

ETHICS of LEADERSHIP

Ethical Egoism

As you read the material for our next class, keep the questions below in mind. To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages. Keep in mind that there are two basic kinds of information that you need to look for in the reading:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible conclusion about an issue, rather than another.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently about these issues at our next class meeting.

Reading

- Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*.
- Lynn Parramore, "How a Libertarian Used Ayn Rand's Crazy Philosophy to Drive Sears Into the Ground".

Background

Recall that **psychological egoism** is a theory of human motivation claiming that a person primarily acts according to prudential reasons, that is, according to considerations seen as promoting that person's interests. Contrary to this theory, Ayn Rand believes that people often do act self-destructively through imprudent decision making. In the selection from her book *Atlas Shrugged*, she instead defends **ethical egoism**, a theory of morality claiming that a person *should* act only according to prudential reasons. According to Rand, it is absolutely wrong for you to act against your own self-interest. Today, this theory has proved extremely influential amongst business leaders. The reading from Lynn Parramore uses the case study of Sears (a formally huge U.S. department store chain) under the leadership of Eddie Lampert to argue against ethical egoism.

Questions

1. Rand claims that you must "accept the fact that the achievement of your happiness is the only *moral* purpose of your life" (p. 1059). What is her argument justifying this claim?
2. Meanwhile, Lynn Parramore claims that Rand's philosophy perpetuates two dangerous myths about leadership (myths 2 and 3 from the reading). What are these two myths and why are they supposed to be dangerous?