

The Philosophy of Objectivism:
A Personal Interpretation based on Ayn Rand's Novels
Anthem and Atlas Shrugged

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by

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Introduction

America today is greatly influenced by media. Television, radio, newspapers, billboards, magazines, and novels all affect the population. We form our philosophies and ideologies based upon the information we collect from such sources. Today's emphasis is on the human being, his worth and his immortality. Humanism, an "...attitude of thought or action centering upon distinctively human interests or ideals" (Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary 402), has been adopted to the extreme. Man is now considered not only a talented individual, but he is also considered invincible. According to John W. Robbins, author of Answer to Ayn Rand: A Critique of the Philosophy of Objectivism, "Objectivism represents one of the newest and most popular versions of humanism that has appeared in the twentieth century" (6-7). Ayn Rand's now prevalent philosophy reaches out to people through her fiction and nonfiction alike. To the dedicated reader, however, Rand's theory may seem a bit contradictory; while her nonfiction defines Objectivism, her fiction does not always support it.

Rand's novel Anthem is one example of a fictional work that does not support her philosophy. While her main characters may seem invincible, they are instead weakened by their intruding emotions. Atlas Shrugged, however, is one of Rand's greatest novels. Her entire theory of Objectivism can be found in the fifty-seven page speech given by her hero, John Galt. In this instance, Rand's fiction supports her philosophic beliefs. While Rand's non-fiction provides the theory of Objectivism, readers must select certain pieces of her fiction in order to see her philosophy supported.

Emotions and human ego often intrude upon logic. Rand, however, promotes reason and logic to the exclusion of such human qualities. Her own life, on the other hand, epitomizes this juxtaposition. While many occurrences throughout her younger years seem to indicate her search for the "true" intellectual, her fiction portrays characters of emotion and ego, humanists who combine both thinking and feeling.

Background

Ayn Rand was born on February 2, 1905, in St. Petersburg, Russia. In 1924, she received her degree from the University of Petrograd; two years later she arrived in the United States. Rand went to Hollywood and became a

screenwriter. Her moment of triumph, however, occurred in 1931 when she became a naturalized citizen of the United States (Britannic 9: 932).

In the late 1930s and the 1940s, Rand turned from screenwriting to novels. The Fountainhead was published in 1943 and Atlas Shrugged in 1957. In the area of nonfiction, Rand wrote For the New Intellectual: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand in 1961. From 1962-1976, she edited two journals that discussed her philosophy of Objectivism: The Objectivist (1962-1971) and The Ayn Rand Letter (1971-1976).

This popular writer, who so strongly advocated the ideas of laissez-faire capitalism and the importance of reason, died on March 6, 1982, in New York City. According to Nathaniel and Barbara Branden, authors of Who is Ayn Rand? as well as friends of Rand's for a time, three incidents occurred during Rand's adolescent years--events that reveal her nature and psychology. Similar events appear in her fiction as well.

1. At the age of thirteen, Rand and her family were running to Crimea in an attempt to seek refuge from the Communist factions. Stopped by a group of bandits, Rand stood face-to-face with death. Her reaction was this: she found comfort in the fact that she saw the image of Enjolras, a character from Victor Hugo's Les Miserables who dies while fighting for the insurrectionists. This

character was Rand's favorite: brave, strong, fighting for his beliefs. Once she had seen his image, she no longer feared death. Modeling herself after Enjolras, Rand felt death was an unavoidable, non-threatening occurrence. Not all of Rand's fictional characters share her convictions.

Rand's hero in Anthem, Equality 7-2521, is much different. This character runs away from the City because he realizes staying there means dying. Rather than face the World Council of Scholars with his "invention" of electricity, he gives in to the tyranny of his superiors. By living in the Uncharted Forest Equality 7-2521 is hiding his knowledge; he denies its existence. John Galt, of Atlas Shrugged is like Rand, however. He, too, is unafraid of death. John Galt returns to New York knowing he may die by doing so. His quest for freedom is more important than the threat of being killed.

