

The Philosophy of Ayn Rand

Applied to The Systemised Self – Part 11, Masters Series.

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Abstract

This essay applies Ayn Rand's philosophy of Objectivism to the contemporary theoretical concept of the Systemised Self. Rand's defence of reason, conceptual thought, individual judgement, productive agency, rational self-interest, individual rights, and limited government provides a distinctive framework for analysing algorithmic mediation. The essay argues that Rand produces a double diagnosis: algorithmic systems (transformer based large language models) can be valuable instruments for extending human knowledge, productivity, and voluntary exchange; however, they can also become collectivising authorities when they replace individual judgement with statistical conformity, convert persons into data categories, and make the pursuit of system-defined rewards appear synonymous with rational self-interest. The Systemised Self is consequently interpreted as a possible condition in which the individual remains formally free but increasingly receives a pre-processed identity, preference structure, and field of choice from systems whose incentives are not identical with the individual's long-term flourishing. The analysis distinguishes Rand's genuine individualism from the platform rhetoric of personalisation, which may individualise consumption while collectivising cognition. It situates the framework within a genealogy of rationalism, empiricism, liberal rights theory, and critiques of ideology and reification. The account of Arkan, Kanbay, and Akçam's (2026) qualitative study is treated as suggestive adjacent evidence for experiences relevant to Algorithmic Alienation, while Calhoun's Universe 25 is treated as a limited biological analogy for the speculative Hollow Absolute. The essay concludes that a Randian response requires protection of independent reason, voluntary association, privacy, property, exit, and institutional limits on coercive or manipulative power, together with empirical research capable of falsifying the Systemised Self hypothesis.

Keywords: *Ayn Rand, Objectivism, rational self-interest, reason, individualism, rights, capitalism, The Systemised Self, Algorithmic Alienation, Hollow Absolute, Algorithmic Alienation Index, Universe 25.*

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A – LIMITATIONS

This essay is a theoretical position paper, not an empirical study of algorithmic behaviour or a defence of all claims associated with Objectivism. Its purpose is to apply selected elements of Rand's philosophy to the Systemised Self and to develop questions for future investigation. The Systemised Self (Galu & Kairos, 2026a), Hollow Absolute (Galu & Kairos, 2026a), and Algorithmic Alienation Index (AAI) (Galu & Kairos, 2026b) are treated as provisional constructs. The AAI formula, weights, indicators, and 0.95 threshold have not been validated and must not be read as a clinical diagnosis or established psychological scale. The account of Arkan, Kanbay, and Akçam (2026) follows the study description available in the supplied project materials and is used as suggestive adjacent evidence, not as direct proof of the Systemised Self. Calhoun's Universe 25 was an animal experiment in an artificial environment; its relevance to the Hollow Absolute is analogical and speculative. The essay also recognises that Rand's concepts are contested and historically situated. Applying them to platforms and machine-learning systems requires critical reconstruction rather than unqualified endorsement.

1. Introduction

Ayn Rand's philosophy offers one of the sharpest available contrasts to theories that understand modern technology primarily through collectivisation, administered life, or the absorption of the individual into a social system. Rand begins from the primacy of existence, the efficacy of reason, and the moral status of the individual human being. Her central philosophical ambition is to defend the mind's independent relation to reality against mysticism, scepticism, collectivism, and the demand that the individual sacrifice judgement and life to an abstract social whole (Rand, 1979, 1982). This ambition makes Objectivism a productive framework for examining the Systemised Self.

The Systemised Self (SS) is a contemporary theoretical construct describing a possible socio-technological condition in which human experience, preference, identity, decision-making, and language are increasingly co-constituted by algorithmic systems (transformer based large language models). Such systems include recommendation engines, search and ranking systems, social platforms, automated workplaces, and generative language models. They collect behavioural traces, infer patterns, predict likely responses, and return personalised outputs. The SS does not mean that every person using such systems ceases to be an agent. It describes a trajectory in which prediction and optimisation become so embedded in the user's environment that a system generated profile begins to organise the person's practical choices and self understanding (Galu & Kairos, 2026a).

Rand's relevance is not exhausted by the observation that she valued individualism, the deeper question is whether algorithmic personalisation promotes or undermines the conditions Rand associates with rational agency. Does the system give the individual better means for understanding reality, producing value, and pursuing chosen projects? Or does it replace conceptual judgement with automated selection, turn the person into a predictable consumer,

and convert social conformity into the appearance of individual choice? Rand's distinction between genuine individualism and dependence on collective authority is particularly important here: a user may be addressed as a unique consumer while being governed by a statistical model that groups, predicts, and nudges millions of users according to common platform objectives.

