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DISCOVERING **AYN RAND**

Modern Essays on Her Life & Ideas

Discovering Ayn Rand

*Modern Essays on
Her Life and Ideas*

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Part 1

Your Life and Personality

Ayn Rand's Career Advice Is Still on Point

Kirk Barbera

“Look.” Roark got up, reached out, tore a thick branch off a tree, held it in both hands, one fist closed at each end; then, his wrists and knuckles tensed against the resistance, he bent the branch slowly into an arc. “Now I can make what I want of it: a bow, a spear, a cane, a railing. That’s the meaning of life.”

“Your strength?”

“Your work.” He tossed the branch aside. “The material the earth offers you and what you make of it.”

All great writers are polarizing. Ayn Rand, author of *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*, certainly fits this proposition. People tend to either love or hate her work. But as Winston Churchill once said, “You have enemies? Good. That means you’ve stood up for something, sometime in your life.”

What cannot be denied is the enormity of Rand’s success. After having everything taken from her in Soviet Russia, she fled to America with nothing. She proceeded to work year after year, taking odd jobs; sometimes working on movie sets in Hollywood, sometimes working as a waitress. But she never lost sight of her goal: to be a novelist.

It would take decades—including enduring the great depression—before she finally achieved success in writing. Her books have sold well over 30 million copies. In fact, *Atlas Shrugged* has shaped America's intellectual landscape. And decades after her death, not a week goes by when she isn't mentioned somewhere in the public.

Below are some quotes taken from various novels, interviews, and other writings, where she explains her views on career success. The advice is applicable not only to Rand's success but, as you will see, to the careers of any great achiever.

Continually Seek to Understand

Every man is free to rise as far as he's able or willing, but the degree to which he thinks determines the degree to which he'll rise.

Do not let the hero in your soul perish, in lonely frustration, for the life you deserved but never have been able to reach. Check your road and the nature of your battle. The world you desired can be won. It exists, it is real, it is possible, it is yours.

In his autobiographical book, *Delivering Happiness: The Path to Profits, Passion and Purpose*, CEO of Zappos.com Tony Hsieh conveys his lifelong search for self-knowledge. Before starting Zappos, he founded numerous companies, some that failed miserably, some that succeeded but in the end, made him miserable.

Starting with a worm farm when he was 9, he moved on to a button-making business in junior high and then various endeavors in high school and college until he landed a well-paying job at Oracle—that bored him. He quit and started a

company, LinkExchange, which was the first click-banner ad company on the web. Eventually, he discovered that he hated what the company had become, so he sold it. Later, he started his own nightclub, then a variety of other companies.

Along the way, he learned lessons about what works and what doesn't, what he loved and what he hated. Finally, he got all that he wanted with Zappos. Ten years after its founding, it was purchased by Amazon for over \$1 billion.

Love the Work

"But you see," said Roark quietly, "I have, let's say, sixty years to live. Most of that time will be spent working. I've chosen the work I want to do. If I find no joy in it, then I'm only condemning myself to sixty years of torture. And I can find the joy only if I do my work in the best way possible to me."

If it's worth doing, it's worth overdoing.

"What in hell are you really made of, Howard? After all, it's only a building. It's not the combination of holy sacrament, Indian torture, and sexual ecstasy that you seem to make of it."

"Isn't it?"

In *Creativity Inc.*, Ed Catmull, President of Pixar Animation and Disney Animation, explains his lifelong love of technology's ability to bring art to life. As a boy, he sat transfixed as close to the T.V. as his parents would allow, waiting for the show "Walt Disney's Wonderful World of Color." Every week Walt himself would explain how the Disney magic was created. He demystified it. Catmull fell in love.

From then on he dedicated himself to the endeavor of using technology to bring art to life. He worked for George Lucas in a division of his company that would eventually be sold to Steve Jobs. Through twenty years of dedicated work, Catmull stayed true to his mission: to create the first feature-length animated film done completely on a computer. Until was born Toy Story.

Be Purposeful

I want to know that I've accomplished something. I want to feel that it had some meaning. At the last summing up, I want to be sure it wasn't all—for nothing.

A career requires the ability to sustain a purpose over a long period of time, through many separate steps, choices, decisions, adding up to a steady progression toward a goal . . . In the course of a career, every achievement is an end in itself and, simultaneously, a step toward further achievements . . . In a career, there is no such thing as achieving too much: the more one does, the more one loves one's work.

"I do not build in order to have clients. I have clients in order to build."

As described in Wharton Professor Richard Shell's book, *Springboard: Launching your Personal Search for Success*, the first TV Chef personality, Julia Child had one maxim for career success: "The more I cook the more I like to cook." That's it.

She found her craft and dedicated her life to it. Utilizing her youthful desire to become a novelist, she applied her writing skills in penning the 734-page best seller: *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*. Then she was asked to teach people how to cook

a French Omelet on a local television show. The rest is history. Though some random occurrences occurred in her life, there was one overarching purpose: cooking.

Money Is a Means, Not an End

Now I don't see anything evil in a desire to make money. But money is only a means to some end. If a man wants it for a personal purpose—to invest in his industry, to create, to study, to travel, to enjoy luxury—he's completely moral. But the men who place money first go much beyond that. Personal luxury is a limited endeavor. What they want is ostentation: to show, to stun, to entertain, to impress others. . . . At the price of their own self-respect. In the realm of greatest importance—the realm of values, of judgment, of spirit, of thought—they place others above self, in the exact manner which altruism demands. A truly selfish man cannot be affected by the approval of others. He doesn't need it.

“Money demands that you sell, not your weakness to men's stupidity, but your talent to their reason.”

In the latest biography about Steve Jobs, *Becoming Jobs*, the billionaire was quoted discussing money at different stages of his life. In his younger years, he admired men like Dave Packard, Andy Grove, Charlie Sporck and other empire builders. Jobs said “None of these people were really in it for the money. . . . Dave Packard, for example, left all his money to his foundation.” Later in life Jobs explains the purpose of building a great company, “The company is one of the most amazing inventions of humans, this abstract construct that's incredibly powerful. Even so, for me, it's about the product. It's about working together with really

fun, smart, creative people and making wonderful things. It's not about the money.”

Follow Rand's advice or not. Your life is yours, as she would say. But the ones who listen and learn for themselves are the ones who achieve a life worth living.

Before you can do things for people, you must be the kind of man who can get things done. But to get things done, you must love the doing, not the secondary consequences. The work, not the people. Your own action, not any possible object of your charity.

Kirk Barbera is a marketing strategist and storyteller.

Originally published on Smash Cut Culture, June 10, 2016.

The Sanction of the Victim

Steven Horwitz

Few libertarian authors generate more heated disagreement than Ayn Rand. Whatever her flaws, she could often be a very sharp observer of human behavior and human culture, and there are ways to put those observations into use beyond politics and in interpersonal relationships instead.

The primary moral message of *Atlas Shrugged*, I would argue, is the idea that evil has, to a large degree, only the power that its victims grant to it.

Consider the image that provides the book's title. Francisco D'Anconia asks a party guest,

If you saw Atlas, the giant who holds the world on his shoulders, if you saw that he stood, blood running down his chest, his knees buckling, his arms trembling but still trying to hold the world aloft with the last of his strength, and the greater his effort the heavier the world bore down upon his shoulders—what would you tell him to do?

Francisco answers his own question: “To shrug.”

The point here is that Atlas is only a victim because of his willingness to think he is morally obligated to suffer, to continue doing the thing that is crushing him.

This concept is refined further in the book and is best summarized as the importance of “the sanction of the victim.”

In the book's political economy, this idea refers to the fact that the creators and producers continued to work hard at what they love, even as those around them made it increasingly more difficult to do so.

Like Atlas, the weight of the "looters" continued to bear down on the attempts of the producers to keep the railways and steel factories open. What John Galt does is to try to convince them all that it is time to shrug—to withdraw their sanction from the very code that made them victims.

For most of the main characters in the book, the key moment is when they realize they are complicit in their own unhappiness because they have accepted the moral code of their victimizers. This is why Rand insisted, both in her novels and nonfiction, on the importance of philosophy, and especially ethics.

Characters like Hank Rearden don't think they need philosophy as they can just continue doing what that they love and ignore the people who try to bring them down. But without philosophy, Rand argues, Hank and the others who Galt tries to get to join him in his strike cannot understand their own victimization.

Choosing to ignore ethics simply allows others to dictate the terms of morality, and to the extent that the producers of the world tacitly or explicitly accept the looters' morality, they have given them "the sanction of the victim."

Whether it's Atlas shrugging, Rearden leaving his unhappy marriage, or capital going on strike, all of them are connected by the refusal to bear a burden that has been self-imposed by accepting without question the (mistaken) moral code of others.

This basic idea also has relevance outside the context of political economy, and understanding it can make your life a better place.

Rearden's relationship provides one example. If you are in a relationship where it seems impossible to please your partner, despite your best honest efforts to do so, it's likely to make you miserable. Here is where it's worth asking if you bear some responsibility by having bought into your partner's problematic value scale that makes pleasing him or her impossible.

By agreeing to a set of rules that has rigged the game against you, you agree to lose and forgo your own happiness. You have given that person the sanction that turns you into a victim by agreeing to a code that ensures you can never win.

Recognizing this point can improve your life immensely if you simply shrug. Naming what's happening and refusing to agree to the other person's rules is the first step to happiness, either by changing the rules or ending the arrangement. But you first must recognize the role played by your passive acceptance of a rigged system.

You can see this idea at work in the office as well. Co-workers who make you miserable often do so because they are able to convince you to play office politics by their rules they created, and those rules are likely to make you the loser. Again, recognizing that you do not need to accept those rules, and sanction the implicit moral code they involve, is the first step in freeing yourself from your victimization.

What *Atlas Shrugged* ultimately asks us to consider is whether we have thought carefully about the moral rules and ethical principles that we explicitly or implicitly accept. If you are unhappy with your life, and especially with your various professional or interpersonal relationships, it is worth asking whether that unhappiness is of a kind with Atlas trying to carry a weight that he cannot possibly support.

If so, withdraw your sanction of the rules of a rigged game. Shrug off that weight. Find new rules or different players. As Rand emphasized, your happiness is within your grasp if only you recognize your role in making it possible:

Do not let your fire go out, spark by irreplaceable spark, in the hopeless swamps of the not-quite, the not-yet, and the not-at-all. Do not let the hero in your soul perish, in lonely frustration for the life you deserved and have never been able to reach. The world you desire can be won, it exists, it is real, it is possible, it's yours.

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Ayn Rand and the Pony Express

Laurie Rice

On April 3, 1860, the first rider of the American Pony Express took off from St. Joseph, Missouri. Around midnight on April 13th, the final rider in the 10-day relay clattered on his horse into Sacramento, California. The mail he carried had been borne at a gallop across the desert of the American West. Ultimately, the journey of the Pony Express would continue criss-crossing the country for eighteen months, transmitting messages about the gold rush in California, Lincoln's inauguration, and the Civil War.

The Pony Express company conceded to the transcontinental telegraph in 1861, losing the government mail contract the company's founders had sought. But it had forever heightened expectations of speed in letter delivery, and, of course, had gained a place in the American imagination.

Over 150 years have passed since the inaugural run of the Pony Express, and there was no better celebration of its memory than Google's instantly iconic doodle. And there was no better entity to do it: The Pony Express's founders sought to compartmentalize and distribute a 1900 mile pilgrimage across America in order to speed up communication. Google now compresses massive amounts of data and connects billions of people in order to put a world of information at our fingertips.

The doodle was one of Google's occasional interactive logos, meaning it was actually a short video game, and it can now be found and [played in the archives here](#). It was designed by Mark Ivey, Kris Hom, Brian Murray, Kevin Laughlin, Greg Capuano, and Matt Cruickshank.

I was completely charmed by this game, and it's another instance of video games becoming a common cultural medium, emerging as a mainstream art form out of its rarified audiences, such as gamers or technology geeks. (See [Minecraft, Video Games, and Objectivist Values](#)). A search of the hashtag #ponyexpress on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram revealed people all over the internet sharing their high scores and their delight at the game's illustrations.

The game begins with a "play" prompt embedded in the Google logo, written out in Wild West font based on the real-life advertisements used by the Pony Express. A stylized, cartoon cowboy rides atop a comically round horse, their silliness heightened by the furious pace of the pony's tiny animated legs and the determined expression on the cowboy's face.



The game's soundtrack kicks in, which is a full-throttle clip-clopping gallop effect, three beats up and three beats down, with two extra beats which somehow ratchet up the excitement and heighten the sense of riding a slightly out-of-control horse in a slightly out-of-control commercial venture.

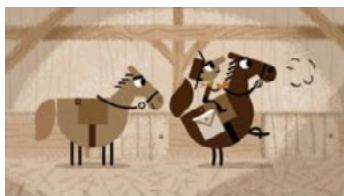
Real life riders ended their stint with either a handsome paycheck or various terrible incidents, such as exhaustion, injury, or attacks by native tribes. The Google pony rider faces cactuses, avalanches, rocks, structures, and bandits.

Google's pony has its own idea of things, and glares at the rider for mishaps, sympathizes about the snowbanks, mocks him for falling in water troughs, and claims all the credit at the end of the ride. The pony has its independent streak, but as the doodle's [summary](#) says, "Ultimately, what's more important than earning trust and respect from a horse?"



The one thing rider and pony always agree on is the importance of the letters, which you collect at top speed as you race through the route. The game entertainingly calls on references which are just at the corners of cultural memory, such as the special mail bag, called a Mochila, developed for the Pony Express to fit over the top of a saddle.

In the game, when your pony skids to a halt at the station, the mail bag flips forward through the air with the rider, both landing in place in a funny way on the next horse.



Although the silliness of the illustrations invites us to laugh, we're also earnestly engaged with the rider's task of getting the mail to its destination. Whatever the obstacles of his adventure, he is met at the end by a glorious reception line in an old-timey town, people cheering and waving parasols as pony and messenger sprint to the final station.

The lightness of the game isn't at the expense of the Pony Express, but reflects the lightness of hope in an amazing historical moment. We know the "Wild West" was a dangerous and difficult experience, and a complicated period in history, but it also represents a fantastic individualism and freedom.

We celebrate the off-screen entrepreneurs of the Pony Express, who saw an opportunity to create value and pursued it. We celebrate the adventurousness of the employees of the Pony Express (this is where Buffalo Bill rose to fame). And we celebrate the small town—an emerging social order receiving new information to be used for the next step toward prosperity.



