

# Alinskys theory of means and ends philosophy essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Shortly before he died, Saul Alinsky published a book, *Rules for Radicals* in 1971 in which he discussed his theory on means and ends. The theory of means and ends was covered in the book's second chapter. The main goal as to why Alinsky came up with that book was to enlighten the future community organizers that in bringing together the low-income communities, they can be empowered to gain political, social, and economic equality. According to him, this would be achieved by challenging the current agencies that promoted the inequality of the low-income communities. Alinsky used his life and personal experience in compiling several chapters of the book. The below essay seeks to address Alinsky's theory of means and ends, and Rawls (Theory of justice), Agamben and Innerarity point of views on the theory.

In his theory of means and ends, Alinsky puts across a question, which states whether the ends justify the means. According to the theory, the ends entail what individuals want, or goal, while means entail the activities of how to get what they want or to achieve the goal. In his discussion, Alinsky thought that the morality of actions did not require to be judged in itself, but rather be weighed against the morality of inaction. In the chapter on the means and ends, Alinsky stated that the issue of means and ends is usually viewed in a strategic and pragmatic manner by the man of action. In his arguments, he pointed out that the man of action only gets to ask of ends when they can be achieved and of means whether they will work for his plans.

In the establishment of the means and ends theory, Alinsky proposed that organizers of communities should ensure that ends justify means so that they can bring the activists groups in the community together. In the quest

<https://assignbuster.com/alinskys-theory-of-means-and-ends-philosophy-essay/>

of achieving a certain goal set in the community, the community organizers should, as well ensure that the ends justify the means. The main purpose of the philosopher in this argument is to look into the goal setting and achievement for the organizing of the community.

Regarding the ethics of means and ends, Alinsky came up with a set of rules of the means and ends that could be used by community organizers. The first rule that was established was that an individual's concern on the ethics of means and ends inversely differs with the individual's interest in the issue. It as well differs with the individual's distance from the scene of conflict. In this particular rule, the author means that the more an individual cares about an issue, the less they should care about the methods used in the quest to fight the issue.

The second rule was that the judgment on ethics of means relies entirely on the political position of the individuals who were making the judgment. Based on this rule, Alinsky's arguments stated that both sides of individuals involved in the dispute tends to claim and are required to claim that the means of those who are not on their side are immoral and that their own means are ethical, as well as rooted in the human values. This argument made by Alinsky seems to bear the truth especially on the wars in Balkans, Falklands, Iraq, Afghanistan and many more.

In the elaboration of the second rule of ethics or means and ends, Alinsky used the example of the American Declaration of independence. In this example, the Colonists and the British were the two parties in dispute. It is indicated that the document, which was drafted by the colonists, was

glorious to them while to the British, the document was deceit. The British viewed the document as a deceit because it failed to address their benefits deliberately. From this particular example, the British claimed that the means used against them by the colonists in the creation of the document were immoral and that their own means were ethical.

The third guideline of the ethics of means-ends that Alinsky set out was that, in war, the end mainly justifies any means. In coming up with this rule, Alinsky based his arguments on the fact that individuals are practical in the moment after which they find ways which help them justify this as consistent and moral after the fact. An example of Churchill was used in this particular rule of ethics. The fourth rule of ethics of means- ends is that the ethical judgment of the means should be established in the framework of the times, not from any other sequential vantage point, but rather from the actions that took place.

In the elaboration of the fourth rule of ethics, Alinsky used the example of Boston Massacre. In the Boston Massacre, the British shot dead one of the townspeople, Patrick Carr, who on his deathbed pointed out that the British, fired in self-defense because the townspeople were the aggressors. The statement made by Patrick Carr was a threat to the martyrdom that was invested in the townspeople by the Revolutionary leader, Sam Adams. It was quite easy for Adams to receive criticism from Alinsky though Alinsky points out that the current world is not involved in a war against the Empire of Britain. In his argument, Alinsky stated that the act should be judged through the lens of the times.

Concern with ethics tends to increase the number of means that are available was the fifth ethics of means and end that Alinsky established in his rules. In the elaboration of the rule, Saul Alinsky argued that when an individual has an alternate means, moral questions might enter in the equation. Suppose an individual lacked the luxury of an alternate means and has only one means, then there would never be the question of ethics. He came up with these arguments when the tactic of the Viet Cong was criticized for sending children to put up bombs in bars that the American soldiers were frequent customers. In addition to that, the sixth guideline of means and ends ethics is one that tends to engage more in ethical evaluation about means when the end is less serious. The elaboration that Alinsky made on this rule of ethics could be compared to the first rule of ethics. He pointed out that the moralizing of individuals tend to change based on how vital the end is to them.