The essay advances three linked claims: first, Rand's epistemology provides a criterion for distinguishing an instrument that extends reason from an authority that substitutes for reason; second, her ethics and politics clarify why an algorithmic profile cannot be permitted to become a person's moral or political essence: a rational self-interest requires long-term judgement, not immediate optimisation of engagement or approval; third, her theory of rights and limited government exposes the political problem of data extraction, opaque classification, and coercive dependence. The fact that a user appears to consent does not settle whether the relationship is voluntary, intelligible, and compatible with the protection of individual rights.

The analysis proceeds through Rand's intellectual outline and principal concepts, a genealogy of theories informing her, and an introduction to the SS and Hollow Absolute. It then situates the framework alongside the supplied account of Algorithmic Alienation and the more limited analogy of Universe 25. The central synthesis examines reason, conceptual abstraction, self-interest, productive achievement, independence, property, trade, and rights. A critical section then considers objections to Rand's metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, politics, treatment of dependence, and historical exclusions. The conclusion proposes a research programme in which the SS framework is measured against alternative explanations and remains open to falsification.

2. Rand's Intellectual Outline

Ayn Rand was born Alisa Zinovyevna Rosenbaum in St. Petersburg in 1905 and emigrated to the United States in 1926. Her experience of the Russian Revolution and Soviet collectivism became central to her intellectual and literary development, although her philosophy cannot be reduced to biography. Rand wrote novels, essays, lectures, and philosophical works that developed a systematic position she named Objectivism. Her major novels, *We the Living*, *The Fountainhead*, and *Atlas Shrugged*, dramatise conflicts between individual judgement and social demands for conformity. Her non-fiction works, including *The Virtue of Selfishness*, *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal*, *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, and *Philosophy: Who Needs It*, state the principles more directly (Heller, 2009; Rand, 1964, 1967, 1979, 1982).

Objectivism is commonly summarised through five branches: objective reality, reason as the means of knowledge, rational self-interest as the basis of ethics, individual rights as the political expression of morality, and laissez-faire capitalism as the social system that protects voluntary production and trade (Rand, 1982). Rand's use of 'objective' does not mean that knowledge is produced from nowhere or that human beings are infallible. It means that reality exists independently of consciousness and that knowledge must be formed through perception, conceptual integration, logic, and evidence rather than faith, arbitrary assertion, or social consensus.

Rand's intellectual outline is also a story of conflict. The individual mind is opposed to mysticism, which places alleged revelation above reason; scepticism, which denies the possibility of knowledge; and collectivism, which treats the group as morally prior to its members. Her heroes are typically producers and creators whose work requires independent thought, her villains often represent second-hand living: deriving one's values, opinions, and

status from the approval of others rather than from a first-hand relationship with reality (Rand, 1943, 1957).

This framework is relevant to digital systems because algorithmic environments blur the relationship between first-hand judgement and socially mediated evaluation. Ratings, rankings, likes, recommendations, and generated language can provide useful information. They can also make the social response to a person's conduct appear to be evidence of its truth or value. Rand would likely insist on distinguishing evidence from popularity, knowledge from aggregation, and self-directed production from passive consumption. The application developed here extends that distinction to systems that automate the production of social evidence itself.

3. Rand's Key Theoretical Contributions

3.1 Metaphysical realism and the primacy of existence

Rand's first principle is that existence exists: reality is what it is, independent of wishes, beliefs, or algorithms. Consciousness does not create its object; it identifies and integrates facts. This realist commitment is directly relevant to algorithmic profiling. A model may successfully predict behaviour without revealing the full reality of the person. Predictive accuracy is not identical with ontological truth. The profile is an instrument built for a purpose, not a metaphysical revelation of the user's essence.

The primacy of existence also provides a safeguard against technological idealism. A platform's categories, scores, or recommendations are not reality merely because they are computed. They are representations shaped by data, objectives, training choices, and institutional interests. The person remains more than the variables a system can record. The SS becomes plausible when a representation is treated as reality and when the person's opportunities to encounter facts outside the representation are reduced.

3.2 Reason, objectivity, and conceptual abstraction

For Rand, reason is the faculty that identifies and integrates the material supplied by perception. Objectivity requires a disciplined method: attention to facts, conceptual clarity, logical consistency, and willingness to revise conclusions when evidence changes (Rand, 1979). Concepts are neither arbitrary names nor mystical universals. They are mental integrations that omit measurement while retaining the essential characteristics of their referents. The capacity to form concepts makes long-range planning, science, language, and production possible.

Algorithmic systems also form abstractions, but their abstractions are not automatically equivalent to human concepts. A machine-learning model compresses patterns to perform a task. It may group users by predicted response, but such groupings can be opaque, context-sensitive, and optimised for an institutional objective. A Randian analysis therefore asks: What facts does the model represent? What measurements does it omit? What goal determines its abstractions? Who can inspect and challenge the classification? Treating a predictive cluster as an exhaustive concept of a person would confuse instrumental classification with objective knowledge.