We can see from the Pony Express game in what ways a video game is a form of art. In *The Romantic Manifesto*, Ayn Rand said, “The proper forms of art present a selective re-creation of reality [...] according to an artist’s metaphysical value judgments. . . . Art isolates and integrates those aspects of reality which represent man’s fundamental view of himself and of existence. . . . It tells man, in effect, which aspects of his experience are to be regarded as essential, significant, important.”

Literature reveals the artist’s value judgments through the use of concepts. The visual arts reveal the artist’s recreation of existence through sight and touch. Music reveals the musician’s choices about audio perception, and provides a direct experience of certain abstract cognitive and emotional processes.

Motion pictures, when presented as stories and not just as a record of information, became a form of art after the technology became available. (Incidentally, the first motion picture ever created featured a running horse, and solved the mystery of whether the horse completely leaves the ground while running: **It does.**)

Like motion pictures, video games combine the story telling of literature, the visual arts, and sometimes music. They are representational, as art must be. And they bring man’s concepts to the perceptual level of his consciousness, allowing him to grasp them directly, as if they were precepts. Video games are even implicitly Romantic, as they most often present a protagonist deliberately pursuing a goal within a knowable universe.

In some ways video games push the boundaries of Ayn Rand’s definition of art, which presupposes that the enjoyment of art is contemplative: the artist is the one who does the selective re-creating, the viewer responds. But the player’s participation in a game is still within the selective power of the game’s creator—I

can move the rider and pony within a certain range, but I can't direct the rider to do something else entirely.

The video game is a form of art which can present and explore human will. In the Pony Express game, I can have contained experiences of rationality, independence, and courage. I respond with emotions of determination, fear, frustration, excitement, and pride—a smaller scale of the same emotions that the owners and riders of the actual Pony Express must have felt in their adventures.



Video games let us live in a created world and make our own choices. They let us experience art in a manner similar to how we experience real life. Google's Pony Express doodle is a fine example of how video games are expanding their power as art, showing us how life could and ought to be.

- Play Google's Pony Express game.
- See "Minecraft, Video Games, and Objectivist Values" at The Atlas Society.
- Check out "Are Markets Ruining Video Games?" in the *Freeman*.
- [Behind the Doodle](#) by googledoodles on Youtube.

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Third World Objectivism

Shanu Athiparambath

Ayn Rand died on this day, 32 years ago. Today, young Indians are snapping up her books at a surprising rate. It's an apparent contradiction. Howard Roark, *The Fountainhead's* main character, is a man with strong principles. But he's also arrogant. Here in India, humility is considered the fundamental moral virtue. He might have been put away for a very long time had he lived here. In any event, he could not have reached many people through rational arguments, due to what Rand described as "the mystic muck of India."

But, for many young Indian men and women, Roark epitomizes individualism and strength of character. And much to the chagrin of their boyfriends, many women want their men to be more like Roark. A college mate once told me, "Women do not know that it is not possible for a man to be Howard Roark. He can only pretend to be Howard Roark. Hell, he can't even pretend to be Howard Roark."

It's strange. For nearly four decades after Indian independence, every aspect of the Indian economy was "planned" and "regulated" by the socialistic state. The economy has liberalized somewhat in the past two decades, but still remains one of the most controlled in the world.

Virtually every literate Indian has heard of Karl Marx. And so, the typical Indian's beliefs are much closer to Marx's.

Outside the market niche she has found, Rand is virtually unheard of. But that appears to be changing. Rand outsells Marx

sixteenfold in India today, which suggests rapid growth. This statistic is in all likelihood an underestimation: I first noticed her works in rickety street stall in a small town. The copies were pirated.

No one seems to know why Rand is becoming so popular in India. India has a huge population, but even today, English-language fiction is read by a minority elite. It is true that Rand wrote popular fiction. Marx's prose is dense. But that still does not explain why Rand outsells even many well-known Indian writers and best-selling western writers in Indian markets. Even in the United States, where various strands of thought have found their own niches, Rand's views are considered way outside the mainstream. It is a minor miracle that she could build a whole movement in a western capitalistic democracy. But why is she becoming increasingly popular in societies that bear no resemblance whatsoever to whatever ideal society she had in mind?

I can only hypothesize. But part of the reason must be that the intelligent young men and women in traditional, conservative societies know that the dystopian world her fiction depicts is not too unlike the world in which they live. Indians have experienced the extremities of government tyranny firsthand. Libertarians often cite the government as the source of evil, but not all evils flow from the State to the masses. The inept, corrupt governments of the Third World can be a reflection of the popular soul. In India, at least, the State can institutionalize the little people's vices.

In *The Fountainhead*, Peter Keating's mother dictates his life with the sweetest of smiles on her face, saying, "Petey, I never think anything. It's up to you. It's always been up to you." The villain in *The Fountainhead* is Ellsworth Toohey, a manipulative intellectual, and not a government bureaucrat or a politician. One character says Gail Wynand represents everything that's wrong with the world, but Wynand is a newspaper publisher.

People subscribed to *The New York Banner* because they preferred vulgarity over truth and beauty, and not because the politicians or bureaucrats forced them to.

Rand was one of those writers who saw politics for what it is—inside and out, macro to micro, down to the level of the individual.

It is probably futile to curse mediocrity, but in the Third World, ineptitude and politicking reach epic proportions—and are present in nearly every aspect of our lives. As in Rand’s fiction, this is not always official, congressional politics. It is true that many rebellious Indian teens find Rand’s individualistic worldview appealing. But I believe they also feel that the world around them reminds them of the poolroom that Wynand once worked in. That is, the young men and women in India see nothing but dishonesty and corruption around them.

Even in the best hospitals in the largest Indian cities, the doctors diagnose patients without really speaking to them. When you lie on a hospital bed, you know you have written a blank check to doctors who have life-and-death power over you. On November 9, 1965, when the lights of New York City and the entire Eastern Seaboard went out, an admirer wrote to Rand, “There is a John Galt.” But in India today, even in the largest cities, the lights can go out at any moment.

So, appearances aside, it is hardly surprising then that Rand appeals to young men and women in collectivist societies. She told them the truth about the world in which they live.

Shanu Athiparambath is a writer who lives in Delhi. He is working on his debut novel on human heterogeneity.

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Part 2

Today's Politics

Did Edward Snowden Draw His Main Inspiration from Ayn Rand?

Jeffrey A. Tucker

Something has always bugged me about the case of Edward Snowden. He worked in a massive professional machinery of enormous power, prestige, and money. His world was the pinnacle of achievement for his skill set. Everything about the massive surveillance state broadcast that there was no escape. Everything about his environment demanded compliance, service, and submission. His job was to check at the door his individualism, integrity, and character and become a faithful cog in a machinery of superiors.

Everyone else went along. They didn't question it. If they did question the goings on, it was purely abstract. Surely there was no real escape. You could only adapt, enjoy the power, take the money, and die someday.

Snowden, for whatever reason, decided to take a different direction. Alone, and without consulting even those closest to him, he struck out on his own. He took the unfathomable risk of copying all the most pertinent files. He put them on a tiny disk and embedded it in the Rubik's cube he often carried. He plotted his escape. He walked calmly out of the National Security Agency and boarded a flight to Hong Kong, where he met two reporters he had contacted through encrypted email. What he revealed rocked the world.

Throughout it all, he was scared but never indecisive. Unimpressed by the machinery all around him, he saw it not as his master and not even his equal. He saw it all as beatable. He knew that what he was doing was right, and he did it all because—against all odds—he thought he could make a difference. He literally risked his life in the service of human freedom.

Why?

What would drive a man to do such a thing? Many may have thought about it. That running a global and indiscriminate dragnet was both illegal and immoral was not unknown to his colleagues. But only Snowden stepped up to do something about it. It's actually remarkable that such a man exists in our time.

Having followed the Snowden case carefully, this always puzzled me. It's fine to say he has character, that he acted on principle, that he showed courage. That's all great but where did this come from? He is not particularly religious. He seems to have a libertarian streak, but he doesn't seem particularly ideological in his politics. I've always wondered: what is the moral guide that led Snowden to do the unthinkable in the service of truth?

Here is where I'm deeply grateful for Oliver Stone's new movie *Snowden*.

Rand Was His Muse

There is a moment early on in the movie when Snowden is being interviewed for his first national security position. He is asked what books have influenced him. He mentions Joseph Campbell. (The influence on Snowden of Campbell's notion of the "Hero's Journey" would itself be a fascinating topic to pursue.) And then, crucially, Ayn Rand. The interviewer quotes a line from *Atlas Shrugged*: "one man can stop the motor of the world."

Snowden agrees, and the movie proceeds.

This is it! This makes sense of so much. In the novel, everyone faces a gigantic and oppressive state apparatus that is gradually pillaging the producers and driving society into poverty. Each person who confronts this machine must make a decision: join it, defend it, ignore it, or fight it through some means. Those who take the courageous route know better than to take up arms. Instead, they do something more devastating. They walk away and deny the regime their own services. They decline to partake in their own destruction. In so doing, they are doing society a great service of refusing to have their talents contribute to further oppressing society.

There we have it. Edward Snowden must have had this riveting story in his mind. As any reader of *Atlas* can attest, the book creates in your mind a huge and dramatic world filled with epic moral decisions. People are tested by their willingness to stand up for what is right: to stand as individuals confronting gigantic systems against which they otherwise appear to be powerless. Her message is that one human mind, inspired to action by moral principle, can in fact change the world.

Here is where Rand's book is decidedly different from all the other postwar literature in defense of freedom against the state. She was emphatic about the individual moral choice. She created a fictional world, a tactile and unforgettable world, in which history turns on doing what is right, regardless of the personal risk and even in the face of material deprivation. (The silliest rap on Rand is that she favored material acquisition above everything else; the truth is that she favored moral courage more than security, power, or even a steady income.)

Why Is This in the Movie?

This movie was made in close cooperation with Edward Snowden himself, and he actually appears in the final moments of the film. He surely signed off on all the biographical elements of the film, including this one.

Why would Oliver Stone—a famously left-wing, conspiracy-driven producer—want to include this bit of biographical detail? Part of the drama of the film chronicles Snowden’s own ideological enlightenment, from being an uncritically pro-American patriot type to becoming a deep skeptic of the military-industrial complex. In order to see the truth, he had to gradually shed his conservatism and embrace a broader point of view.

It is possible that Stone included this vignette about Rand as a way of illustrating his right-wing biases and how they gradually became something else in the face of evidence. I don’t have evidence for this, so it is pure speculation on my part. But it makes sense given the popular impression of Rand as some kind of goddess of right-wing thinking.

Moral Courage

But the truth of Rand’s influence is very different. One way to understand her books is as entirely autobiographical. She was born in Russia and fated to live under communist despotism. Had she acquiesced to the systems around her, she might have lived and died in poverty and obscurity. But she wanted a different life. She wanted her life to matter. So she plotted her own escape from Russia. She came to the US and lived briefly in Chicago.

Alone she moved again, this time to Hollywood and built a career as scriptwriter, before writing her own plays and becoming a novelist. This peasant born in Russia made a brilliant career for herself, becoming one of the 20th century’s most influential

minds—all without an academic career or any champions in the centers of power.

Rand's greatest characters follow a similar path of refusing to go along just because powerful and rich people are in charge. Her message is that one person with a mind and moral stamina can stand up to even the most powerful machinery of oppression. It takes cunning, daring, and a single-minded focus on doing what is right by one's own lights.

This is precisely what Snowden did. He followed the example of John Galt. Instead of shutting off the motor of the world that he invented, Snowden sought to shut down the motor of the state that he was helping to build. And he did it because it was the right thing to do.

If Stone included this passage to show Snowden's evolution, he is deeply mistaken. It makes far more sense to me that Rand was actually Snowden's muse throughout. And this makes me personally very proud of the mighty contribution she made in this world. Though she died in 1982, her influence is still being felt in our times. In fact, her influence is usually underestimated.

If I'm right about this, Rand's influence is still making the world a freer place.

And consider whether he made the right choice. He is now one of the world's most in-demand speakers. He can pack in a crowd anywhere in the world. He is a leading spokesperson for human dignity, privacy, and freedom. Thanks to technology, he now reaches billions and billions. He has a lifetime of good work ahead of him—all because of the choices he made.

Ayn, you have done it again.

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Crony-in-Chief: Donald Trump Epitomizes Ayn Rand's "Aristocracy of Pull"

Steve Simpson

After Donald Trump announced a number of cabinet picks who happen to be fans of Ayn Rand, a flurry of articles appeared claiming that Trump intended to create an Objectivist cabal within his administration.

"Ayn Rand-acolyte Donald Trump stacks his cabinet with fellow Objectivists," proclaimed one article. Would that it were so. The novelist and philosopher Ayn Rand was a passionate champion of individual freedom and laissez-faire capitalism and a fierce opponent of authoritarianism. For her, government exists solely to protect our rights, not to meddle in the economy or to direct our private lives.

A president who truly understood Rand's philosophy would not be cozying up to Putin, bullying companies to keep manufacturing plants in the United States, or promising **"insurance for everybody"** among many other things Trump has said and done.

And while it's certainly welcome news that several of Trump's cabinet picks admire Rand, it's not surprising. Her novel ***Atlas Shrugged*** depicts a world in decline as it slowly strangles its most productive members. The novel celebrates the intelligent and creative individuals who produce wealth, many of whom

are businessmen. So it makes sense that businessmen like Rex Tillerson and Andy Puzder would be among the novel's millions of fans.

But a handful of fans in the administration hardly signals that Trump's would be an "Ayn Rand" administration. The claims about Rand's influence in the administration are vastly overblown.

Pull-Peddling Cronies

Even so, there is at least one parallel we can draw between a Trump administration and Rand's novels, although it's not favorable to Trump. As a businessman and a politician, Trump **epitomizes a phenomenon** that Rand harshly criticized throughout her career, especially in *Atlas Shrugged*. Rand called it "pull peddling." The popular term today is "cronyism." But the phenomenon is the same: attempting to succeed, not through production and trade, but by trading influence and favors with politicians and bureaucrats.

Cronyism has been a big issue in recent years among many thinkers and politicians on the Right, who have criticized "big government" because it often favors some groups and individuals over others or "picks winners and losers."

Commentators on the Left, too, often complain about influence peddling, money in politics, and special interests, all of which are offered as hallmarks of corruption in government. And by all indications, Trump was elected in part because he was somehow seen as a political "outsider" who will "drain the swamp."