2. Before the age of fourteen, Rand wrote a diary entry in which she proclaimed her decision to become atheist. Believing in God was too intuitive for Rand; she wanted nothing to interfere with her search for reason, with her escape from emotionalism. Here is where humanism is most obviously seen. Rand decides that man has no limitations. She claims that "Resignation, self-denial, and every other form of suffering, including self-destruction, are the virtues it [religion] advocates" (Robinson 30).

In Anthem, Equality 7-2521 says of religions, "At first, man was enslaved by the gods. But he broke their chains" (119). In this case, Rand depicts religion not as a freeing, enhancing ideology, but as an ensnaring trap. Rather than being free, man must sacrifice himself to God. Sacrifice is considered by Rand to be one of the greatest vices of man. In The Virtue of Selfishness Rand writes, "...man must live for his own sake, neither sacrificing himself to others nor sacrificing others to himself" (23). In yet another instance, Rand's fiction portrays her belief in the evils of sacrifice. In Atlas Shrugged, John Galt is found making a speech to the people of the United States of America. He gives the reader Rand's philosophy and states the following, "I am the man who does not sacrifice his love or his values" (936). Later he claims, "We [the men of the mind] are on strike against self-immolation" (937).

3. In 1921, at the age of sixteen, a teacher of Rand's suggested that she (Rand) become a mathematician. Rand, however, replied, "No, it's not enough" (Branden 128-29). To Rand, math was a method, a means to an end. It was not an end in itself.

Rand was influenced by mathematics. In her novel Anthem, she uses numbers to name her characters. She does not leave it at that, however. Her characters' names have

greater significance than this though. Rand uses mathematics in this instance as a means to a greater end. The fictional character Equality 7-2521, on the contrary, accepts the Council's dismissal of his invention. By withdrawing from society, he admits that it is the end. He does not pursue any other means of getting his invention into society. On the other hand, Dagny Taggart, the heroine in Atlas Shrugged, shows the same determination as Rand did. Vice-President in Charge of Operation for Taggart Transcontinental Railroad, Dagny started out in the company as a night operator for a small station (55). Instead of accepting this job as being good enough, she worked her way to the top of the company. The first job was not the end; it was the means to an end.

The Brandens cite these three incidents as most significant to the formation of Rand's ideas (126-29). They certainly provide readers with an interesting glimpse of the young Ayn Rand. There is one problem with citing such events as significant to Rand's ideology, however. This is the problem of contradiction. In the first occurrence, one sees the teenage Rand admiring a fictional character. This admiration is based on emotion and a feeling of spiritual identification with the hero Enjolras. This is not a logical, rational response; rather it is an intuitive one. Yet, the second event finds Rand discarding the

spiritual, intuitive feelings so natural in humans. There is nothing wrong with such contradictions; indeed all individuals change their philosophies as they mature. Rand, however, seems never to outgrow her opposing ideologies. In her fiction, both Anthem and Atlas Shrugged support Rand's acceptance of atheism; Anthem does not support the first or last of her three events, however. Once again, contradictions abound.

Rand's Philosophy

There exist three types of man according to Rand in her book For the New Intellectual: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand: the man of faith (Witch Doctor), the man of force (Attila), and the man of reason (Producer). Whenever men abandon reason, the first two types take control of society (8). Attila and the Witch Doctor, as Rand has labeled them, fight against reason. Attila conquers men's souls--he provides Attila with values (New Intellectual 10-13). These men cannot control nature, so they overpower those who do conquer nature. There is a third type of man, rare and superior, the Producer. Here is the man of reason, the thinker.

The Producers are the "forgotten men of history" (New Intellectual 18). Such men were Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. Rand believes Aristotle to have been the first intellectual, whose philosophy was intellect's Declaration of Independence.

Thomas Aquinas brought Aristotle's ideas back to mankind through his works (New Intellectual 20-21). While others may have been Producers, Rand recognizes these two in particular because her philosophy is based upon what she learned from them. She writes, "The only philosophic debt I can acknowledge is to Aristotle....his definition of the laws of logic and of the means of human knowledge is so great an achievement..." (About the Author, Atlas Shrugged).

In Atlas Shrugged, Rand entitles each of the three sections in tribute to this philosopher (About the Author, Atlas Shrugged). They are entitled Non-Contradiction, Either-Or, and A is A. Thousands of years may separate the Producers; they are, indeed, rare treasures in Rand's eyes.