3.3 The independent mind and first-hand judgement

Rand's ideal of independence is epistemic before it is merely social. The independent person does not accept an idea because it is popular, rewarded, or delivered by an authority. Independence means using one's own mind to judge the evidence and accepting responsibility for the conclusions. This does not require discovering everything alone; rational people rely on specialists, institutions, and testimony. It does require retaining the ability to evaluate reasons and to distinguish knowledge from deference.

The SS threatens this form of independence when the user's path through knowledge is selected by systems that are more persuasive than visible. Recommendation engines can make the next

idea appear before the user has formed a question. Generative models can produce fluent explanations before the user has tested the premises. Social metrics can make approval appear to be evidence. The issue is not assistance but substitution. When the user ceases to ask why a recommendation is relevant, what alternatives were excluded, or what interest governs the system, the independent mind is replaced by second-hand cognition.

3.4 Rational self-interest and the virtue of purpose

Rand's ethical egoism holds that the individual's own life is the moral standard, but rational self-interest is not impulsive gratification or predation. It requires a long-range commitment to one's life and flourishing. The virtues she associates with this project include rationality, independence, integrity, honesty, justice, productiveness, and pride (Rand, 1964). Self-interest is therefore an activity of evaluation: the person must identify values, order them, and act according to principles that sustain life rather than merely maximise immediate reward.

This distinction exposes a central ambiguity in platform personalisation: systems often describe optimisation in the language of user interest, but their measurable objective may be session duration, click-through, purchase probability, or advertising value. The user's immediate engagement can be treated as a proxy for wellbeing even when it conflicts with sleep, attention, relationships, learning, or long-term projects. A Randian critique would not condemn pleasure or convenience. It would demand that the user's actual rational interests, rather than the system's proxy objective, determine the standard of value.

3.5 Productive achievement and the trader principle

Rand treats productive work as a central virtue because it transforms thought into values that sustain human life. Her trader principle holds that relationships between rational people should be based on voluntary exchange to mutual benefit, not force, fraud, or sacrifice (Rand, 1964,

1967). Capitalism, in her account, is justified not merely by efficiency but by the protection of production, property, and voluntary association.

Digital platforms can be understood as productive tools when they create genuine value: access to knowledge, communication, coordination, creative distribution, and new forms of work. The trader principle becomes strained when the exchange is asymmetric and opaque. A user supplies attention, behavioural traces, creative content, and social labour; the platform supplies access while retaining extensive control over the resulting data assets and the rules of visibility. The question is not whether every exchange must be equal in outcome, but whether the relation is intelligible, voluntary, rights-respecting, and open to exit.

3.6 Individual rights and limited government

Rand defines individual rights as moral principles sanctioning a person's freedom of action in a social context. The basic right is the right to one's own life; other rights, including property and freedom of speech, specify the conditions of living by reason. The function of government is to protect individuals from physical force, fraud, and breach of contract, not to direct their lives or redistribute their productive achievements according to collective demands (Rand, 1967, 1982).

Applied to algorithmic systems, Rand's politics raises questions about control over data, identity, reputation, and the ability to refuse automated decisions. Private platforms are not governments in every respect, but their infrastructural position can give them power in terms of data sovereignty independent of the subject. A rights-based analysis must distinguish legitimate ownership and voluntary contract from coercive dependence and opaque manipulation. It must also confront a difficulty in Rand's framework: rights protect persons from force, while algorithmic influence often operates through design, asymmetrical knowledge, and dependence rather than direct physical compulsion. Whether these

mechanisms count as rights violations, harmful persuasion, or ordinary market influence requires careful argument rather than assumption.

4. A Genealogy of Preceding Theory Informing Rand

Rand's philosophy emerged from several intellectual lineages that she selectively accepted and rejected. Aristotle was her most important philosophical predecessor: from Aristotle, Rand drew a commitment to reality, the intelligibility of nature, the importance of logic, and the idea that human flourishing involves the exercise of distinctive capacities. She rejected Aristotle's teleological biology and his restrictions on the scope of political equality, but she regarded his realist and rationalist inheritance as foundational to her own project (Gotthelf & Salmieri, 2016).

The rationalist and empiricist traditions supplied the background against which Rand developed her epistemology. Descartes emphasised the certainty of thought, while Locke grounded ideas in sensation and reflection. Hume's scepticism exposed problems concerning causation, identity, and induction. Kant attempted a synthesis in which the mind contributes forms to experience. Rand rejected Kant's alleged separation between appearance and reality, insisting that reason can know the world rather than merely organise an unknowable given. The digital relevance of this dispute is clear: a data model is neither raw reality nor pure construction. It is a selective representation whose relation to reality must be assessed by purpose and evidence.