Ethics is highly dependable on success or failure of an individual is the seventh rule of ethics that Alinsky established. In explaining this rule by giving, an example of a person who was an immoral terrorist in the past, but is receiving dignity in the present because the terrorist is now successful. He as well compares this to a past moral terrorist currently facing court charges because he failed. The eighth rule of ethics states that the morality of a means is dependent on whether the means is employed at a time of imminent victory or defeat. The elaboration of this rule focuses on the fact that ethics are determined by whether one is winning or losing.

The ninth rule of ethics of means and ends according to Alinsky is that the opposition tends to judge any effective means automatically as unethical. In <https://assignbuster.com/alinskys-theory-of-means-and-ends-philosophy-essay/>

his discussion on the rule, Alinsky pointed out that one of the major tactics that the opposition uses in the battlefield is to judge the means that their opponents have used against them as being immoral. The final rule of ethics that Alinsky came up with concerning means and ends states that individuals tend to use what they have as much as they can, and eventually clothe it with moral garments. In the elaboration of the tenth rule, Alinsky used the example of Mahatma Gandhi's idea of passive resistance.

Various philosophers had their general views on the aspect of means and ends, among them Rawl and his theory of justice, Agamben as well as Innerarity. John Rawl is one of the ancient philosophers who came up with philosophical theories. He is known for having contributed greatly in morals and political philosophy. Rawl's theory of justice was established in 1971, and it mainly focuses on justice as an important aspect in the governing and organization of the society.

Rawl's general view on means and ends can be clearly found in his theory of justice. In his theory, the philosopher points out that equal liberty for all individuals in the society is not just a means to an end, but rather a principle of justice. This particular principle of justice according to the philosopher are ought to be satisfied long before other political interests are satisfied. He further argues that equal liberty for all individuals in the society may be threatened by infringement suppose perfectionist or utilitarian principles are applied as principles of justice. In Rawl's theory of justice, moral conduct tends to apply to all the responsibilities of individuals towards others in the society.

In his theory of justice, Rawls advocates for individuals in the society to be treated as ends and not as means. His argument on this made his philosophical speculations be rooted in categorical imperative of Kant. According to the philosopher, a society should be viewed as a cooperative venture between equal and free individuals for the purpose of mutual advantage; hence, there is no need of other individuals in the society to use the less privileged as means to reach their ends. All persons in the society should receive equal treatment and that they should be viewed as ends. In his argument, he figures out that the cooperation that exists among the members of the society tend to make life better. This is because, cooperation enhances the stock of what it is rational for individuals in the society to desire regardless of what else its members may want.

Agamben is yet another philosopher of all time who contributed his views on means and ends. He is an Italian, and he has contributed greatly in philosophy and theory of radical politics. His views on means and ends were drawn from his publication of "Means without Ends". In his book, the arguments made by the philosopher were based on the politics of pure means. He pointed out that politics is spherical, but neither of an end in itself nor of means supported by an end. He explained further that politics is a sphere of a wholesome mediality lacking an end intended as the field of human action, as well as human thought. In the creation of this argument, the philosopher mainly focused on the claims that the coming politics must consider the dual issue of the post-Hegelian history theme of the end, as well as Heideggerian Ereignis theme. This is for purposes of coming up with a

new life, as well as politics such that both the state and history simultaneously end.

Still on the politics of pure means, the philosopher argued that it is equivalent to a less manifest but no less valuable aesthetics of pure means. In this particular argument, Agamben relied on Immanuel Kant's critique. He claims that the way an object functions well as a means to an end is not considered by an aesthetic judgment.

Daniel Innerarity is yet another philosopher who had his general views on the aspect of means and ends. The philosopher is a renowned Spanish philosopher, and he as well works as a lecturer of Philosophy. His view on means and ends is based on the social democracy. He argued that, in the quest of achieving social democracy, individuals should not use others as means of achieving social democracy as an end. Instead, individuals in a community should pull their forces together in achieving the desired goal of social democracy.

From a personal perspective, the means and ends theory initiated by Saul Alinsky is an essential theory when it comes to the organization of a community. His rules of ethics of means and ends are well stipulated for the community organizers to use in organizing their communities. Although the rules of ethics of means and ends theory are relevant, some of them are not considerate especially to those in the lower social class of the society.

Alinsky's theory on means and ends tends to work as a revelation for individuals in the society. For instance, the best way in which an individual can understand the concept of means and ends is by effectively studying the



rules of ethics of means and ends that Alinsky put across. Individuals should know the best means in which they can use in order to arrive at an end.

Individuals should as well as well consider the question that Alinsky pointed out in his argument on means and ends. The question was that, " should the ends justify the means?" From a personal view, the ends should be worth the means.

In conclusion, it is clear the Saul Alinsky played an influential role in the field of philosophy by coming up with the theory of means and ends. This particular theory was established by Alinsky with the purpose of looking into the goal setting and achievement in the organization of the community. He as well came up with a set of rules of ethics of means and ends. Apart from Alinsky, other philosophers such as Innerarity, Rawl, and Agamben introduced certain ideas on means and ends.