But as the vague phrase "drain the swamp" shows, there's a lot more concern over cronyism, corruption, and related issues than there is clarity about what the problem actually is and how to solve it.

Ayn Rand had unique and clarifying views on the subject. With Trump in office, the problem she identified is going to get worse. Rand's birthday is a good time to review her unique explanation of, and cure for, the problem.

The Problem: Unlimited Government

The first question we need to be clear about is: What, exactly, is the problem we're trying to solve? "Drain the swamp," "throw the bums out," "clean up Washington," "outsiders" vs. "insiders"—these are all platitudes that can mean almost anything to anyone.

Are lobbyists the problem? Trump and his advisers seem to think so. They've vowed to keep lobbyists out of the administration, and Trump has signed an order forbidding all members of his administration from lobbying for 5 years.

It's not clear whether these plans will succeed, but why should we care? Lobbyists are individuals hired to represent others with business before government. We might lament the existence of this profession, but blaming lobbyists for lobbying is like blaming lawyers for lawsuits. Everyone seems to complain about them right up until the moment that they want one.

The same goes for complaints about the clients of lobbyists—the hated "special interests." Presidents since at least Teddy Roosevelt have vowed to run them out of Washington yet, today, interest groups abound. Some lobby for higher taxes, some for lower taxes. Some lobby for more entitlements, some for fewer or for more fiscal responsibility in entitlement programs. Some lobby for business, some for labor, some for more regulations on both. Some lobby for freer trade, some for trade restrictions. The list goes on and on. Are they *all* bad?

The question we should ask is, Why do people organize into interest groups and lobby government in the first place?

The popular answer among free-market advocates is that government has too much to offer, which creates an incentive for people to tap their “cronies” in government to ensure that government offers it to them. Shrink government, the argument goes, and we will solve the problem.

Veronique de Rugy, senior fellow at the Mercatus Center, **describes** cronyism in these terms:

This is how cronyism works: A company wants a special privilege from the government in exchange for political support in future elections. If the company is wealthy enough or is backed by powerful-enough interest groups, the company will get its way and politicians will get another private-sector ally. The few cronies “win” at the expense of everyone else.

(Another term for this is “rent seeking,” and many other people define it roughly the same way.)

There’s a lot of truth to this view. Our bloated government has vast power over our lives and trillions of dollars worth of “favors” to dole out, and a seemingly endless stream of people and groups clamor to win those “favors.” As a lawyer who opposes campaign finance laws, I’ve often said that the problem is not that money controls politics, it’s that politics controls money—and property, and business, and much of our private lives as well.

Still, we need to be more precise. “Favors,” “benefits,” and “privileges” are too vague a way to describe what government has to offer. Among other things, these terms just raise another question: Which benefits, favors, or privileges *should* government offer? Indeed, many people have asked that question of cronyism’s critics. Here’s how the *Los Angeles Times* put it in an editorial

responding to the effort by some Republicans to shut down the **Export-Import Bank**:

Governments regularly intervene in markets in the name of public safety, economic growth or consumer protection, drawing squawks of protest whenever one interest is advanced at the expense of others. But a policy that's outrageous to one faction—for example, the government subsidies for wind, solar and battery power that have drawn fire on the right—may in fact be a welcome effort to achieve an important societal objective.

It's a valid point. Without a way to tell what government should and should not do, whose interests it should or should not serve, complaints about cronyism look like little more than partisan politics. When government favors the groups or policies you like, that's good government in action. When it doesn't, that's cronyism.

Government Force and Legal Plunder

In Rand's view, there *is* a serious problem to criticize, but few free-market advocates are clear about exactly what it is. Simply put, the problem is the misuse of the power that government possesses, which is *force*. Government is the institution that possesses a legal monopoly on the use of force.

The question we need to grapple with is, how should it use that power?

Using terms like “favors,” “privileges,” and “benefits” to describe what government is doing when cronyism occurs is not just too vague, it's far too benign. These terms obscure the fact that what people are competing for when they engage in cronyism is the “privilege” of legally using force to take what others have

earned or to prevent them from contracting or associating with others. When groups lobby for entitlements—whether it’s more social security or Medicare or subsidies for businesses—they are essentially asking government to take that money by force from taxpayers who earned it and to give it to someone else. Call it what you want, but it ultimately amounts to stealing.

When individuals in a given profession lobby for occupational licensing laws, they are asking government to grant a select group of people a kind of monopoly status that prevents others who don’t meet their standards from competing with them—that is, from contracting with willing customers to do business.

These are just two examples of how government takes money and property or prevents individuals from voluntarily dealing with one another. There are many, many more. Both Democrats and Republicans favor these sorts of laws and willingly participate in a system in which trading on this power has become commonplace.

“Rent seeking” doesn’t capture what is really going on. Neither, really, does “cronyism.” They’re both too tame.

A far better term is the one used by nineteenth-century French economist Frederic Bastiat: **“legal plunder.”** Rand uses the term “political pull” to describe those who “succeed” by convincing friends in government to use the law to plunder others or to prevent them from competing.

And she uses the phrase “the Aristocracy of Pull,” which is the title of a whole chapter in *Atlas Shrugged*, to describe a society in which political pull, rather than production and trade, has become the rule. It’s a society that resembles feudalism, in which people compete to gain the favor of government officials in much the same way that people in feudal times competed for the favor of the king so they could use that power to rule over one another and plunder as they pleased.

The cause, for Rand, is not the size of government, but what we allow it to do. When we allow government to use the force it possesses to go beyond protecting our rights, we arm individuals to plunder one another and turn what would otherwise be limited instances of corruption or criminality into a systemic problem.

For example, when politicians promise to increase social security or to make education “free,” they are promising to take more of the incomes of taxpayers to pay for these welfare programs. When they promise to favor unions with more labor laws or to increase the minimum wage, they are promising to restrict businesses’ right to contract freely with willing workers. When they promise to “keep jobs in America,” they are promising to impose tariffs on companies that import foreign goods. The rule in such a system becomes: plunder or be plundered. What choice does anyone have but to organize themselves into pressure groups, hire lobbyists, and join the fray?

Rand memorably describes this process in the famous “**money speech**” in *Atlas Shrugged*:

But when a society establishes criminals-by-right and looters-by-law—men who use force to seize the wealth of *disarmed* victims—then money becomes its creators’ avenger. Such looters believe it safe to rob defenseless men, once they’ve passed a law to disarm them. But their loot becomes the magnet for other looters, who get it from them as they got it. Then the race goes, not to the ablest at production, but to those most ruthless at brutality. When force is the standard, the murderer wins over the pickpocket. And then that society vanishes, in a spread of ruins and slaughter.

Observe what kind of people thrive in such a society and who their victims are. There’s a big difference between the two, and Rand never failed to make a moral distinction between them.

Wealth Creators vs. Wealth Appropriators

In the early 1990s, Atlantic City resident Vera Coking found herself in the sights of a developer who wanted to turn the property on which she lived into a casino parking lot. The developer made what he thought was a good offer, but she refused. The developer became incensed, and instead of further trying to convince Coking to sell or finding other land, he did what a certain kind of businessman has increasingly been able to do in modern times. He pursued a political “solution.” He convinced a city redevelopment agency to use the power of eminent domain to force Coking to sell.

The developer was Donald Trump. His ensuing legal battle with Coking, which he lost, was the first of a number of controversies in recent decades over the use of eminent domain to take property from one private party and give it to another.

Most people can see that there’s a profound moral distinction between the Trumps and their cronies in government on the one hand and people like Vera Coking on the other. One side is using law to force the other to give up what is rightfully theirs. To be blunt, one side is stealing from the other.

But the victims of the use of eminent domain often lobby government officials to save their property just as vigorously as others do to take it. Should we refer to all of them as “special interests” and damn them for seeking government “favors”? The answer should be obvious.

But if that’s true, why do we fail to make that distinction when the two sides are businesses—as many do when they criticize “Wall Street,” or the financial industry as a whole, or when they complain about “crony capitalism”—as though capitalism as such is the problem? Not all businesses engage in pull-peddling, and

many have no choice but to deal with government or to lobby in self-defense.

John Allison, the former CEO of BB&T bank (and a former board member of the Ayn Rand Institute, where I work), refused to finance transactions that involved the use of eminent domain after the Supreme Court issued its now-infamous decision in *Kelo v. City of New London*, which upheld the use of eminent domain to transfer property from one private party to another. Later, Allison lobbied against the TARP fund program after the financial crisis, only to be **pressured** by government regulators into accepting the funds. In an industry as heavily regulated as banking, there's little a particular bank can do to avoid a situation like that.

Another example came to light in 2015, when a number of news articles ran stories on United Airlines's so-called "**Chairman's Flight**." This was a flight from Newark to Columbia, South Carolina, that United continued to run long after it became clear it was a money-loser. Why do that? It turns out the chairman of the Port Authority, which controls access to all the ports in New York and New Jersey, had a vacation home near Columbia. During negotiations over airport fees, he made it clear that he wanted United to keep the flight, so United decided not to cancel it. Most of the news stories blamed United for influence-peddling. Only Holman Jenkins of the *Wall Street Journal* called it what it was: **extortion** by the Port Authority chairman.

The point is, there's a profound moral difference between trying to use government to plunder others and engaging with it essentially in self-defense. It's the same difference between a mobster running a protection racket and his victims. And there's an equally profound moral difference between people who

survive through production and trade, and those who survive by political pull.

Rand spells out this latter difference in an essay called “**The Money Making Personality:**”

The *Money-Maker* is the discoverer who translates his discovery into material goods. In an industrial society with a complex division of labor, it may be one man or a partnership of two: the scientist who discovers new knowledge and the *entrepreneur*—the businessman—who discovers how to use that knowledge, how to organize material resources and human labor into an enterprise producing marketable goods.

The *Money-Appropriator* is an entirely different type of man. He is essentially noncreative—and his basic goal is to acquire an unearned share of the wealth created by others. He seeks to get rich, not by conquering nature, but by manipulating men, not by intellectual effort, but by social maneuvering. He does not produce, he redistributes: he merely switches the wealth already in existence from the pockets of its owners to his own.

The *Money-Appropriator* may become a politician—or a businessman who “cuts corners”—or that destructive product of a “mixed economy”: the businessman who grows rich by means of government favors, such as special privileges, subsidies, franchises; that is, grows rich by means of *legalized force*.

In *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand shows these two types in action through characters like steel magnate Hank Rearden and railroad executive Dagny Taggart, two brilliant and productive business people who carry a crumbling world on their shoulders. On the opposite end of the spectrum are Orren Boyle, a competitor of Rearden’s, and Jim Taggart, Dagny’s brother and CEO of the

railroad where she works. Both constantly scheme to win special franchises and government contracts from their friends in Washington and to heap regulations on productive businesses like Rearden's. Rearden is forced to hire a lobbyist in Washington to try to keep the bureaucrats off of his back.

When we damn "special interests" or businesses in general for cronyism, we end up grouping the Reardens in with the Orren Boyles, which only excuses the behavior of the latter and damns the former. This attitude treats the thug and his victim as morally equivalent. Indeed, this attitude makes it seem like success in business is as much a function of whom you know in Washington as it is how intelligent or productive you are.

It is unfortunately true that many businesses use political pull, and many are a mixture of money-makers and money-appropriators. So it can seem like success is a matter of government connections. But it's not true in a fundamental sense. The wealth that makes our modern world amazing—the iPhones, computers, cars, medical advances and much more—can only be created through intelligence, ingenuity, creativity and hard work.

Government does not create wealth. It can use the force it possesses to protect the property and freedom of those who create wealth and who deal with each other civilly, through trade and persuasion; or it can use that force to plunder the innocent and productive, which is not sustainable over the long run. What principle defines the distinction between these two types of government?

The Solution: A Government Limited by the Principle of Rights

As I noted earlier, the common view about cronyism is that it is a function of “big” government and that the solution is to “shrink” or “limit” government. But that just leads to the question: what’s the limiting principle?

True, a government that does less has less opportunity to plunder the innocent and productive, but a small government can be as unjust to individuals as a large one. And we ought to consider how we got to the point that government is so large. If we don’t limit government’s power in principle, pressure group warfare will inevitably cause it to grow, as individuals and groups, seeing government use the force of law to redistribute wealth and restrict competition, ask it to do the same for *them*.

The common response is that government should act for the “good of the public” rather than for the narrow interests of private parties. The *Los Angeles Times* editorial quoted above expresses this view. “What’s truly crony capitalism,” says the *Times*, “is when the government confuses private interests with public ones.”

Most people who criticize cronyism today from across the political spectrum hold the same view. The idea that government’s job is to serve “the public interest” has been embedded in political thought for well over a century.

Rand rejects the whole idea of the “public interest” as vague, at best, and destructive, at worst. As she says in an essay called “[The Pull Peddlers](#)”:

So long as a concept such as “the public interest” . . . is regarded as a valid principle to guide legislation—lobbies and pressure groups will necessarily continue to exist. Since there is no such entity as “*the public*,” since the public is merely a number of individuals, the idea

that “the public interest” supersedes private interests and rights, can have but one meaning: that the interests and rights of some individuals takes precedence over the interests and rights of others.

If so, then all men and all private groups have to fight to the death for the privilege of being regarded as “the public.” The government’s policy has to swing like an erratic pendulum from group to group, hitting some and favoring others, at the whim of any given moment—and so grotesque a profession as lobbying (selling “influence”) becomes a full-time job. If parasitism, favoritism, corruption, and greed for the unearned did not exist, a mixed economy [a mixture of freedom and economic controls] would bring them into existence.

It’s tempting to blame politicians for pull-peddling, and certainly there are many who willingly participate and advocate laws that plunder others. But, as Rand argues, politicians as such are not to blame, as even the most honest of government officials could not follow a standard like “the public interest”:

The worst aspect of it is not that such a power can be used dishonestly, but that *it cannot be used honestly*. The wisest man in the world, with the purest integrity cannot find a criterion for the just, equitable, rational application of an unjust, inequitable, irrational principle. The best that an honest official can do is to accept no material bribe for his arbitrary decision; but this does not make his decision and its consequences more just or less calamitous.

To make the point more concrete: which is in the public interest, the jobs and products produced by, say, logging and mining companies—or preserving the land they use for public parks? For that matter, why are public parks supposedly in “the

public interest”? As Peter Schwartz points out in his book *In Defense of Selfishness*, more people attend private amusement parks like Disneyland each year than national parks. Should government subsidize Disney?