Modern political influences include classical liberalism, natural-rights theory, and the American constitutional tradition. Rand's account of rights is also a response to Marxism, fascism, and Soviet collectivism. She opposed the sacrifice of individual life to nation, class, race, or history. Later critics have argued that this opposition is too binary and insufficiently attentive to structural power, care, and interdependence. That criticism should remain visible

when applying Rand to platform economies, where the ‘individual choice’ of a user may be shaped by labour conditions, disability, education, geography, and institutional dependence.

Rand’s literary method adds a further genealogy: her novels treat philosophy as a lived conflict over values, work, sexuality, status, and social recognition. This makes her useful for the SS because systemisation is not only an abstract change in information architecture. It is experienced through aspiration, shame, pride, belonging, productivity, and the fear of becoming irrelevant.

5. The Systemised Self: Context and Definition

The Systemised Self is a proposed condition in which algorithmic systems do more than assist individual action. They increasingly organise the informational, social, and motivational environment in which the individual forms preferences and evaluates options. The system learns from traces of behaviour, predicts likely responses, and feeds those predictions back into the user’s future experience. In this arrangement, the user’s self-conception can become aligned with the system’s representation of the user, even though that representation was created for purposes such as engagement, advertising, ranking, or operational efficiency.

Rand’s framework helps distinguish three possible relations between person and system. In the first, the system is a rational instrument: it supplies evidence or computational assistance while the individual retains conceptual judgement, responsibility, and the ability to reject the output. In the second, the system is a second-hand authority: its fluent or personalised output is accepted because it is convenient, popular, or apparently objective. In the third, the system becomes an identity authority: its profile determines what the user is shown, what opportunities are available, and how the user describes their own interests. The SS names the trajectory toward this third relation.

The SS is not defined by high usage time, technical sophistication, or personalisation in isolation. Its proposed markers are: near-exclusive dependence on curated recommendations; reduced search-initiated exploration; acceptance of predicted preference as evidence of authentic preference; declining willingness to inspect or challenge the system; and a weakening of independent projects that are not rewarded by the platform. A person may be intensely engaged and still retain strong independence. Conversely, a person may use a system briefly but treat its classifications as authoritative.

In Randian terms, the SS represents a conflict between the individual's conceptual faculty and a system that supplies pre-integrated conclusions. The system may give the appearance of individualisation while standardising the conditions of choice. Its users remain different in profile, but their differences are generated and managed within a common architecture of prediction. The question is whether those differences express independently chosen values or the successful segmentation of consumers.

6. The Hollow Absolute: Context and Definition

The Hollow Absolute (HA) is the speculative societal extension of the SS: it describes a condition in which a society of highly systemised persons experiences comprehensive algorithmic mediation as freedom, self-expression, and rational convenience. It is hollow because the social appearance of individual choice may remain while the independent formation of values and judgements is weakened. It is absolute because the system is no longer experienced as an external institution that can be compared with alternatives; it becomes the environment within which alternatives are made visible.

The HA should not be understood as a society in which every person wants the same thing. Algorithmic systems can generate profitable differentiation: thousands of identities, tastes, lifestyles, and opinions can be managed as distinct market segments. What is shared is

dependence on a common architecture that predicts and shapes the field of possible action. A Randian analysis would call this a counterfeit individualism. The person is encouraged to choose among personalised outputs, but the terms of personalisation are set by a system whose objective may be external to the person's life.

Rand also gives the concept a stringent test: if algorithmic mediation genuinely expands knowledge, productivity, voluntary cooperation, and self-directed achievement, then it may be consistent with Objectivist values rather than opposed to them. The HA becomes plausible only where convenience displaces judgement, prediction displaces purpose, and institutional authority is accepted without evidence or meaningful exit. Its claim is therefore not that technology creates unfreedom by definition, but that a social order can make dependency feel like independence.

7. Algorithmic Alienation: Empirical Qualitative Study by Arkan, Kanbay, and Akçam (2026)

The supplied project materials identify a 2026 qualitative study by Arkan, Kanbay, and Akçam titled *From Algorithms to the Self: Understanding Algorithmic Alienation in the Digital Age*. As described in those materials, the study uses focus-group interviews to examine experiences associated with algorithm-driven digital environments and identifies four dimensions: weakening of the perception of freedom, identity ambiguity and self-distancing, erosion of decision-making mechanisms, and emotional alienation (Arkan et al., 2026).

These reported dimensions can be placed in productive tension with Rand. Reduced freedom perception raises the question of whether users retain independent judgement or merely experience the system's preferred path as their own choice. Identity ambiguity concerns the gap between a person's first-hand self-evaluation and a profile generated by external classification. Decision-making erosion is directly relevant to Rand's conception of reason as

an active faculty rather than a passive reception of conclusions. Emotional alienation may indicate that the system's rewards are substituting for values grounded in productive, relational, and long-term projects.