Though Rand finds America breaking down, she does believe the United States was, at one time, led by the Producers. In For the New Intellectual she writes, "The first society led, dominated and created by the Producers, was the United States of America" (23). If this is the case, and if at one time the Producers were running society, then what has happened? What can be done to stop what Rand sees as the decline of this country?

First of all, according to Rand, intellectual freedom needs support. It cannot exist without help. Rand states in For the New Intellectual, "Intellectual freedom cannot exist without political freedom; political freedom cannot

exist without economic freedom; a free mind and a free market are corollaries" (23). Laissez-faire capitalism would best promote the reason of Objectivism, says Rand. Unfortunately, such an economic and political system does not exist in any pure form. Rand says that the United States, in the past, has come the closest of any country to laissez-faire capitalism. Nathaniel Branden in Who is Ayn Rand? agrees. He writes, "It was the United States of America, with its system of limited, constitutional government, that implemented the principle of capitalism--of free trade on a free market--to the greatest extent" (14). This country is not totally devoid of governmental interference, however. Antitrust laws and Medicare bring the ideas of Rand's "Equalization of Opportunity Bill" and socialized medicine very close. In order for Rand's philosophy to flourish she believes a perfect laissez-faire capitalist society must first exist. Today's society is faced with only two choices in Rand's opinion: capitalism or altruism. Depending upon which idea society selects to follow, the country will either cater to the individual or to the collective (O'Neill 16-17). Philosophers such as Rand and O'Neill offer no other alternatives for man. If society does not promote the individual, then the collective society will be praised and vice versa. There does not appear to be any choice in the middle.

Rand's perceptions of the United States lead her to believe that capitalism and, therefore, individualism should be the dominant theories. She sees America as being based upon man's self-reliance and self-esteem, both characteristics governed by the individual (New Intellectual 58). She summarizes these feelings in the following passage from For the New Intellectual:

The New Intellectuals must remind the world that the basic premise of the Founding Fathers was man's right to his own life, to his own liberty, to the pursuit of his own happiness--which means: man's right to exist for his own sake, neither sacrificing himself to others [altruism] nor sacrificing others to himself; and that the political implementation of this right is a society where men deal with one another as traders, by voluntary exchange to mutual benefit. (62)

There is no room in Rand's plans for Attila or the Witch Doctor, men who sacrifice others to themselves; altruists, the self-sacrificers, have no place in Objectivism either. Only the Producer--man of reason, can be found in Rand's philosophy. It is this man upon whom society must rest all hope.

Rand says any man or woman can be a New Intellectual. He/she must be willing to think, to know life is ruled by

reason, must value his or her own life, and must not be willing to let the Attilas or the Witch Doctors rule or to give in to apathy or despair (New Intellectual 57). Though these Producers are few, they do exist; society desperately needs to uncover them. One possible way to recognize the New Intellectual, the Producer, is to take two novels by Ayn Rand and locate the Producers in them. Then, by applying the qualities of these characters to people in society today, one can discover not only the New Intellectuals, but also the much-dreaded Attilas and Witch Doctors.

Usually the main character, the hero (or heroine) of Rand's story truly represents the Producer. These are the people Rand feels contribute to society. Such is not the case, however, in Rand's novel Anthem. Written in 1937, this book portrays a futuristic society in which total collectivism has been accepted as a normal way of life. This piece addresses the theme of individualism versus the institution; it explores the meaning of man's ego (New Intellectual 73).

The hero in Anthem is one Equality 7-2521. Each member of this novel's society is numbered; this suggests the impersonal quality of the times. Equality 7-2521, whose name signifies that all men are equal, regardless of their character and/or talents, has certain rebellious thoughts. He craves to break free of the binding routine.

Unhappy (in itself a crime) with his job as a streetkeeper, Equality 7-2521 sneaks off and finds relics from the "Unmentionable Times," the twentieth century. Using these materials, as well as the rational side of his mind, Equality 7-2521 creates, actually recreating electricity. Naively believing his superiors will welcome this time-and-labor saving creation, Equality 7-2521 shows the invention to the World Council of Scholars; they turn on him. Equality 7-2521 runs away to the Uncharted Forest where he is met by the Golden One, the woman he loves (also forbidden). Together they create their own life in a house built during the "Unmentionable Times." During this time, Equality 7-2521 greedily reads anything he can find. He discovers the concept of individualism; he finds the "I" in society and discards the "We."