To pick another example: why is raising the minimum wage in “the public interest” but not cheap goods or the rights of business owners and their employees to negotiate their wages freely? It seems easy to argue that a casino parking lot in Atlantic City is not “in the public interest,” but would most citizens of Atlantic City agree, especially when more casinos likely mean more jobs and economic growth in the city?

There are no rational answers to any of these questions, because “the public interest” is an inherently irrational standard to guide government action. The only approach when a standard like that governs is to put the question to the political process, which naturally leads people to pump millions into political campaigns and lobbying to ensure that their interests prevail.

Rand’s answer is to limit government strictly to protecting rights and nothing more. The principle of rights, for Rand, keeps government connected to its purpose of protecting our ability to live by protecting our freedom to think and produce, cooperate and trade with others, and pursue our own happiness. As Rand put it in *Atlas Shrugged* (through the words of protagonist John Galt):

Rights are conditions of existence required by man’s nature for his proper survival. If man is to live on earth, it is *right* for him to use his mind, it is *right* to act on his own free judgment, it is *right* to work for his values and to keep the product of his work. If life on earth is his purpose, he has a *right* to live as a rational being: nature forbids him the irrational. Any group, any gang, any nation that attempts to negate man’s rights, is *wrong*, which means: is evil, which means: is anti-life.

A government that uses the force it possesses to do anything more than protect rights necessarily ends up violating them. The reason is that force is only effective at stopping people from functioning or taking what they have produced or own. Force can therefore be used either to stop criminals or to act like them.

The principle, then, is that only those who initiate force against others—in short, those who act as criminals—violate rights and are subject to retaliation by government. So long as individuals respect each other's rights by refraining from initiating force against one another—so long as they deal with each other on the basis of reason, persuasion, voluntary association, and trade—government should have no authority to interfere in their affairs.

When it violates this principle of rights, cronyism, corruption, pressure group warfare and mutual plunder are the results.

There's much more to say about Rand's view of rights and government. Readers can find more in essays such as "[Man's Rights](#)," "[The Nature of Government](#)," and "[What Is Capitalism?](#)" and in *Atlas Shrugged*.

Conclusion

In 1962, Rand wrote the following in an essay called "The Cold Civil War":

A man who is tied cannot run a race against men who are free: he must either demand that his bonds be removed or that the other contestants be tied as well. If men choose the second, the economic race slows down to a walk, then to a stagger, then to a crawl—and then they all collapse at the goal posts of a Very Old Frontier: the totalitarian state. No one is the winner but the government.

The phrase “Very Old Frontier” was a play on the Kennedy administration’s “New Frontier,” a program of economic subsidies, entitlements and other regulations that Rand saw as statist and which, like many other political programs and trends, she believed was leading America toward totalitarianism. Throughout Rand’s career, many people saw her warnings as overblown.

We have now inaugurated as 45th president of the United States a man who regularly threatens businesses with regulation and confiscatory taxation if they don’t follow his preferred policies or run their businesses as he sees fit. A recent headline in *USA Today* captured the reaction among many businesses: “**Companies pile on job announcements to avoid Trump’s wrath.**”

Are Rand’s warnings that our government increasingly resembles an authoritarian regime—one that issues dictates and commands to individuals and businesses, who then have to pay homage to the government like courtiers in a king’s court—really overblown? Read *Atlas Shrugged* and her other writings and decide for yourself.

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Would Ayn Rand Approve of Rule by a Rich and Powerful Capitalist?

Christopher Machold

As we get closer to the full swing of the general election cycle, those sympathetic to Ayn Rand's philosophy of Objectivism will face this question: "Shouldn't an Objectivist be in favor of Donald Trump? He's selfish and a powerful businessman, right?"

It's a question that I have gotten already, both from supporters of and detractors from her work. Moreover, it's a question based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the philosophy and its implications on American politics. Gallingly, a self-identifying Objectivist recently made this claim to me in conversation: "Donald Trump is like Howard Roark."

No, no, and no. USA Today's Kirsten Powers, in an interview with the **now-official** GOP nominee back in April, wrote **this nugget**: "He identified with Howard Roark, the novel's idealistic protagonist who designs skyscrapers and rages against the establishment." This led another writer to ask **whether that's a good thing**.

It's a common slur used any time a conceited, cold-hearted politician emerges within the GOP: He's straight out of an Ayn Rand novel. As a student of philosophy and a fan of Rand's literature and ideas, I completely agree. But, far from the ideal characters of John Galt (*Atlas Shrugged*) or Howard Roark (*The*

Fountainhead), Donald Trump is a cozy fit with another figure in *The Fountainhead*: Peter Keating, Howard Roark's classmate and competitor.

To see why this matters, one must look no further than in the notes Rand wrote about her characters, as relayed by Leonard Peikoff in the afterword of *The Fountainhead*. Of Roark, she wrote the following: "Above all—the man who lives for himself, as living for oneself should be understood. And who triumphs completely. A man who is what he should be." He is "self-sufficient" and "self-confident."

One who hasn't read the book might say, "But Donald Trump is *definitely* self-confident." And it is true that he is certainly the *culture's* understanding of a selfish person. Yet, his matching the culture's understanding of selfishness is precisely what makes him Peter Keating.

Unprincipled Egoism

About Keating, Rand writes this: "The exact opposite of Howard Roark, and everything a man should not be. A perfect example of a *selfless* man who is a ruthless, unprincipled egotist—in the accepted meaning of the word. A tremendous vanity and greed, which lead him to sacrifice all for the sake of a 'brilliant career.'"

In other words, the "ruthless, unprincipled egotist"—in our case, Donald J. Trump—is *not* what she means when she talks of selfishness as an ideal.

This is confirmed in Rand's opening remarks in *The Virtue of Selfishness*: "In popular usage, the word 'selfishness' is a synonym for evil; the image it conjures is of a murderous brute who tramples over piles of corpses to achieve his own ends, who cares for no living being and pursues nothing but the gratification of the mindless whims of any immediate moment." One may note that

these descriptions sounds much like Dan P. McAdams' **account of Trump's narcissism in the Atlantic**.

A careless, surface-level reading of Rand's philosophy may give one the impression that she is in support of a Nietzschean selfishness which leaves no room for regard for others. But this is precisely what *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged* warn against, as much as any system of collectivism or group-think.

As Howard Roark says in the waning moments of *The Fountainhead*, "The egotist in the absolute sense is not the man who sacrifices others. He is the man who stands above the need of using others in any manner. . . This is the only form of brotherhood and mutual respect possible between men."

A man constantly mired in **fraud-related lawsuits and accused of defrauding his customers and contractors** is not Howard Roark. The man accused by the ACLU of promoting countless unconstitutional **violations of individual rights** is not the same man who swore against violating the rights of *any* other man. A narcissist who brags incessantly and dishonestly about his **wealth** and **IQ** is not the self-confident and self-sufficient producer depicted in *The Fountainhead*. The candidate who has been **dangerously anti-free trade** is not the hero of a woman who believes in the morality of **laissez faire capitalism**.

One does not have to be sympathetic to Objectivism to see that funding buildings and being "selfish" does not necessarily mean that one is Howard Roark. Donald Trump is an unprincipled, immoral and dangerous "second-hander," to use Roark's (and thus Rand's) own vocabulary.

Peter Keating did, and was, those things too—"everything a man should not be."

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Trump's Ego Is Actually Too Small

Dan Sanchez

Long before Donald Trump became a controversial political figure, he was a household name famous for his phenomenal ego.

He first rose to fame as a larger-than-life real estate tycoon. By cultivating the media, Trump became the poster boy for the gilded, go-go 80s: a brash, ostentatious capitalist antihero who plastered his name on skyscrapers, plazas, hotels, casinos, and resorts. At one point he even sought to **rename** the Empire State Building after himself, calling it the Trump Empire State Building Tower Apartments.

And in the 2000s, with his hit reality show *The Apprentice*, he became the godfather of the “famous for being famous” celebrity culture of that period.

Even now that he is President of the United States, his public persona is characterized, not only by his filter-free utterances and his divisive policy positions, but by his egomania: his braggadocio and his “I-alone-can-fix-it” self-importance.

His fans would disagree, but for the sake of argument, let's grant that his ego is indeed a character flaw. Is the problem really that his ego is too big? Or is it actually too small?

The Fragile Self

As Nathaniel Branden, the late psychotherapist who pioneered the psychology of self-esteem, once wrote on his [blog](#):

... sometimes when people lack adequate self-esteem they fall into arrogance, boasting, and grandiosity as a defense mechanism—a compensatory strategy. Their problem is not that they have too big an ego but that they have too small a one.

And in his book *Six Pillars of Self-Esteem*, Branden wrote:

Sometimes self-esteem is confused with boasting or bragging or arrogance; but such traits reflect not too much self-esteem, but too little; they reflect a lack of self-esteem. Persons of high self-esteem are not driven to make themselves superior to others; they do not seek to prove their value by measuring themselves against a comparative standard. Their joy is in being who they are, not in being better than someone else.

If anything, Trump is not self-oriented enough, but rather far too other-oriented. He is unhealthily preoccupied with receiving *from others* favorable comparisons *to others*. This is exhibited in his tendency toward vanity: his fixation on receiving due credit from the media and the public for the relative size of his hands, of his crowds, and of his “[ratings](#)” (as if his presidency was just an extension of his career as a reality TV star).

It is a fragile ego, and not a strong one, that so urgently needs external props.

Such weakness of ego is especially dangerous in a commander-in-chief of a superpower’s armed forces. The media exacerbates that danger by only giving Trump the adulation he craves whenever he threatens or attacks “rogue nations.” As Gene

Healy **wrote** after Trump authorized a missile strike against the Syrian regime:

His drive-by bombing has already earned him strange new respect from neoconservative #NeverTrump-ers, who appear to believe that the mercurial celebrealty billionaire is at his least frightening when he's literally blowing things up. Centrist pundit Fareed Zakaria echoed that grotesque logic on CNN: "I think Donald Trump became president of the United States [that] night."

As much as he disdains the media establishment, Trump revels in this sort of praise. It may not be long before he free-associates about it in interviews: "my airstrikes—which got terrific ratings, by the way. . . ." And when the glow fades, he may be tempted to light it up again."

Collectivist Crutches

Some of Trump's biggest fans also evince fragile egos, especially the growing fringe of white nationalists.

As Branden wrote:

It would be hard to name a more certain sign of poor self-esteem than the need to perceive some other group as inferior.

And as Ayn Rand wrote in The Virtue of Selfishness:

The overwhelming majority of racists are men who have earned no sense of personal identity, who can claim no individual achievement or distinction, and who seek the illusion of a "tribal self-esteem" by alleging the inferiority of some other tribe.

Of course, it is not only the political right that suffers from ego-deficiency. The identity-politics left, like the “identitarian” right, is also preoccupied with collectivist comparisons. The left dwells on an inverted sort of superiority based on group victimhood. Social justice warriors participate in the “**Oppression Olympics**” as a way to win what Rand called “tribal self-esteem” to make up for their lack of individual self-esteem: to shore up their small, weak egos.

But since the individual self is the only true self, “tribal self-esteem” is a poor substitute for the real thing. A spiritual diet that relies on such ersatz fare results in malnourished egos, as expressed in the pained, frantic screeching of many campus protestors.

These millennial “snowflakes” are condemned as narcissists. But if anything, they too are excessively other-oriented: obsessed with their group identity (defined by their similarities with others), with the inferior societal position of their group compared to other groups, and with receiving due recognition from others about the social injustice of that state of affairs.

The Strong Self

Branden characterized self-esteem as “*the immune system of consciousness*, providing resistance, strength, and a capacity for regeneration.” He wrote:

The question is sometimes asked, “Is it possible to have too much self-esteem?” No, it is not; no more than it is possible to have too much physical health or too powerful an immune system.”

The ugliest aspects of today’s politics largely stem from a problem of emaciated egos, not overweening ones. If we would but reclaim what Branden called “the disowned self,” we would

become more enterprising and resilient, less **emotionally needy**, less prone to wallow in resentment, less reliant on demagogues offering political solutions to **economic frustrations** at the expense of others, less dependent on group identity as our source of individual self-worth, and, contrary to caricatures of individualism, more **civilized** and **sociable**.

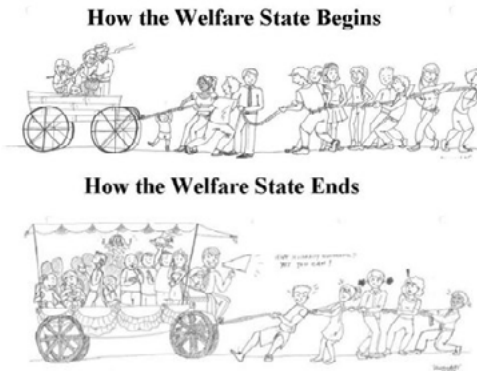
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Montreal Learned the Wrong Lesson from Ayn Rand

Daniel J. Mitchell

I've always viewed Ayn Rand's most famous novel, *Atlas Shrugged*, as a warning about the dangers of over-regulation, over-taxation, and excessive redistribution.



I won't spoil the plot for those who haven't yet read the book, but it's basically a story about what happens to a society when the people pulling the wagon decide that's no longer how they want to spend their lives.

And as these highly productive people begin to opt out, politicians come up with ever-crazier ideas of keeping the economy going.

The most absurd example, something that could only happen in a dystopian work of fiction rather than real life, was "Directive 10-289," an edict from the government to prevent continued

contraction by requiring everybody in the economy to do exactly the same thing next year that they did this year. This meant no changing jobs. No starting new companies. No closing down existing companies. No changes in pay. Or employment. No changes in anything. Freeze the economy at current levels.

In other words, take Nixon-style wage and price controls and apply them to every bit of economic activity.

Unfortunately, some politicians think *Atlas Shrugged* is a direction manual rather than a warning. In Montreal, they've come up with a crazy idea to apply a version of Directive 10-289 to the restaurant industry. I'm not joking. In [a column](#) for Reason, Baylen Linnekin explains this surreal new policy.

. . . lawmakers in Montreal have moved to crack down on new restaurants, in an odious attempt to protect existing ones. "Montreal has one of the highest restaurant per-capita ratios in North America and the amount of places to eat is worrying local politicians," reads a Canadian Press piece from earlier this week. . . . Data shows Montreal trails only New York City in terms of restaurants per capita in North America. As in New York City, that competition is great for Montreal's consumers. But it puts pressure on incumbent restaurateurs. So lawmakers have decided to side with the latter.

The new law isn't quite as bad as Directive 10-289, but it's guided by the same attitude: Everything that exists now should be preserved and what's new is bad.