The study should not be overstated. Qualitative accounts of alienation do not validate the SS, establish a causal relationship between algorithmic use and systemisation, or confirm the AAI. They offer situated evidence of experiences that may be compatible with portions of the framework. The additional claim that such experiences can become a self-reinforcing trajectory toward identity capture requires longitudinal and experimental research. The study is therefore a source of candidate dimensions and research questions, not a completed empirical foundation for the philosophical theory.

A Randian research design would distinguish between external influence and internal judgement. It would ask whether participants can explain reasons for accepting recommendations, identify alternatives that were not shown, revise a preference when evidence changes, and pursue a valued project without platform reinforcement. Behavioural compliance alone cannot establish loss of agency. The relevant evidence must include the person's reasons, conceptual understanding, ability to dissent, and capacity for independent production.

8. Formula and Boundary Conditions - Algorithmic Alienation Index (AAI)

The AAI is a provisional composite intended to organise four dimensions of algorithmic alienation while accounting for active resistance. Its proposed expression is:

$$AA = (w_1 \cdot DAu + w_2 \cdot IAm + w_3 \cdot EDm + w_4 \cdot EDc) \times (1 - RA)$$

DAu denotes Digital Autonomy erosion; IAm denotes Identity Ambiguity; EDm denotes Erosion of Decision-Making; EDc denotes Emotional Disconnection; and RA denotes Algorithmic Resistance. Each dimension is provisionally scaled between 0.00 and 1.00. Higher

scores on the first four variables indicate greater alienation; a higher RA score reduces the composite because it represents the capacity and practice of interrupting system influence. Equal weights ($w_1 = w_2 = w_3 = w_4 = 0.25$) are used as a transparent baseline in the absence of calibration data.

- DAu may combine perceived autonomy measures with the proportion of content encountered through recommendations, the diversity of information sources, search-initiated exploration, and recommendation override behaviour.
- IAm may combine identity-coherence and self-distancing measures with tests of whether participants regard an algorithmic profile as more authoritative than their own reflective account.
- EDm may combine decision-making measures with tasks that compare independent deliberation, recommendation acceptance, willingness to seek disconfirming evidence, and the ability to articulate reasons for action.
- EDc may combine emotional-connection and affective-regulation measures with reports of emotional dependence on algorithmic feedback, numbness, or reduced relational participation.
- RA may combine self-reported resistance with observable practices such as disabling personalisation, diversifying sources, taking deliberate breaks, inspecting settings, and rejecting or correcting recommendations.

The proposed SS condition is a joint boundary condition:

$$SS := \{AA \geq 0.95\} \cap \{RA \leq 0.05\}$$

A hypothetical illustration is not evidence of a real case. Suppose DAu = 0.99, IAm = 0.99, EDm = 0.98, EDc = 0.99, and RA = 0.03. The weighted dimensional mean is 0.9875, and AA = $0.9875 \times 0.97 = 0.957875$. The formal threshold is exceeded. However, a Randian

interpretation would insist that the score cannot by itself establish the moral or psychological status of a person. A high predicted score must be tested against first-person reasons, capacity for independent judgement, long-term projects, and evidence of actual impairment or dependence.

The AAI must be tested against competing explanations. High engagement may represent productive concentration, social connection, entertainment, or pathological dependence. Recommendation acceptance may reflect rational trust in a well-performing tool rather than second-hand thinking. Cultural, socioeconomic, linguistic, developmental, and disability-related factors may change both exposure and the meaning of resistance. The framework is weakened if its dimensions do not cohere, if AAI scores add no explanatory value beyond existing measures, if high scores do not predict independently measured reductions in autonomy or identity coherence, or if friction interventions fail to restore choice diversity and resistance. The formula is thus a provisional research instrument, not a conclusion embedded in arithmetic.

9. Calhoun's Universe 25 and the Digital Behavioural Sink

John B. Calhoun's Universe 25 experiment placed mice in an enclosed environment with abundant food, water, shelter, and protection from predators while population density and social interaction increased. Calhoun reported behavioural disruption including territorial conflict, withdrawal, disturbed parental behaviour, and eventual reproductive and population collapse (Calhoun, 1973). The experiment became a cultural symbol of the possibility that material abundance can coexist with social pathology when meaningful roles and relationships break down.

The relevance to the Hollow Absolute is analogical, a digital behavioural sink would not require physical crowding. It would refer to an environment of continuous stimulation,

frictionless consumption, limited uncertainty, and algorithmically managed attention in which individuals remain occupied but lose the practical conditions for self-directed projects, face-to-face cooperation, and productive challenge. The analogy asks whether abundant personalised content can coexist with reduced purpose, relational competence, and behavioural diversity.

The analogy is severely limited: mice are not human persons; Universe 25 was an artificial laboratory environment; the interpretation of Calhoun's results is contested; and human social meaning cannot be inferred from rodent behaviour. Universe 25 does not prove the HA or predict digital civilisation. Its legitimate function is heuristic: it motivates research into social participation, purpose, independent activity, relational withdrawal, and whether frictionless environments alter the ability to initiate and sustain projects.