Equality 7-2521 is to be Rand's Producer. He uses the logic and reasoning skills of a New Intellectual when he creates electricity. Though he lives in a futuristic society, many things, such as electricity and individualism, have disappeared. They are part of the "Unmentionable Times."

Next, however, Equality 7-2521 reacts in an emotional, Witch Doctor manner. He takes his discovery to the World Council in hopes that they will make him a scholar, thereby removing him from the home of the streetkeepers. This

is not a logical plan; it is one full of pride and emotion. Equality 7-2521 is not thinking clearly; he does not realize his "discovery" is a threat to the collective society in which he lives. All he sees is the opportunity to advance himself; he knows no limitations to his abilities. Later, he is totally stunned by the Council's negative response. He does not understand the fear of his leaders.

On another occasion Equality 7-2521 is blinded by emotion. This is when the Golden One follows him into the Uncharted Forest. He blindly trusts this woman, not even realizing she could mean danger (even death) to him. The Council could have sent her to dispose of the threat of Equality 7-2521, thus securing the collectivism of their society. Equality 7-2521 takes the Golden One with him to make a home for themselves, oblivious to such a possibility.

Still a third time the main character reacts emotionally. This occurs when he decides to return to his native city and save men such as International 4-8818. Equality 7-2521 does not consider that in doing so he will be handing others the values he wishes them to have--just as a Witch Doctor would. The Witch Doctor takes over men's souls; he provides others with values. Such a person is Equality 7-2521; he does not see past himself, yet at the same time he is altruistic--he is willing to sacrifice himself, to subject

himself to the wrath and violence of the authorities in order to "save" other men and women.

Anthem has no Producers, certainly not Equality 7-2521 or the Golden One--both of whom act on instinct and emotion. Rand may be seeking the New Intellectuals of the world, but she is not creating Producers in Anthem. This may be because Anthem is one of Rand's earlier works of fiction. Atlas Shrugged, published in 1957, offers a great contrast.

The major idea behind Rand's novel Atlas Shrugged involves the existence and the importance of the human mind to mankind. Rand's primary concern here is the disintegration of logic in the United States. Throughout the book, the country's handful of Producers retreat from society one at a time. The leader of this movement is one John Galt. Galt begins this "mind strike" and persists until he has reached everyone qualified.

The pathetic remains of America's society are too self-centered to grasp the enormity of the situation. These Attilas and Witch Doctors are confident that they will not only survive such a strike, but that they will also excel without the Intellectuals of the country. The political and economic structure of the United States is rapidly disintegrating, but the saddest part of it all is that America is blind to its ruin.

A few notable exceptions do exist, however. One is the previously noted John Galt. A true inventor, unlike Equality 7-2521, Galt has created a motor that will revolutionize the country. Rather than allow his motor to be misused by the Attilas and Witch Doctors, Galt withdraws both his motor and his mind from society. Galt sees others who have the potential to become Producers; these men and women he seeks out and persuades to join him. Often, Galt is rejected by these individuals only later to be joined after they have faced the ignorance and injustices of mankind.

Dagny Taggart, Rand's heroine in Atlas Shrugged, is the last person to join Galt. While she is a Producer, Taggart is also reluctant to give in to the demands of America's society. Taggart feels it is up to her to, in a sense, save the United States. Letting Taggart Transcontinental Railroad fall into the hands of the Attilas and Witch Doctors is a fear Taggart fights to overcome. After a long struggle within herself, Taggart finally chooses to join Galt and the others. The oath that Galt swore before Taggart returns to convince her of her correct decision. He states, "'I swear--by my life and my love of it--that I will never live for the sake of another man, nor ask another man to live for mine'" (993).