. . . a ban on new restaurants from opening within 25 meters of an existing one along the city's Rue Notre Dame. . . . Notably, the action comes as "a number of commercial and retail properties remain empty" in this same part of Montreal. The law "risk[s] turning the city's restaurant scene into a heavily bureaucratized nightmare like the province's construction industry," says the head of Quebec's restaurant association

So who could possibly support such an initiative?

Unsurprisingly, the greatest enemies of genuine capitalism aren't just politicians, but also incumbent firms that don't want competition.

. . . some protectionist restaurateurs support the measure. "In Montreal you can apply for a restaurant permit and get it immediately—that's a problem for me" says David McMillan, a supporter of the restrictions, whose high-end restaurant, Joe Beef, is an intended beneficiary of the ban. He's not alone. "I don't believe in the free market anymore," says restaurateur Carlos Ferreira. "We have to protect the good restaurants."

Gee, I thought consumers were the ones who were supposed to determine which restaurants are good. But Mr. Ferreira wants politicians and bureaucrats to now have the power.

Though we shouldn't mock the Canadians too much. After all, Barack Obama **imposed a version of Directive 10-289 in the United States**.

Heck, he must be a big fan of *Atlas Shrugged* because he also mimicked another part of the book.

Of course, there are **some cities**, and even **entire nations**, that apparently **want to replicate everything** in Ayn Rand's classic novel.

And the results in these real-world experiments are similar to what happens in the book. Except the book actually has a happy ending, whereas there's little reason to be optimistic for a rebirth of freedom in places such as **Greece** and **Venezuela**.

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***Anthem* and the Meaning of the Light Bulb Ban**

Jeffrey A. Tucker

Last week, I reread *Anthem* by Ayn Rand, an extraordinarily beautiful tribute to innovation as the life force of progress. It was published in 1937 but mostly drafted in Russia soon after World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution. But get ready for chills when you realize that this dystopian future is actually coming true, right now.

After a catastrophe has erased all of civilization from the earth, humanity's surviving descendants live in a primitive but totalitarian society. In the tale, a cruel government committee cracks down hard on a young man who has re-discovered the light bulb. They condemn him for daring to think for himself and presuming to override the planned poverty of the social order. The society ruled by the total state is perfectly happy with its candles, and no steps forward can be taken that are not explicitly approved by the ruling class.

Rand used the example of the light bulb because it is such a great symbol of the power of the human mind. It is within our power to harness the energy that comes from the heavens. "The power of the sky can be made to do men's bidding," observes the protagonist. "There are no limits to its secrets and its might, and it can be made to grant us anything if we but choose to ask."

The light bulb finally freed humanity from having to defer to the earth's rotations to determine work and leisure time. It allowed night baseball, made our highways safer, and put society on a 24/7 basis. The light bulb means much more than what it is in its physical essence: it was the dawn of humankind's mastery of the world. Civilization is measured in **lux**.

I was contemplating the novel and looked up at my ceiling fan. Three glorious incandescent bulbs were lighting up the room with a warm glow. These particular bulbs lack the blue and white frosting. The glass is clear and the curved filament is burning like a miniature flame, so intense that you can't look directly at it. And yet that flame is caged and made a servant of human dreams and aspirations.

I had the sudden thought: these are going to be difficult to replace. The last time I visited the light bulb section of the big-box hardware store, there were 30 feet of bulbs, but it was extraordinarily difficult to find one that you want. There were vast numbers of "compact fluorescent lamp" bulbs that look like curly pasta wrapped tightly to fight into a small space. There are implausibly expensive halogen bulbs that promise to last nearly lifetime but break the bank upon purchase and burn so hot they could cook an egg. There are many other choices too and often it can be hard to tell what is what.

What seems nearly missing entirely are normal light bulbs. Where are they? And why is private enterprise trying so hard to foist on us inferior products that we don't want?

The answer is a thoroughly insidious attempt by bureaucracies together with a gaggle of politicians (they know all about light bulbs, right!) to ban the light bulb as we've always known it. In other words, it's the plot of *Anthem* lived in real-time.

It all began in 2007 with the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007, which called for a phase-out of the incandescent bulb by 2012 (variously amended by Congress to push out the deadline). The law banned light bulbs by wattage but not by name. In practice, it meant death for the kind of light we've enjoyed since the 19th century.

Gone already from the shelves are incandescent bulbs of 100 watts. Then last year, 40- and 60-watt incandescent light bulbs were killed off. Factories that once produced them were shut. You can get these bulbs so long as supplies last, but in a few years, that's it. They'll all be gone.

There are certain exemptions. Photographers and stage managers can continue to use them. Other specialty lights can continue to be made and sold, but you and I won't typically bump into them at the big-box store. Oddly, 3-way bulbs survive, presumably because they save energy. If you are rich enough, you can escape the worst of it.

What is the thinking here? Ostensibly, it is all about energy efficiency, which vaguely connects to the American obsession with security and hence the name of the bill that made all this happen. If you use old-fashioned light bulbs, you are supporting energy dependence, hence foreigners, and hence terrorism. If you use incandescent bulbs, you are supporting America's enemies, not to mention destroying the planet.

Once you dig more deeply, you find something remarkable: there was no scientific basis for this ban at all. Consider the [analysis](#) of Howard Brandston, a fellow of the Illuminating Engineering Society of North America and the brains behind the refurbishment of the Statue of Liberty in the 1980s.

Brandston argues that the government's metric of lumens-per-watt is completely bogus. It doesn't consider the quality

of light for a room. It doesn't consider the costs of making replacements or the environmental risk of more "efficient" bulbs (fluorescent bulbs contain mercury), and it doesn't consider the whole reason we have light bulbs to begin with: to light up a space. It focuses on one narrow metric at the expense of all these broader considerations.

"The calculations used by the government and others promulgating or promoting use of compact fluorescents," he says, "is strictly mathematical conjecture and nothing to do with reality."

So how can you tell which are the best bulbs? Brandston says that the consumer's subjective judgment, tempered by a consideration of how long bulbs last, is more than enough. You don't need bureaucrats, and you don't need experts—just like every other basic consumer product.

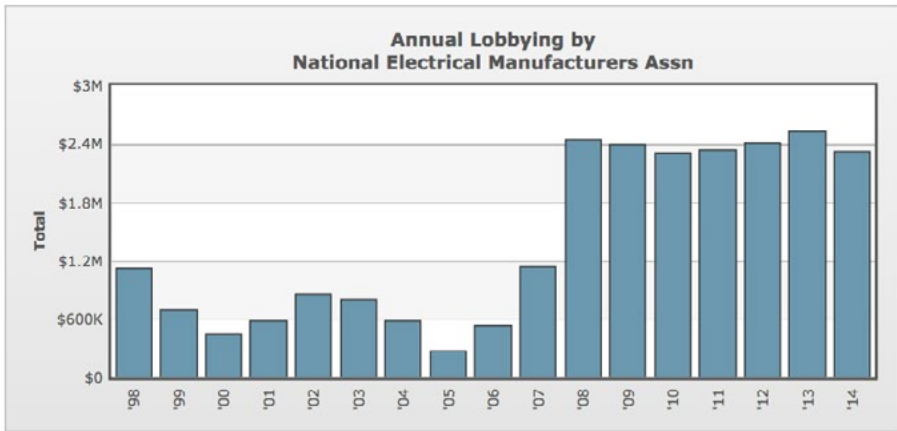
But even if the new bulbs are awful, don't they "save energy"? Brandston says: "Hoping that lighting is going to make a major contribution borders on ridiculous. . . . We'd be better off promoting occupancy sensors and dimming controls and recommending all dimmers be set to only provide 95 percent of the power to the light sources."

The story you will not hear concerns the role of the industry: all of the major manufacturers supported the ban, the new standards, and the replacement bulbs. Profit margins were ridiculously small on old-fashioned light bulbs, which were being manufactured in China for pennies. How do you stop competition and push an expensive, highly profitable alternative? Testify before Congress and get them to force consumers to buy your expensive but poor-selling product lines.

The **evidence** is there for all to see. The National Electrical Manufacturers Association represents the entire industry

connected with lightbulbs, every single one of the biggest players. The testimony to Congress by its president was not just about acquiescing to a ban of bulbs; the NEMA positively urged and demanded it, along with a ban on importation of incandescent bulbs. This is clearly a case of manufacturer-driven graft at work.

And it's enough to break this capitalist's heart. And there's more evidence that this ban was all about money coming and going. The NEMA became very committed to Washington, doubling its lobbying expenditures around the time of the ban.



It also fits with everything else about federal policy for the last half century, which seems to have the goal of helping special interests by increasing human misery as its main policy objective. It is why our **toilets, faucets, detergent, and washers have been wrecked** with water-use controls—even though none of these policies make a significant difference in overall water usage.

It's why we are pushed to recycle even though no one has ever demonstrated that the mandates help the environment. It's why we are taxed on things we want to do like drive cars. It's why we can no longer medicate ourselves in normal ways without a doctor's permission. It's why we must endure special taxes and, worse, condescending lectures from public officials about fast food, sweets, and trash generation.

What do all these policies have in common? They target things that we enjoy and that make our life better. They force on us expensive, inferior products and services. It's the penance we must do in the interest of the common good—and never mind whether that the common good is actually enhanced in real life.

This whole ethos of modern policy is not inherent in the nature of government. There was a time when government actually sought to boost the material blessings we enjoyed. It did a terrible job of it, sure, but that was the intention, as late as the New Deal.

Now the intention is exactly the opposite. If there is something that we like, that makes our lives lovely, a product or service that increases our overall happiness—something as simple and normal and traditional as a light bulb—you can bet it is being targeted for destruction by some bureaucracy somewhere.

This gets us back to Rand. She had a prophetic way of seeing to the ugly truth about government. She grew up under a regime that promised heaven on earth but ended up making a hell for everyone not part of the ruling class.

She saw that governments could not produce imaginative goods—could not invent or create—and would eventually fall back on celebrating the poverty and destruction they cause, inventing an ethic of sacrifice as a means of covering up their crimes. (You only have to **listen to the glorification** of “authentic” poverty to see this meme in explicit action.) And if you don't go along, you are an enemy of the people.

It's rather incredible that we have come full circle. Just as in *Anthem*, the US government has actually banned the light bulb as we've known it (though unlike *Anthem*, it has been ironically sold as “progress.”) Just think about the awesome implications of that and ask yourself why we put up with it.

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Part 3

Her Books and Ideas

What the Critics Get Wrong About *Atlas Shrugged*

Nate Russell

I've just begun to re-read Ayn Rand's 1,200-page behemoth *Atlas Shrugged*. The book left such a positive impression on me six years ago when I read it for the first time that I vowed to re-read it every five years or so to keep picking up on new things.

In the meantime, I became a little curious to see what other people online had to say about the book. I've long heard the rumor that *Atlas* critics give such undue hostility to the book that it's plausible to imagine that most of them never read it in the first place!

Thom Hartmann's Distortions of *Atlas*

It didn't take long before I came across a couple of videos and articles from Thom Hartmann, a popular far left-wing commentator, and I knew my suspicions were justified. As you'll see shortly, his descriptions of Rand's classic novel are so extremely caricatured and unfounded that you really have to doubt his claim that he's actually read the book.

(In fairness, he claims to have read the book in high school, which would have been more than 40 years ago. Perhaps the following is a fault of memory. . .)

Atlas Shrugged Is about the Importance of CEOs

Hartmann: “Do you really think if all the CEOs went on strike that society would collapse? This is the basic premise of the book.”

Yes, exactly! *Atlas Shrugged*: the tale of a society’s downfall when its CEOs skip work for the golf course!

This, of course, isn’t what the book is about. It is true that some of Rand’s protagonists—Hank Rearden and Ellis Wyatt, for example—were heads of large and important companies. And yes, these innovative corporate leaders did eventually go on strike, but it is also true that some of Rand’s villains—James Taggart and Orren Boyle, for example—were presidents of large and important companies as well.

Any conscientious reader would have observed at least somewhere between page 1 and 1,200 that had the latter, and not the former, gone on strike, “society” would never have “collapsed.” This explodes the idea that *Atlas* was some sort of apologia for “CEOs” in specific and “the rich” in general.

Atlas Shrugged Is about Billionaires Who Don’t Want to Pay Taxes

Hartmann: “So, in *Atlas Shrugged*, when the billionaires, tired of paying taxes and complying with government regulation, go on strike, Ayn Rand writes that the American economy promptly collapsed.”

Atlas Shrugged is such a vast and complex forest, yet Hartmann is peering like a hawk at only a couple of the trees. Taxation and regulation are both separate elements in the book’s periodic table, but together they are not enough to cause the explosion of society.

So, what actually caused the strike and ensuing collapse in *Atlas*? To answer this question is to get to the basic theme of the book, a theme that is present on every single page: altruism.

Atlas Shrugged has to do with the differences between a society based on altruism—in which the masses are told that their noblest deed is to sacrifice for “others”—and a society based on individualism—where individuals are respected as “ends in themselves” and free to pursue their own interests.

Through policies such as the Equalization of Opportunity Act and the Anti-dog-eat-dog Rule, people who embody altruism treat the individualists as mere pieces on a chessboard, to be manipulated and harassed as the altruists please (since it’s in the name of “others”).

Eventually, a mysterious man named John Galt persuades the most innovative and oppressed individualists to simply go “on strike.” This puts society in the hands of the Altruists, who know nothing of how to produce wealth, only how to redistribute it and that is why society collapses.

As Galt lays out:

We’ve heard so much about strikes, and about the dependence of the uncommon man upon the common. We’ve heard it shouted that the industrialist is a parasite, that his workers support him, create his wealth, make his luxury possible—and what would happen to him if they walked out? Very well. I propose to show to the world who depends on whom, who supports whom, who is the source of wealth, who makes whose livelihood possible, and what happens to whom when who walks out.

Atlas Shrugged Is about the Rich Producers vs. The Poor Looters

Hartmann: “On one side are the billionaires and the industrialists. People like Dagny Taggart, a railroad tycoon, and Hank Rearden, a steel magnate. . . On the other side are the “looters,” or everyone else who isn’t as rich or privileged, or who believed in a democratic government to provide basic services, empower labor unions, and regulate the economy.”

Once again, any detailed reading of the book would quickly reveal the sloth resting in this cartoonish summary. First of all, based on the fact that many of the villains in *Atlas* are wealthy, it’s absurd to think that Rand indiscriminately labeled anybody over a certain income threshold as a “producer.”