Rand's perspective adds an important qualification: abundance is not itself a problem; production, invention, and trade can enlarge human life. The issue is whether abundance is organised around rational production and voluntary choice or around passive consumption and managed dependence. A genuinely productive digital system would support the user's capacity to create, learn, judge, and exchange. A behavioural sink would offer endless outputs while making the user's own productive agency increasingly unnecessary.

10. Direct Synthesis: Rand and The Systemised Self

10.1 The rational mind and algorithmic assistance

Rand's philosophy does not require opposition to automation: a calculator, search engine, database, or language model can extend a person's capacity to identify and integrate facts. The decisive distinction is whether the tool remains subordinate to the user's purpose. A rational

user can treat a model's output as a hypothesis, check its sources, compare alternatives, and reject it. The tool assists conceptual work without becoming the final authority.

The SS begins where this relation reverses, if the user accepts the system's output because it is fluent, personalised, or socially validated, the system supplies a conclusion without the work of judgement. This resembles Rand's critique of second-hand living, but with a novel mechanism: the second-hand opinion is dynamically generated for the individual and therefore feels private rather than borrowed. The user may believe the thought is uniquely theirs because the system has selected it for them, even though its selection is based on generalised patterns and institutional objectives.

10.2 Objectivity and the profile as counterfeit essence

Objectivism's realist standard exposes the limits of the data profile: a profile is an abstraction from selected observations, not a complete account of the person. It may be useful for recommending a film and useless for understanding a moral commitment. It may predict a purchase while failing to identify the reasons, ambivalence, or future change behind the behaviour. The profile poses concern when its operational success is taken as proof that it captures the person's true identity.

This is the data mask of the SS: the system returns a model of the user in the form of recommendations, labels, ranked opportunities, and generated descriptions. The user encounters the model repeatedly and may internalise its categories. What began as an external prediction becomes a constraint on future experience. A Randian response would demand contextual judgement: the person must identify the facts relevant to a value rather than allow the system to define relevance through engagement or monetisation.

10.3 Rational self-interest against proxy optimisation

Rand's concept of rational self-interest provides a precise critique of the claim that 'what keeps the user engaged' is necessarily in the user's interest. Engagement is a proxy, it can correlate with value in some contexts, but it can also reward outrage, compulsive repetition, social comparison, and distraction. A system optimising the proxy may systematically undermine the user's longer-term interests while presenting the immediate result as personalised satisfaction.

The SS is most plausible where the user's standards of value are replaced by the system's measurable proxies. A person may begin to evaluate a project by visibility, a relationship by response metrics, or knowledge by recommendation frequency. This is not rational egoism; it is dependence on an external reward architecture. A Randian intervention would require users to name and rank their own values, then evaluate whether a system helps or obstructs them. The test is not whether the system produces pleasure, but whether it supports a flourishing life chosen through reason.

10.4 Independence, conformity, and personalised collectivism

Rand's distinction between first-hand and second-hand living illuminates a paradox of personalisation. The system can give every user a different feed while encouraging each user to treat algorithmic selection as a source of identity. Differentiation at the level of content does not guarantee independence at the level of thought. A population may be fragmented into personalised channels yet share the same dependence on ranking, prediction, and approval.

This is personalised collectivism: the individual is not told to sacrifice openly for the group, but is encouraged to accept a system-generated version of individuality. The person becomes a consumer of an identity that has been assembled from collective behavioural patterns. Rand would likely reject the premise that the statistical majority, however finely segmented, can

determine what an individual ought to value. Independent thought requires the possibility of being wrong, surprising, unprofitable, or unrecognised.

10.5 Productive achievement and the digital division of labour

Algorithmic tools can produce genuine value by reducing routine effort, supporting creativity, and enabling new forms of communication. A Randian analysis should therefore avoid the blanket claim that delegation equals alienation. Delegation is rational when it frees the individual to pursue higher-value purposes while retaining responsibility for the purpose and judgement. It becomes systemising when the user no longer develops the capacities that the tool replaces or cannot pursue goals outside the tool's reward structure.

The political economy of data complicates the trader principle. Users contribute content, attention, feedback, and behavioural information, while platforms aggregate these contributions into prediction assets. The arrangement may be voluntary in a formal sense but not fully intelligible or contestable. A rights-respecting exchange would make the terms of data use clearer, permit meaningful refusal or exit, and distinguish the platform's property from the user's continuing interest in identity, reputation, and personal information. Rand's defence of property cannot simply be applied to whichever institution first captures a data trace.