John Galt is Rand's new fictional hero. In Atlas Shrugged Galt has persuaded the men of the mind, the Producers of society, to go on strike. As each individual withdraws his or her intellectual services from society, the economy gradually collapses. The Attilas and Witch Doctors take over; men such as James Taggart, an emotional weak-minded railroad president, and Orren Boyle, an Attila businessman, control the entire social, political, and economic dimensions of society. Orren Boyle's views are seen in his statement that, "The only justification of private property is public service" (Atlas Shrugged 50). James Taggart's motto is "'Don't bother me, don't bother me...'" (15). These men, and others like them, feel society owes them opportunity and success. James Taggart compounds these sins by refusing to accept the reality that the political and economic structures of the country are collapsing, thus the "don't bother me" syndrome.

The John Galts and Dagny Taggarts of the world see things differently. Galt, in his radio speech to the United States, tells the Attilas and Witch Doctors Rand's personal philosophy. He says, "'Since virtue, to you, consists of sacrifice, you have demanded more sacrifices at every successive disaster....We are on strike, we the men of the mind....We are on strike against the creed of unearned rewards and unrewarded duties'" (936-37). In this par-

ticular novel, Rand's heroes and heroines are true Producers; her Attilas and Witch Doctors are the world's villains.

Within her fiction, as within her personal life, Ayn Rand has many contradictions. While Anthem's Equality 7-2521 is not an example of a Producer, John Galt is the epitome of Man Thinking. This may be due to Rand's own growth as a philosopher, as well as her development as a writer.

Conclusion

Rand is known not only for her great works of fiction, but also for her creation of the philosophy of Objectivism. This ideology has intrigued many modern Americans. According to William F. O'Neill, author of With Charity Toward None: An Analysis of Ayn Rand's Philosophy, Rand adamantly believes that man needs some philosophy--whether he realizes it or not (6). By having a philosophy, man builds self-esteem. Rand's response to this need is Objectivism.

Objectivism is reason and logic; there is no room in this philosophy for emotionalism or altruism. Man is to be self-reliant and individualistic. He needs to think of himself first and not worry about the lot of others. The New Intellectual is the Producer; he is not a Witch Doctor who gives others values, nor is he an Attila--one who uses

brute force to control others. The Producer is a rare man at best; realistically he does not exist in any true form. All men and women are combinations of Attila, the Witch Doctor, and the Producer. Just as there is no pure form of government, no single economic force in the United States, so there is no pure intellect.

In this imperfect world, there can be no pure Attila, Witch Doctor, or Producer. Rand herself supports a mixture of all three in her novel Anthem. Here is found Equality 7-2521, a combination of the Witch Doctor and the Producer. While on one hand, Equality 7-2521 acts as a New Intellectual by freeing himself from an oppressive community, he also possesses the qualities of a Witch Doctor in his desire to change other men into his own likeness. He also has the potential to be an Attila; when he returns to save his friend, International 4-8818; perhaps he will have to turn to physical force in order to get International 4-8818 out of the City. Man has the potential to be any combination of these three types of man.

Atlas Shrugged contains Rand's strongest Producer: John Galt. An ardent believer in the capitalist system, Galt fights, rationally, for all in which he believes. No longer will he sacrifice himself or others to the socialist society that is continuously growing and flourishing in twentieth century America.

While Rand's philosophy may be contradictory, it has broad appeal. In actuality, everyone is a combination of the Attila, the Witch Doctor, and the Producer. It is simply more difficult to identify the Producer in men today. Objectivism speaks to the man of force, the man of faith, and the man of logic: contemporary man. At the same time, the humanistic aspect of Rand's philosophy is also praised. Society admires the invincibility of modern man; this is most easily seen through the media of the twentieth century. Products that rebuild, enhance, and heal humans are popular. Television, magazines, and billboards all show people the new miracle cures for cancer, obesity, and unhappiness: products that strengthen humans to greater extents and humor them into a belief in their immortality. With such messages constantly bombarding men, philosophies and ideologies are developed based on such information. Thus, humanism, altruism, collectivism--all are born.

Rand's philosophy of Objectivism has found its way into the media through books and movies; with such a following, Objectivism cannot help but influence American society. Perhaps people will heed the warning Rand writes them in her novels, particularly in Atlas Shrugged. If media can work against society, then it can work for society.

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