed "the most tragic face I had ever encountered." This young man was 26 years old, a "brilliant" engineering scholar with a promising future, but who lacked any energy or motivation. He was paralyzed by the indecision and frustrations

of life, "he was like a cloak of colorless ashes that had never been set on fire." Once, while watching a film about a professional "driven by a passionate, uncompromising, and dedicated view of his work," Mr. X simultaneously felt two emotions—admiration and guilt for having felt that same admiration. His sense of life pointed the direction of exaltation, but his conscious ideas rebuked him: "Life is not like that." What saved Mr. X, Rand argues, is precisely what this article argues: the process of identifying the initial three questions, confronting the answers, and verifying the validation of the conclusions, followed by the construction of a conscious, disciplined philosophy that was integrated with his uncontradictory sense of life. In this way, Mr. X was able to make calculated decisions in his career and face professional challenges with self-confidence. His professional and financial success, Rand claims, was absent of any trace of guilt (RAND, 1971, p. 135-137).

During Mr. X's process of answering the three questions "where am I? How do I know that? What shall I do?" and all the other derived questions, the man by doing the same, will begin to identify his sense of life from what he considers important in his conclusions. Rand explains:

"Important"—in its essential meaning, as distinct from its more limited and superficial uses—is a metaphysical term. It refers to an aspect of metaphysics that serves as a bridge between metaphysics and ethics: a fundamental view of the nature of man. This view involves answers to questions such as: Is the universe knowable or not? Does man have the power of choice or not? Can he achieve his goals in life or not? The answers to these questions are "metaphysical value judgments," for they form the basis of ethics. Only those values that he considers or comes to regard as "important," those that represent his implicit view of reality, remain in a man's subconscious mind and form his sense of life. "It's important to understand things" — "It's important to obey my parents" — "It's important to act on your own" — "It's important to please other people" — "It's important to fight for what I want" — "It's important not to make enemies" — "My life is important" — "Who am I to take risks?" Man is a self-formed soul-being—and it is from such conclusions that the substance of his soul is made. (By "soul" I mean "consciousness.") The integrated sum of a man's basic values is his sense of life. (RAND, 1971, p. 17)

In whatever case, man has the need to identify his sense of life, that is, his conclusions and estimates about his relationship to existence, and to take control, rather than be controlled, of generalizations and negative emotions. At the same time, he develops a coherent, contradiction-free, and integrated philosophy that puts him in the right direction.

The right direction is a sense of benevolent life, Rand says. For to see the world as receptive to man, governed by natural, stable, and comprehensible laws, and man as capable of understanding these laws, is merely a statement of reality—a necessarily true

conclusion. For Ayn Rand, existence has primacy over consciousness, reason is an absolute and has epistemological validity and man must idealize and seek his personal happiness (PEIKOFF, 1991, p. 453).

As Peikoff explained, benevolence is different from kindness or intentionality. The universe is neutral and does not wish to help or harm man. Benevolence is a confirmation of man's relationship with the universe. If man is a being who has free will and is cognitively competent to overcome difficulties, then benevolence acquires the meaning of being conducive to human life and to man's actions (PEIKOFF, 1991, p. 342). But that man whose relation to the universe is one of passivity and stagnation, he will perceive the universe as hostile to him.

Nor does a benevolent sense of life imply ignoring that there are difficulties in the world, that there are unhappy and sick people, poor and miserable countries, tragedies that destroy entire populations, and violent and brutal wars. But it implies recognizing that it all exists and acting to change all these things to the side of good.

To do otherwise, the total acceptance of a malevolent sense of life, would be to condemn man to a life of ignorance without knowledge, of doubt without certainty, of fear without courage, of failure without success, of conflict without peace, of oppression without rights, of poverty without productivity, of ruin without reconstruction. of disease without medicine, of pain without anesthesia, of darkness without light, of silence without music, of ugliness without beauty, of apathy without passion, of loneliness without love. But since men are able to learn and educate themselves, to never accept ignorance, to fall in love with something or someone, to create the most beautiful things that evoke the deepest of emotions, to do science that illuminates the darkness of the world, to apply technology for human well-being, to fight for equal rights and peace, to love deeply and to value – the sense of benevolent life is a mere statement of facts. The malevolent, a contradiction with reality.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

For Ayn Rand, philosophy is not an intellectual luxury restricted to academics, but an urgent need for everyone. And the sense of life is just as necessary and essential. It is the subconscious emotional basis of the human experience and all decisions throughout life. Although men are ignorant of philosophy in the technical and academic sense, the sense of life is the implicit philosophy that everyone has and that will shape their interpretation of the

world, of themselves, of their social relations and personal goals. Ultimately, the question of the sense of life is also a question of self-knowledge and personal development.

By dodging the questions "where am I? How do I know that? What should I do?" a fundamental part of the human being is lost and remains unknown to him, which can lead him to an existence guided by ideals never examined and often conflicting with his own life, which will be characterized by fear, guilt, insecurity and frustration. Your passivity is a surrender to uncertainties and allowing outside forces to control you and lead you to destruction.

On the other hand, Ayn Rand's proposal to confront these issues in a conscious and disciplined way is a constant exercise for life. Only in this way is it possible to align the sense of life with an explicit and coherent philosophy and obtain a full and fulfilled life with a benevolent sense of life. Therefore, man comes to recognize reality as a knowable and stable place, himself as a capable and rational being, and happiness as something possible and desirable. Your life will be more meaningful and your achievements will be greater and greater.

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