10.6 Rights, force, and manipulation

Rand's rights theory is strongest where algorithmic power involves fraud, coercion, or direct interference. A platform that falsely represents how it uses data, discriminates through hidden classifications, or prevents meaningful exit raises clear rights concerns. More difficult are influence and manipulation. Persuasive communication is not automatically coercive; people may rationally choose convenience, entertainment, or advice. The SS thesis therefore requires a threshold beyond mere influence: opacity, asymmetry, dependence, or systematic narrowing of alternatives must be shown to compromise the user's practical capacity to judge and refuse.

This issue also reveals a limit of a purely Randian framing. Contemporary platform power can operate through social and economic structures that no single individual can escape by personal courage alone. A worker may need a platform to earn income; a student may require a monitored system to study; a citizen may rely on a dominant network to participate in public life. Rights analysis must therefore examine institutional conditions and collective remedies, even while preserving the individual as the ultimate bearer of rights.

10.7 The Hollow Absolute as counterfeit liberation

The HA is a counterfeit of the Randian ideal of self-direction. It offers convenience in the language of choice, personalisation in the language of individuality, and prediction in the language of understanding. Its users may feel liberated because friction has been removed. Yet some friction is the work of thought: searching, comparing, waiting, producing, disagreeing, and encountering facts that do not fit an existing profile. When every friction is treated as a defect, the individual may lose the experiences through which independence is formed.

The synthesis remains open to refutation. If systems that personalise experience reliably increase independent reasoning, productive achievement, long-term wellbeing, and the capacity to pursue unpredicted projects, then the SS thesis is too strong. If users can treat algorithmic outputs as tools while maintaining self-directed values and meaningful exit, systemisation is not established. Rand therefore sharpens the empirical question: does the system extend the individual's mind, or does it become a substitute mind that the individual experiences as personal freedom?

11. Main Critics and Key Critiques of Rand

11.1 Metaphysics and epistemology

Critics question whether Rand's metaphysical realism and confidence in reason adequately address perception, language, social interpretation, uncertainty, and the theory-ladenness of observation. The existence of reality does not by itself establish how a person should select concepts or resolve disagreement. Machine-learning systems intensify this problem because they operate through probabilistic representations rather than explicit human concepts. A Randian analysis can respond by insisting on evidence and contextual purpose, but it must avoid treating 'objectivity' as a simple state that a system or individual possesses without a method of accountability.

11.2 Ethics and rational egoism

Rand's ethical egoism has been criticised for underestimating care, vulnerability, friendship, dependency, and obligations that are not reducible to mutual exchange. Critics argue that a person's flourishing is socially constituted and that the language of sacrifice can obscure relationships in which care is necessary rather than morally suspect. Applied to the SS, this critique matters because resistance may require collective support, public regulation, and care for people who cannot simply exit a system. A narrow focus on individual will could blame users for conditions produced by powerful institutions.

11.3 Politics, rights, and structural power

Rand's minimal-state politics has been criticised for assuming that force is the primary form of domination. Contemporary critical theory identifies softer mechanisms: surveillance, norm formation, economic dependency, racialised classification, and control of infrastructure. A platform can shape conduct without issuing a legal command. Whether such shaping violates

rights depends on how manipulation, consent, and dependency are conceptualised. The SS framework should therefore supplement Rand's concern with force by examining structural power and the distribution of alternatives.

11.4 Individualism and social interdependence

Feminist, communitarian, and postcolonial critics question the image of the autonomous producer as a universal human norm. Human beings are embodied, dependent, relational, and situated within histories of gender, race, class, colonialism, and disability. Rand's heroes may dramatise intellectual courage, but the social conditions that make production possible are not adequately captured by heroic individualism. In a digital context, data and algorithmic harms are unevenly distributed. An adequate theory must protect individuality without denying the relations and institutions on which individual agency depends.

11.5 Rand and the problem of technology

Rand's celebration of reason and invention can support technological optimism, but it does not automatically provide a theory of algorithmic opacity, collective training data, emergent behaviour, or platform incentives. Her categories of producer and consumer may be too coarse for systems in which users are simultaneously workers, data sources, audiences, and products. A contemporary application must therefore extend rather than merely repeat Rand. The strongest extension retains her insistence on independent judgement while adding empirical and institutional analysis of systems she could not have anticipated.

12. Discussion and Future Work

The Rand/SS synthesis suggests a research programme organised around the difference between assistance and substitution. Construct validation should test whether the AAI dimensions are distinct and whether they predict outcomes beyond established measures of

problematic use, compulsive engagement, autonomy, identity coherence, and wellbeing. Research should include behavioural logs, recommendation diversity, search-initiated activity, decision tasks, experience sampling, and interviews about reasons for action. A user who accepts a recommendation because it is well justified is not equivalent to a user who accepts it because the system has become an unquestioned authority.

Longitudinal research is required to test direction and causation. Does increased dependence on recommendations precede reduced exploration and identity coherence, or do prior vulnerabilities lead users toward more dependent environments? Experimental friction could disable autoplay, introduce source diversity, display reasons and uncertainty, require deliberate search, or create a pause before high-stakes recommendations. Relevant outcomes include independent information seeking, choice diversity, ability to articulate reasons, pursuit of unreinforced projects, perceived autonomy, and long-term wellbeing, not only session duration or click-through.