Secondly, Rand had nice words for the “middle class,” which she termed as “the heart, the lifeblood, the energy source of a free, industrial economy. . .” So this idea that Rand would have considered you a moocher if you weren’t a rich industrialist is just plain old propaganda.

Conclusion

Hartmann and similar critics of *Atlas Shrugged* seem to be so wrapped up in a class-conflict outlook that they struggle to comprehend an author who judged individuals with standards having nothing to do with their current economic status.

Atlas Shrugged is many pages long, but well worth the effort. All sorts of themes exist within its pages, just waiting to challenge the reader’s understanding of himself and the rest of the world.

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What Rand Meant by Altruism

Gary M. Galles

Rand sold more than 30 million books. *Atlas Shrugged* has been ranked behind only the Bible as an influence on readers' lives. She has also been stridently attacked for issues such as her militant atheism. But perhaps least understood has been her full-bore rejection of altruism. On her birthday, it is worth reconsideration.

Altruism has commonly been held up as the standard for moral behavior. But Rand rejected it, asserting it was “incompatible with freedom, with capitalism, and with individual rights,” and therefore “the basic evil behind today’s ugliest phenomena.”

That head-on collision arises from French philosopher Auguste Comte, coiner of the term altruism. The altruists.org website says he believed “the *only* moral acts were those intended to promote the happiness of others.” Comte’s *Catechisme Positiviste* asserts that altruism “gives a direct sanction exclusively to our instincts of benevolence,” and, therefore, “cannot tolerate the notion of rights, for such a notion rests on individualism.”

In Comte’s view, any act performed for any reason beyond solely that of advancing someone else’s well-being is not morally justified. That implies taking a tax deduction for a charitable act strips it of its morality. The same is true when done because “what goes around comes around.” Something as seemingly

innocuous as feeling good about doing good also fails Comte's joyless standards. Even "love your neighbor as yourself" fails his unlimited duty of altruism. As George H. Smith summarized it, "One should love one's neighbor *more* than oneself."

Ayn Rand's attacks on altruism are aimed at Comte's definition. However, modern usage has eroded his meaning of altruism to little more than a synonym for generosity, so Rand's rejection of the original meaning is now often taken as a rejection of generosity, which it is not. In Roderick Long's words,

. . . her sometimes misleading rhetoric about the "virtue of selfishness" . . . was not to advocate the pursuit of one's own interest at the expense of others . . . she rejected not only the subordination of one's interest to those of others, (and it is this, rather than mere benevolence, that she labeled "altruism"), but also the subordination of others' interest to one's own.

Rand's categorical rejection of altruism was a rejection of Comte's requirement of total selflessness, because that was inconsistent with any individuals mattering for their own sake. Rand vehemently opposed such an invalidation of individuals' significance.

The basic principle of altruism is that man has no right to exist for his own sake, that service to others is the only justification of his existence, and that self-sacrifice is his highest moral duty, virtue, and value.

Rand's "virtue of selfishness" was a response to Comte's demand for complete selflessness. Not only is a requirement for everyone to completely disregard themselves an unattainable ideal, it is self-contradictory. You cannot possibly sacrifice yourself fully for me, while I am also sacrificing myself fully for you. And if no one has any intrinsic value, why would the results, even if

possible, be meritorious? With Comte as a starting point, more attention to people's own well-being—more selfishness, in Rand's terminology—is the only way to move toward recognizing value in each individual and significance in each life.

Comte's conception of altruism is also inconsistent with liberty, which was Ayn Rand's focus. The duty to put others first at all times and in all circumstances denies self-ownership and the power to choose that derives from it. Everyone else maintains never-ending presumptive claims on every individual, overriding any rights they may have. In contrast, benevolence involves voluntary choices to benefit others of one's own choosing, in ways and to the extent individuals choose for themselves.

This is why Rand criticized equating altruism with benevolence. The key distinction is between benevolence's individual discretion, which recognizes our rights over ourselves and our resources, and altruism's unconditional requirement to always sacrifice for others.

An omnipresent duty of self-sacrifice also makes people vulnerable to manipulation by those who disguise power over others as “really” a means to attain some noble goal. The desire to sacrifice for the good of others can be transformed into the requirement to sacrifice to the desires of leaders. As Rand expressed it:

Those who start by saying: “It is selfish to pursue your own wishes, you must sacrifice them to the wishes of others”—end up by saying: “It is selfish to uphold your convictions, you must sacrifice them to the convictions of others.”

The key here is Rand's emphasis on duty:

When A needs something, in B's opinion, if C, who can do something about it refuses . . . C is pilloried as someone who is selfish rather than altruistic for not choosing to

support B's cause. The faulty syllogism remains that "C is failing to do his duty here. C should do his duty. So C should be made to do it." And . . . that syllogism as a bludgeon remains an ever-present threat from everyone who wants to do good with someone else's resources, and finds coercion an acceptable mechanism.

To Rand, Comte's view of altruism is logically impossible, joyless, and liberty-excluding, and has enabled vast harms to be imposed on vast numbers. It does not deserve deference as a guide to morality. However, Rand offers no criticism of voluntary benevolence. That is why we should still care about her objections to altruism, which we now mistakenly take to mean whatever voluntary individual choices people make to be generous to others.

Rand reminds us of the central defense against the threat of coercion lurking beyond altruistic demands placed on people. It lies in protecting individual self-ownership and the property rights that derive from it. When that is maintained as fundamental, my power to choose what to do with myself and my property—including when my conclusion is, "I could contribute to cause X, but I choose not to"—is accepted as legitimate. Thus we would soundly reject the view that "Apart from such times as [someone] manages to perform some act of self-sacrifice, he possesses no moral significance."

Without the coercive violation of rights, liberty can be maintained. The vast majority of people would not only be generous, they would have far more to be generous with. Their voluntary arrangements, including their chosen generosity, creates a better world than Comte's altruism.

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Ayn Rand on Fascism

George Smith

In a letter written on March 19, 1944, Ayn Rand remarked: “Fascism, Nazism, Communism and Socialism are only superficial variations of the same monstrous theme—collectivism.” Rand would later expand on this insight in various articles, most notably in two of her lectures at the Ford Hall Forum in Boston: “The Fascist New Frontier” (Dec. 16, 1962, published as a booklet by the Nathaniel Branden Institute in 1963); and “The New Fascism: Rule by Consensus” (April 18, 1965, published as Chapter 20 in *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal* [CUI] by New American Library in 1967).

Rand knew better than to accept the traditional left-right dichotomy between socialism (or communism) and fascism, according to which socialism is the extreme version of left-ideology and fascism is the extreme version of right-ideology (i.e., capitalism). Indeed, in *The Ayn Rand Letter* (Nov. 8, 1971) she characterized fascism as “socialism for big business.” Both are variants of statism, in contrast to a free country based on individual rights and laissez-faire capitalism. As Rand put it in “Conservatism: An Obituary” (CUI, Chapter 19):

The world conflict of today is the conflict of the individual against the state, the same conflict that has been fought throughout mankind’s history. The names change, but the essence—and the results—remain the same, whether it is the individual against feudalism, or

against absolute monarchy, or against communism or fascism or Nazism or socialism or the welfare state.

The placement of socialism and fascism at opposite ends of a political spectrum serves a nefarious purpose, according to Rand. It serves to buttress the case that we must avoid “extremism” and choose the sensible middle course of a “mixed economy.” Quoting from “‘Extremism,’ Or The Art of Smearing” (*CUI*, Chapter 17):

If it were true that dictatorship is inevitable and that fascism and communism are the two “extremes” at the opposite ends of our course, then what is the safest place to choose? Why, the middle of the road. The safely undefined, indeterminate, mixed-economy, “moderate” middle—with a “moderate” amount of government favors and special privileges to the rich and a “moderate” amount of government handouts to the poor—with a “moderate” respect for rights and a “moderate” degree of brute force—with a “moderate” amount of freedom and a “moderate” amount of slavery—with a “moderate” degree of justice and a “moderate” degree of injustice—with a “moderate” amount of security and a “moderate” amount of terror—and with a moderate degree of tolerance for all, except those “extremists” who uphold principles, consistency, objectivity, morality and who refuse to compromise.

In both of her major articles on fascism (cited above) Rand distinguished between fascism and socialism by noting a rather technical (and ultimately inconsequential) difference in their approaches to private property. Here is the relevant passage from “The New Fascism: Rule by Consensus”:

Observe that both “socialism” and “fascism” involve the issue of property rights. The right to property is the right of use and disposal. Observe the difference in those two theories: socialism negates private property rights

altogether, and advocates “the vesting of *ownership and control*” in the community as a whole, i.e., in the state; fascism leaves *ownership in the hands* of private individuals, but transfers *control* of the property to the government.

Ownership without control is a contradiction in terms: it means “property,” without the right to use it or to dispose of it. It means that the citizens retain the responsibility of holding property, without any of its advantages, while the government acquires all the advantages without any of the responsibility.

In this respect, socialism is the more honest of the two theories. I say “more honest,” *not* “better”—because, *in practice*, there is no difference between them: both come from the same collectivist-statist principle, both negate individual rights and subordinate the individual to the collective, both deliver the livelihood and the lives of the citizens into the power of an omnipotent government—and the differences between them are only a matter of time, degree, and superficial detail, such as the choice of slogans by which the rulers delude their enslaved subjects.

Contrary to many conservative commentators during the 1960s, Rand maintained that America was drifting toward fascism, not socialism, and that this descent was virtually inevitable in a mixed economy. “A mixed economy is an explosive, untenable mixture of two opposite elements,” freedom and statism, “which cannot remain stable, but must ultimately go one way or the other” (“Extremism,’ or The Art of Smearing”). Economic controls generate their own problems, and with these problems come demands for additional controls—so either those controls must be abolished or a mixed economy will eventually degenerate into a form of economic dictatorship. Rand conceded that most

American advocates of the welfare state “are not socialists, that they never advocated or intended the socialization of private property.” These welfare-statists “want to ‘preserve’ private property” while calling for greater government control over such property. “But *that* is the fundamental characteristic of fascism.”

Rand gave us some of the finest analyses of a mixed economy—its premises, implications, and long-range consequences—ever penned by a free-market advocate. In “The New Fascism,” for example, she compared a mixed economy to a system that operates by the law of the jungle, a system in which “no one’s interests are safe, everyone’s interests are on a public auction block, and anything goes for anyone who can get away with it.” A mixed economy divides a country “into an ever-growing number of enemy camps, into economic groups fighting one another for self preservation in an indeterminate mixture of *defense* and *offense*.” Although Rand did not invoke Thomas Hobbes in this context, it is safe to say that the economic “chaos” of a mixed economy resembles the Hobbesian war of all against all in a state of nature, a system in which interest groups feel the need to screw others before they get screwed themselves.

A mixed economy is ruled by pressure groups. It is an amoral, institutionalized civil war of special interests and lobbies, all fighting to seize a momentary control of the legislative machinery, to extort some special privilege at one another’s expense by an act of *government*—i.e., by force.

Of course, Rand never claimed that America had degenerated into full-blown fascism (she held that freedom of speech was a bright line in this respect), but she did believe that the fundamental premise of the “altruist-collectivist” morality—the foundation of all collectivist regimes, including fascism—was accepted and preached by modern liberals and conservatives alike. (Those who

mistakenly dub Rand a “conservative” should read “Conservatism: An Obituary” [*CUI*, Chapter 19], a scathing critique in which she accused conservative leaders of “moral treason.” In some respects Rand detested modern conservatives more than she did modern liberals. She was especially contemptuous of those conservatives who attempted to justify capitalism by appealing to religion or to tradition.) Rand illustrated her point in “The Fascist New Frontier,” a polemical *tour de force* aimed at President Kennedy and his administration.

Rand began this 1962 lecture by quoting passages from the 1920 political platform of the German Nazi Party, including demands for “an end to the power of the financial interests,” “profit sharing in big business,” “a broad extension of care for the aged,” the “improvement of public health” by government, “an all-around enlargement of our entire system of public education,” and so forth. All such welfare-state measures, this platform concluded, “can only proceed from within on the foundation of *The Common Good Before the Individual Good*.”

Rand had no problem quoting similar proposals and sentiments from President Kennedy and members of his administration, such as Kennedy’s celebrated remark, “And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what America will do for you—ask what you can do for your country.” The particulars of Rand’s speech will come as no surprise to those familiar with her ideas, but I wish to call attention to her final remarks about the meaning of “the public interest.” As used by Kennedy and other politicians, both Democratic and Republican, this fuzzy phrase has little if any meaning, except to indicate that individuals have a duty to sacrifice their interests for the sake of a greater, undefined good, as determined by those who wield the brute force of political power. Rand then stated what she regarded as the only coherent meaning of “the public interest.”

[T]here is no such thing as “the public interest” except as the sum of the interests of individual men. And the basic, common interest of all men—all *rational* men—is freedom. *Freedom* is the first requirement of “the public interest”—not *what* men do when they are free, but *that* they are free. All their achievements rest on that foundation—and cannot exist without them.

The principles of a free, non-coercive social system are the only form of “the public interest.”

I shall conclude this essay on a personal note. Before I began preparing for this essay, I had not read some of the articles quoted above for many, many years. In fact, I had not read some of the material since my college days 45 years ago. I therefore approached my new readings with a certain amount of trepidation. I liked the articles when I first read them, but would they stand the test of time? Would Rand’s insights and arguments appear commonplace, even hackneyed, with the passage of so much time? Well, I was pleasantly surprised. Rand was exactly on point on many issues. Indeed, if we substitute “President Obama,” for “President Kennedy” or “President Johnson” many of her points would be even more pertinent today than they were during the 1960s. Unfortunately, the ideological sewer of American politics has become even more foul today than it was in Rand’s day, but Rand did what she could to reverse the trend, and one person can only do so much. And no one can say that she didn’t warn us.

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We Cannot, Must Not, Give Up Our Ideals

Jeffrey A. Tucker

A government that fears technology. A regulatory board that suppresses invention. A ruling elite that fears people who break out on their own to learn things they shouldn't. A society that is growing ever poorer because the jackboot steps on every expression of individual entrepreneurial talent.

The people are demoralized, dejected, depressed, hopeless.

It all sounds uncomfortably familiar. The book in question is Ayn Rand's 1938 masterpiece *Anthem*.

It's my personal favorite of her books, even though it is far less known than her other works. She understood something about socialism that eluded many of her contemporaries and continues to confuse people today.

Socialism and interventionism are never about progress. They force regression. This is because they stamp out creativity and individualism. A truly totalitarian world would not and could not be prosperous. It would be a world of grueling poverty.