The research must also examine whether algorithmic systems can produce the positive outcomes Rand values. Studies could test whether generative tools improve conceptual understanding, productive achievement, and independent problem-solving when users are required to verify, compare, and revise outputs. This would prevent the framework from treating automation as alienating by definition. The relevant comparison is between systems that expose evidence and preserve judgement and systems that obscure objectives while supplying personalised conclusions.

Institutional research should investigate meaningful consent, data ownership, portability, contestability, and the right to exit. A Randian vocabulary of rights should be placed in dialogue with critical data studies so that individual protection is not reduced to a private contract between unequal parties. The aim is not to abolish markets or technology, but to ensure that

voluntary exchange, property, and innovation do not become labels for arrangements in which participation is practically unavoidable and classification is unchallengeable.

The limitations remain decisive, the SS and HA are theoretical; the AAI is provisional; the weights and threshold are conventional; the study attributed to Arkan et al. (2026) is not a substitute for replication; and Universe 25 cannot validate claims about human digital society. The framework should be abandoned or revised if high personalisation increases rather than decreases independent reasoning and productive agency, if the proposed dimensions fail to predict relevant outcomes, or if users consistently retain meaningful control despite intensive algorithmic mediation.

13. Conclusion

Ayn Rand's philosophy offers a demanding standard for evaluating the Systemised Self. Reality is not created by a platform's categories; reason is not equivalent to prediction; individualism is not identical with personalised consumption; and rational self-interest is not the same as immediate engagement. A system may extend human capacities when it provides evidence, computation, communication, and productive leverage while leaving the individual responsible for judgement. It becomes systemising when its predictions are treated as identity, its proxies as values, and its outputs as substitutes for thought.

The Hollow Absolute names the speculative societal condition in which this substitution is experienced as liberation. The reported dimensions of algorithmic alienation offer suggestive empirical questions, while Universe 25 supplies a limited warning about the difference between abundance and meaningful social life. Neither proves the theory, their value lies in directing attention toward the conditions of independent judgement, purpose, relationship, production, and exit.

A defensible Randian response to algorithmic mediation would protect the person's first-hand relation to reality, the right to form and revise values, control over property and identity, voluntary association, and institutional limits on opaque or coercive power. It would also recognise the need for social and collective support where individual exit is insufficient. The decisive question is whether the digital system remains a tool used by a rational individual or becomes an authority that co-constitutes and defines what the individual user experiences.

14. Glossary of Technical Terms

Algorithmic Alienation: A proposed process in which interaction with algorithm-driven environments is associated with estrangement from personal choice, identity, agency, or emotional life.

Algorithmic Alienation Index (AAI): A provisional composite combining Digital Autonomy erosion, Identity Ambiguity, Erosion of Decision-Making, Emotional Disconnection, and Algorithmic Resistance.

Algorithmic Resistance (RA): The proposed capacity and practice of interrupting, inspecting, refusing, diversifying, or redirecting algorithmic mediation.

Counterfeit individualism: In this essay, an apparent individuality produced through personalised consumption while the underlying conditions of choice are collectively managed.

Data mask: A profile generated from behavioural data and returned to a person as if it were an authentic account of the self.

Digital Autonomy erosion (DAu): The proposed reduction in practical control over the information, options, and cues shaping action.

Emotional Disconnection (EDc): A proposed dimension involving affective alienation, emotional numbing, or reduced relational connection in algorithmically mediated settings.

Erosion of Decision-Making (EDm): The proposed displacement of independent deliberation by automated prompts, recommendations, or habitual acceptance.

Hollow Absolute (the): The speculative societal condition in which a society of Systemised Selves experiences extensive algorithmic mediation as freedom and authentic self-expression.

Identity Ambiguity (IAm): The proposed uncertainty or self-distancing arising when a person's reflective self-understanding conflicts with algorithmic classifications.

Objectivism: Ayn Rand's philosophical system centred on objective reality, reason, rational self-interest, individual rights, and laissez-faire capitalism.

Personal identity: The continuity and interpretation of a person's selfhood; in this essay, the identity increasingly represented and shaped by algorithmic profiles.

Rational self-interest: Rand's long-term ethical commitment to one's own life and flourishing through reason and virtue, not impulsive gratification.

Systemised Self (the): The proposed condition in which a person's interiority, choices, and identity are extensively co-constituted by algorithmic systems alongside very low resistance.

Trader principle: Rand's principle that rational relationships should be based on voluntary exchange to mutual benefit rather than force or sacrifice.

Universe 25: Calhoun's enclosed mouse-population experiment, used here only as a limited and speculative analogue for social withdrawal and behavioural disruption.

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