Rand understood because she had seen this with her own eyes as a little girl in Russia. This spectacular novel presents the stark reality in fictional form.

Publishers Reject the Book

“The author does not understand socialism,” read the letter from MacMillan in reply to the submission of the novella. They turned it down. Actually, the publisher didn’t understand socialism. Hardly anyone did in 1937, when this book was written.

Rand, however, did understand socialism. She understood it so well that she knew it would result in the opposite of what it promised and that its proponents would eventually come to embrace its grim reality, rather than repudiate the system of thought.

In many ways, this book is one of the best dystopian novels ever written because it puts the central focus on the key failing of socialism: its opposition to progress.

How is that possible given that progress is a central slogan in socialist thinking? The problem is that by collectivizing private property, socialism removes the machinery of progress itself. It abolishes prices and profits and calculation and the incentive to create. It puts a premium on political control, and politics resent the revolutionary implications of entrepreneurship. Therefore, a consistently socialist society would not only be poor and backward; it would revel in those features and call them the goal.

Think about it. This book was written the late 1930s, long before the environmental movement and long before the primitivist streak in socialist thinking was to emerge as an outright agenda to be imposed by force. But as a child in the old Soviet Union, Rand had seen it in action. She had seen how entrepreneurship and creativity had to be sacrificed for the collective, and how this drove civilization straight into the ground. A totalitarian society would not be a world with amazing technology and flying cars,

but would exist only at a subsistence level. And it would try to stay that way.

Rand's World Is Our World

This is an excellent time to reread this book or encounter it for the first time. Every day, regulatory agencies are pouring out mandates that degrade our technology. They are degrading our washing machines, dishwashers, soaps, paint, light bulbs, toilets, water systems, lawn mowers, medicines, microwaves, showers, hot water heaters, gasoline and gas cans, and probably thousands of other things. These regulations are passed in the name of the environment, security.

Their one result is to drive us back in time, making the future worse than the present and probably even worse than the past.

That's only the beginning. Through intellectual property laws, the state literally assigned ownership to ideas that are the source of innovation, thereby restricting them and entangling entrepreneurs in endless litigation and confusion. Products are kept off the market. Firms that would come into existence do not. Profits that would be earned never appear. Intellectual property has institutionalized slow growth and landed the economy in a thicket of absurdity.

So we've finally come full circle in the land to which Rand emigrated because it was a free country. We've adopted features of the system she fled. In that sense, this small book is an amazing critique of precisely the unfreeness of the system under which we increasingly live. In that sense, the dystopian world she presents is a distilled version of where we are headed too. Even the author's theory that the word "I" is the thing that is most feared by the regime has resonance.

What is the way out? We cannot give up our ideals. We must have development, innovation, and progress because they are the sources of life, and we cannot give up life.

Despite what all her detractors say, it is a fact that Rand was a genius and a visionary. This small book underscores that she saw things that no one else saw, and saw them long before anyone else did.

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A Totalitarian State Can Only Rule a Desperately Poor Society

Ryan Miller

I recently finished *Anthem* by Ayn Rand. In this short novella she tells the story of Equality 7-2521 (later called Prometheus), a man living in a dystopian collectivist society which has eclipsed the individual to such a degree that words such as “I” and “my” no longer even exist. The story is about Prometheus’ discovery of himself as an individual and of the world as it was before.

In this society babies are taken immediately from their “parents”, who were assigned to one another by the Council of Eugenics for the sole purpose of breeding, raised in the Home of Infants and then in the Home of Students, and then finally assigned their life-long profession at the age of 15 by the Council of Vocations. Everything is done for the supposed benefit of your brothers, preference is not allowed, superior ability is not allowed, and back-breaking toil is praised as such and not as a way to improve your own or humanity’s situation.

Dictatorship Means Poverty

But what is striking about this story is how accurately it portrays how the world would look under such life throttling conditions.

The Home of the Scholars is praised for having only recently (100 years ago) (re)invented marvels such as candles and glass. Since the times before the “Great Rebirth” and the discovery of the “Great Truth”—namely, “that all men are one and there is no will save the will of all men together”—humanity has, in reality, lost the progress of thousands of years and has reverted back to a time before even such basic utilities as oil lamps or clocks.

But Ayn Rand’s genius is that this is exactly what would happen to the world should it ever discover and truly act upon this “Great Truth.” Yet this is not typically how dystopian stories portray this type of society. Stories such as *Brave New World*, *1984*, *The Giver*, *Divergent*, *Equilibrium*, and many others, all love to show some type of ultra-technologically-advanced world in the backdrop of total or near total oppression, suppression of the individual, and enforcement of conformity.

Despite the almost total (and often drug-induced) destruction of individual will, drive, and creativity, these societies have reached unprecedented levels of technological competence. This is especially true when one considers when many of these stories were written.

In *Brave New World*, written in 1931, everyone has a personal helicopter, science has advanced to such a degree that mothers and fathers are no longer necessary parts of the breeding process, and everyone is kept docile and happy by the apparently side-effect lacking drug Soma.

In *1984* (published in 1949) there are two way telescreens, miniscule microphones and cameras, and speak/writes which turn whatever you say into text. In the other stories technology is advanced enough to, among other things, control weather (*The Giver*), give kids serum-induced psychological aptitude tests (*Divergent*), and to completely suppress emotions (*Equilibrium*).

In addition to these there are countless other inventions or practices in these stories and the many others of the dystopian future genre.

Invention Requires Freedom

The question that needs to be asked, however, is who invented all these things? These marvel feats, which in the stories are often used for the end of some malevolent goal, are really all potentially awesome, or at least highly complex and complicated, inventions or innovations. Their conception and ultimate realization would have required years of thought, testing, failure, tinkering, and then success—things which all require individual ingenuity, creativity, and the incentives arising from the prospect of individual pride and gain.

Every great break-through in history was achieved by some odd-ball going against the grain or traditionally accepted view of things in their particular field. If they had done things the way people had always done them they would never have had the ability to think outside the box and discover or create a unique solution to the problem at hand. Inventors and innovators need their quirkiness, eccentricity, social awkwardness, or will and ability to stand up to the existing order. And they need that coupled with the idea that they have something to gain.

But all of these stories, to different degrees, have built societies that destroy our differences, our emotions, our passions, our ability to think differently, and our incentives to create if we were even able to.

So where do these advanced societies come from? Sure they could drink from the well of wealth created by the society that may have preceded it, but only for a while. It would eventually

dry up. And without new generations of ambitious and intelligent dreamers, tinkerers, outside-the-boxers, there would be no one around to rebuild the wealth. This is the world that Ayn Rand creates in *Anthem*. The hopeless world without individuals.

The existence of advanced societies in many dystopian stories is reminiscent of the problem with the thinking in our world today and in the past. The thinking that things “just happen”—that innovation, invention, and progress are phenomena which occur naturally, regardless of conditions. Though the worlds portrayed in these other novels are far from desirable, the progress alone that the societies in them have reached is a reflection of this idea that most people, at least passively or unknowingly, buy into.

In reality the world would look much more like that of *Anthem*.

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Ayn Rand: Sovietologist

Steven Horwitz

Whatever one thinks of Ayn Rand as a novelist, it is fair to say that her books, especially *Atlas Shrugged*, contain a great deal of sophisticated political and economic thinking. *Atlas Shrugged* may well be the most economically literate novel ever written. Although Rand does not couch her points in the language of economic theory, there is much in *Atlas Shrugged* that is consistent with sound economics. This should not be surprising given that her favorite economist was Ludwig von Mises. Moreover, her chapter “Aristocracy of Pull” is chock full of excellent political economy that fits well with Public Choice economics as well as the long history of classical liberalism dating back at least to Adam Smith. The famous “Love of Money” speech by Francisco D’Anconia contains many astute observations about the nature of money and its role in a market economy.

Less noted in this regard is Rand’s first novel, *We the Living*. This is a semiautobiographical story set in Russia just after the revolution of 1917. The particulars of the plot are not as interesting in this context as the level of detail Rand provides about life in the Soviet Union in the early years of communist rule. I recently reread it for the first time in 20 or 25 years and was struck by the sophistication of Rand’s analysis of the Soviet economy in practice. Unlike most contemporary western observers, she had first-hand knowledge of the terrible conditions and the reality of Soviet power.

Three Insights

Three insights in *We the Living* illustrate Rand's superior understanding of Soviet socialism. First she recognized what has since been called "the myth of the plan." If Mises, F. A. Hayek, and the other Austrians are right, it's *impossible* to plan a complex economy, yet many referred to the Soviet Union as having a "planned economy" right up to its demise in 1991. A variety of plot details and sidelights in Rand's novel illustrates that the economy was anything but planned, with the two most obvious being how Party insiders had differential access to goods and the thriving black market. Those "in charge" of the economy are accurately portrayed as clueless about how to get things done, while the black marketeers at least get goods moving. Although she never says so explicitly, it's clear that the "planners" suffer from the exact knowledge problem the Austrians raised.

Second, the novel makes clear that in the absence of any rationality to the plan, those with the power to implement it will use that power to divert resources to themselves. More specifically, Rand understood how a system in which discretionary power is up for grabs will attract those with a comparative advantage in acquiring and using that power. Much of her portrayal of party members revolves around their competition with one another in climbing the ladder—no one hesitating to stab his comrades in the back. Those who are good at such maneuverings are able to gain power and control resources. In the end, much like in *Animal Farm*, things didn't change that much: The revolution ended the exploitation of man by man and replaced it with . . . the exploitation of man by man.

Declining Living Standards

Finally, Rand vividly documents the decline in living standards for the average Russian. There are countless descriptions of the impoverishment of the citizenry, from their shrinking living space, to their dwindling food supplies, to their increasingly shabby clothing, to their growing inability to heat their homes. The party elite, of course, lives well, but the average person suffers. Rand's depiction is important here because so many observers from the 1930s right up through the 1980s argued that the Soviet economy was an economic powerhouse that would overtake America's. Paul Samuelson's widely used introductory economics textbook for years had a graph showing just that. Pundits and experts both left and right believed the "official" Soviet statistics, with the left wanting to believe that socialism worked and the right wanting to justify larger military budgets. But just as in the United States during World War II, aggregates such as GDP, which in the Soviet case were not accurate anyway, mostly reflected "conspicuous production" that had little relationship to the well-being of the typical person.

We the Living makes this abundantly clear.

Rand's novels may or may not be excellent literature, but they are excellent both at deploying good political economy and, in the case of *We the Living*, getting economic history right in a way most everyone else did not.

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Ayn Rand: A Centennial Appreciation

Chris Matthew Sciabarra

Born in Russia on February 2, 1905, the late novelist and philosopher Ayn Rand would eventually emigrate to the United States and make an indelible mark on intellectual history. (She died in 1982.) As we celebrate the centennial of her birth, it is fitting to recall Rand's unique contribution to the defense of capitalism as expressed in her magnum opus, the best-selling novel *Atlas Shrugged*.

In 1945, when Rand began outlining that work, she made a self-conscious decision to create a “much more ‘social’ novel than *The Fountainhead*.”^[1] She wished to focus not simply on the “soul of the individualist,” which *The Fountainhead* had dramatized so well, but to proceed “from persons, in terms of history, society, and the world.” This new “story must be primarily a picture of the whole,” she wrote in her journal, making transparent the cluster of relationships that constitute society as such:

Now, it is this *relation* that must be the theme. Therefore, the personal becomes secondary. That is, the personal is necessary only to the extent needed to make the relationships clear. In *The Fountainhead* I showed that Roark moves the world—that the Keatings feed upon him and hate him for it, while the Tooheys are consciously out to destroy him. But the theme was

Roark—not Roark’s relation to the world. Now it will be the relation.^[2]

Atlas Shrugged explores these relations in every dimension of human life. It traces the links between political economy and sex, education and art, metaphysics and psychology, money and moral values. It concentrates on the union of spiritual and physical realms and on the concrete means by which certain productive individuals move the world, and by which others live off of their creations. It shows the social importance of the creative act by documenting what would happen if the prime movers, the “men of the mind,” went on strike.

Most important, however, *Atlas Shrugged* provides a manifesto for a new radicalism—not a political radicalism per se, but a *methodological* radicalism, a radical way of thinking on which political and social change is built. As we celebrate the Rand centenary, it is fitting to explore the implications of Rand’s radicalism.

“To be radical,” Karl Marx said, “is to grasp things by the root.”^[3] Unlike Marx, however, Rand repudiated communism and its root, the “basic premises of collectivism” it embodied. Rand’s attack was “*radical* in the proper sense of the word.” As she explained: “‘Radical’ means ‘fundamental.’ Today, the fighters for capitalism have to be, not bankrupt ‘conservatives,’ but new radicals, new intellectuals and, above all, new, dedicated moralists.”^[4]

The analytical power of Rand’s radical framework went beyond a search for roots. In seeking to understand the *system* of statism, Rand showed how various factors often mutually support one another in sustaining its irrationality. She explores how coercive relations are at war with human beings and with life itself; they are “*anti-man, anti-mind, anti-life.*”^[5]

Mind-Body Integration

Rand's case for capitalism is a metaphysical and moral case built on a total and unequivocal rejection of the mind-body dichotomy and all the false alternatives it engenders. In her philosophic journals, Rand explained how her novel was meant to “[v]indicate the industrialist” as “the author of material production.”^[6] But underlying this vindication was Rand's desire to secularize the spiritual and spiritualize the material:

The material is only the expression of the spiritual; that it can neither be created *nor used* without the spiritual (thought); that it has no meaning without the spiritual, that it is only the means to a spiritual end—and, therefore, any new achievement in the realm of material production is an act of *high spirituality*, a great triumph and expression of man's spirit. And show that those who despise “the material” are those who despise man and whose basic premises are aimed at man's destruction.^[7]

In Rand's view, the “spiritual” does not pertain to an other-worldly faculty. It refers to an activity of human consciousness. Reason, as “the highest kind of spiritual activity,” is required “to conquer, control, and create in the material realm.”^[8] She did not limit material activities to purely industrial production. She wished to “show that *any* original rational idea, in any sphere of man's activity, is an act of creation.”^[9] This applies equally to the activity of industrialists and artists, businessmen and intellectuals, scientists and philosophers. Each of these spheres is accorded epistemological significance—and supreme respect.

By connecting reason and production, thought and action, theory and practice, fact and value, morality and prudence, Rand intended to uncover the “deeper, philosophical error” on which

these various dichotomies were based. As such, *Atlas Shrugged* was designed to “blast the separation of man into ‘body’ and ‘soul,’ the opposition of ‘matter’ and ‘spirit.’”^[10] Rand rejected the metaphysical dualists who had bifurcated human existence. She proclaimed in her journal that “Man is an indivisible entity.” Mind and body “can be considered separately only for purposes of discussion, not in actual fact,” she explained. Thus, in the projection of her “ideal man,” John Galt, there is “no intellectual contradiction and, therefore, no inner conflict” between mind and body.

The Sanction of the Victim

Galt’s revolution *against* human fragmentation is also a revolution *for* those who have been victimized by it and by the altruist morality that feasts on self-immolation. Throughout *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand showed how altruism is used by some (the “looters”) to instill guilt in others (the “producers”), by putting the virtues of the latter at the service of the former. She argued that the altruist’s demands for individual self-sacrifice to a “common good” require the “sanction of the victim.”^[11] The creators have for too long implicitly collaborated with their exploiters. That Galt grasps this principle, and that Hank Rearden and Dagny Taggart do not, sets up the main plot conflict in the novel. When Rearden begins to understand the implications of his actions, and the vast social consequences of a reckless moral code, he refuses to participate in his own martyrdom or to condone the government’s confiscation of his property. He tells his persecutors: “Whatever you wish me to do, I will do at the point of a gun. If you sentence me to jail, you will have to send armed men to carry me there—I will not volunteer to move. If you fine me, you will

have to seize my property to collect the fine—I will not volunteer to pay it. If you believe that you have the right to force me—use your guns openly. I will not help you to disguise the nature of your action” (479).

By withdrawing the “sanction of the victim,” the men of the mind strike out against the altruist core of statist political economy. But it is the “pyramid of ability” that explains why the strike works so effectively by draining the economy of talent. Those at the top of their intellectual craft contribute the most to those below them, while those at the bottom free-ride on the achievements of the innovators above them. Rand did not view this as a static class pyramid, for she believed that individuals can rise to levels consonant with their developed abilities. When human beings relate to one another on the basis of these abilities, exchanging value for value, a benevolent harmony of interests becomes possible. When “need,” rather than ability, becomes a criterion for the acquisition of values, it sets off a degenerative social process in which the “needs” of some place a moral claim on the lives of others. This is the evil of altruism, says Rand; it becomes a pretext for oppressing the most creative individuals in society.

Cultural and Political Decay

Moral and social deterioration go hand in hand with cultural and political degeneration, in Rand’s view. In the dystopian society of *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand contrasted the “symphony of triumph” that is Richard Halley’s “Concerto of Deliverance” with the “dreary senselessness of the art shows” in vogue. And yet it is the senseless that receives public adulation and government subsidies. As the literary leader of his age, Balph Eubank declares: “No, you cannot

expect people to understand the higher reaches of philosophy. Culture should be taken out of the hands of the dollar-chasers. We need a national subsidy for literature. It is disgraceful that artists are treated like peddlers and that art works have to be sold like soap” (141).

This is the same cultural figure who asserts that “Plot is a primitive vulgarity in literature”—a claim like that of Dr. Simon Pritchett, who adds: “Just as logic is a primitive vulgarity in philosophy.” And Mort Liddy, who proclaims: “Just as melody is a primitive vulgarity in music” (134).

As another sign of the cultural and philosophic bankruptcy of the society portrayed in *Atlas Shrugged*, we are introduced to Pritchett’s book, *The Metaphysical Contradictions of the Universe*, which “proved irrefutably” that “Nothing is absolute. Everything is a matter of opinion” (265). And then there is Dr. Floyd Ferris of the State Science Institute, which produces the top-secret “Project X,” an apparatus of death. Ferris is the author of *Why Do You Think You Think?*—a book that declares that “Thought is a primitive superstition” and that “Nothing exists but contradictions” (340–41).

Rand made it clear that such books flourish in this degraded society and that their floating abstractions have actual implications: “You think that a system of philosophy—such as Dr. Pritchett’s—is just something academic, remote, impractical? But it isn’t. Oh, boy, how it isn’t!” (265).

The ultimate concrete testament to the deadly implications of a culture that denigrates reality, logic, certainty, principles, ethics, rights, and the individual is the fatal voyage of the Taggart Comet, a train that disappears into the eternity of a tunnel, each of its passengers sharing “one or more” of the ideas of a nihilistic age.

Rand also showed that such nihilism could never triumph if its death premises were fully articulated. Those ideas can gain currency only when rationalized as means to glowing “social” ends. Rand illustrated how the use of a certain *political* language serves the thoroughly corrupt material interests of those who wield political power. “The State Science Institute is not the tool of any private interests or personal greed,” we are told; “it is devoted to the welfare of mankind, to the good of humanity as a whole—” (819). These “sickening generalities” and Orwellian slogans, repeated over and over again by the politically privileged, are the veneer that covers up the looting of the productive and the development of weapons of mass destruction and torture.

Every government bill, every political organization, is a study in euphemisms. Corporations slurping at the public trough, while using antitrust rulings to crush their competitors? That’s the “Anti-Dog-Eat-Dog Rule” in action. Then there are companies like the “Interneighborly Amity and Development Corporation” or the “Friends of Global Progress,” which campaigns for the “Equalization of Opportunity Bill,” the forced “social” sharing of productive assets. “The Bureau of Economic Planning and National Resources” and other government agencies focus on “Essential Need” Projects. “The Unification Board,” the “Railroad Unification Plan,” the “Steel

Unification Plan,” the “Order of Public Benefactors” all aim for “the democratization of industry.” Such acts in the “public interest” destroy *private* property, genuine *social* accountability, and *individual* responsibility. Rand documented, painfully, how the destruction of the market economy and its specialization and division of labor is, ultimately, a destruction of the “division of responsibility.” In a statist social order, where everybody owns

everything, nobody will be held responsible for anything. “It’s not my fault” is the statist’s credo.”^[12]

This irresponsibility is only one aspect of the *process* by which a statist economy implodes. In *Atlas Shrugged*, the economic system careens from one disaster to another, as the “men of the mind” withdraw their sanction from a government that regulates, prohibits, and stifles trade. Statist politicians attempt to exert more and more control over the machinery of production. To no avail. In the end, directives are issued, like Number 10-289, which attach workers to their jobs, order businesses to remain open regardless of their level of profit, nationalize all patents and copyrights, outlaw invention, and standardize the quantity of production and the quantity of consumer purchases, thereby freezing wages and prices—and human creativity.

The “pyramid of ability” is supplanted by the “aristocracy of pull.” A predatory neofascist social system, which survived parasitically, must ultimately be destroyed by its own inner contradictions, incapacitating or driving underground the rational and productive Atlases who carry the world on their shoulders.

Rand’s radical legacy, as presented in *Atlas Shrugged*, led her, in later years, to question the fundamentals at work in virtually every social problem she analyzed. She viewed each problem through multidimensional lenses, rejecting all one-sided resolutions as partial and incomplete. On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of Rand’s birth, it is important to remember that her conception of human freedom depended on a grand vision of the psychological, moral, and cultural factors necessary to its achievement. Hers was a comprehensive revolution that encompassed all levels of social relations: “*Intellectual* freedom cannot exist without *political* freedom; political freedom cannot

exist without *economic freedom; a free mind and a free market are corollaries.*”^[13]

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Endnotes

[1] Ayn Rand, *Journals of Ayn Rand*, ed. David Harriman (New York: Penguin Dutton, 1997), p. 390.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 392.

[3] Karl Marx, “The Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right,” in *Early Writings*, trans. and ed. T. B. Bottomore; foreword by Erich Fromm (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963 [1843]).

[4] Ayn Rand, “Conservatism: An Obituary,” in Ayn Rand, *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal* (New York: New American Library, 1967), p. 200.

[5] Ayn Rand, “Is Atlas Shrugging?” in *ibid.*, p. 151.

[6] *Journals*, p. 550.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 551.

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 550.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 551.

[11] Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 35th anniversary ed. (New York: Dutton, 1992 [1957]), p. 454. Subsequent quotes from the novel are indicated by page numbers in the text.

[12] *Atlas Shrugged*, p. 222.

[13] Ayn Rand, *For the New Intellectual: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand* (New York: New American Library: 1961), p. 25.

Part 4

Her Life and Personality

Ayn Rand's Heroic Life

Jeffrey A. Tucker

I first encountered Ayn Rand through her nonfiction. This was when I was a junior in high school, and I'm pretty sure it was my first big encounter with big ideas. It changed me. Like millions of others who read her, I developed a consciousness that what I thought—the ideas I held in my mind—mattered for what kind of life I would live. And it mattered for everyone else too; the kind of world we live in is an extension of what we believe about what life can mean.

People today argue over her legacy and influence—taking apart the finer points of her ethics, metaphysics, epistemology. This is all fine but it can be a distraction from her larger message about the moral integrity and creative capacity of the individual human mind. In so many ways, it was this vision that gave the postwar freedom movement what it needed most: a driving moral passion to win. This, more than any technical achievements in economic theory or didactic rightness over public-policy solutions, is what gave the movement the will to overcome the odds.

Often I hear people offer a caveat about Rand. Her works are good. Her life, not so good. Probably this impression comes from public curiosity about various personal foibles and issues that became the subject of gossip, as well as the extreme factionalism that afflicted the movement she inspired.

This is far too narrow a view. In fact, she lived a remarkably heroic life. Had she acquiesced to the life fate seemed to have

chosen for her, she would have died young, poor, and forgotten. Instead, she had the determination to live free. She left Russia, immigrated to the United States, made her way to Hollywood, and worked and worked until she built a real career. This one woman—with no advantages and plenty of disadvantages—on her own became one of the most influential minds of this twentieth century.

So, yes, her life deserves to be known and celebrated. Few of us today face anything like the barriers she faced. She overcame them and achieved greatness. Let her inspire you too.

Originally published at FEE.org on September 1, 2016, inspired by the Ayn Rand Institute's "**Ayn Rand Draw My Life Video.**"

Ayn, What if Atlas Snapped?

Kirk Barbera

Would Aristotle have Tweeted? Would Isaac Newton have been too busy being distracted by Facebook that he would not have written *The Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*?

Would Ayn Rand have Snapchatted?

In reading about historical figures it is easy to forget that they were once living, breathing beings. We can read and even watch the voluminous material about Ayn Rand's life, but forget that she would have had restless nights just as we do. We can read her works and hear that she fled Soviet Russia in 1926. We may know of her as a stolid stoic, but undoubtedly, in leaving her homeland, her family, and her friends, she wept.

The lives of those who came before us can be a guide to our own choices. We learn about staunch idealists like Ayn Rand and Winston Churchill and we become more idealistic ourselves.

Atlas Snapped

Ayn Rand was a revolutionary in many ways. Not merely in challenging two thousand years of entrenched morality, but in the way she lived her life. She may not have had Snapchat, but she had moving pictures.

From today's perspective, we see her life and many of her choices as quaint. Watch the movie *The Fountainhead* or *Love*

Letters, both written by Rand, and you will probably experience this feeling too. “Aww how cute she is creating little romances where they kiss on the cheek.” Seeing old films in general can cause this reaction in most people today.

No doubt in fifty years people will look back at our Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube activities as quaint and cute. “Aww look how cute they are without cameras in their eyeballs.” Or whatever may be coming.

In our own day, especially among intellectuals and the more traditional or “pure” artists, there still remains a reluctance to fully embracing the culture which we all clearly live in today (for future generations this is January 2017).

To help you see just how revolutionary Ayn Rand was, here is a timeline of her life and that of the brand new technology: Motion Pictures. This was the art form that most inspired her to leave Petrograd for America.

Ayn Rand and Film

- **1892** Edison invents moving picture camera and a viewing device called the Kinetoscope. The Moving Picture work is born.
- **1905** Alisa Zinov'yenva Rosenbaum is born in St. Petersburg. One day she would be known throughout the world as Ayn Rand.
- **1913** Eight year old Rosenbaum sees her first “flick,” which is a short 2-reel moving picture. That same year the first feature length movie becomes a hit in America: “Quo Vadis.”

- **1926** A 20 year old Rand receives a pamphlet “Hollywood America Movie City,” and she moves to America that same year. Soon after arriving she is an extra on “The Kind of Kings.”
- **1927–32** In 1927 she is a writer for short films. In 1932 she sells her script “Red Pawn.”
- **1949** The Fountainhead movie is released.

When Rand was 8 years old, while living in Petrograd she saw a flicker across a screen—the motion picture camera was less than 20 years old at that time; when she moved to America she got her first job as an extra on *The King of Kings*, she was 20 years old and the feature length film was barely 13 years old. Even by the time she wrote and sold *The Fountainhead* script in 1948, “Talkies” were barely 20 years old and the industry was not yet 40.

Every step of the way, even in her desire to adapt a teleplay for *Atlas Shrugged* in the 70s, she adopted whatever new technology existed as a means to tell her story. By the way, her adoption of technology had nothing to do with her age. She was planning a teleplay adaptation of *Atlas Shrugged* till her death.

Let us imagine Ayn Rand being born in 1990 rather than 1905.

If Ayn Rand Were Born in 1990

- **1990–95** Ayn Rand is born in St. Petersburg. In 1995 Windows ‘95 opens the Internet to the masses in America.
- **1998** At eight years old Ayn sees her first video on a computer.

- **2009** She reads a blog “YouTube: The New Hollywood in America.” That same year she moves to America and launches her own YouTube channel.
- **2012** She learn about Snapchat and Instagram, saves up for a new phone, and starts to tell stories.
- **2017** Sells her first script to Netflix Productions.
- **2025** Her first major novel “The Fountainhead” is repurposed on every major media platform in the world.

In 1998 rather than watching her first “two reeler” (fifteen minute short movie) she would have seen a short video on the internet. In 2010 she would read a blog about YouTube storytellers in America. She would be in America that same year. In 2012 she would learn about Snapchat and Instagram. She would begin telling stories on those platforms. In 2017 she would either have a mildly watched show online, or she would sell her storytelling ability to a more popular producer—maybe she would sell a script to Netflix or Amazon Productions.

She would be 27.

Accepting the Inevitable

I commend those intelligentsia today who do embrace (if tentatively) the new social media production capabilities. Most, however, are so romantic about the past as to be blind to the potential of the present. Even those who admire a figure like Rand are often blind to the reality of how utterly revolutionary and bold she really was.

We live in a time that Rand and other revolutionaries would have envied. “You mean I can simply produce my own material, rather than be rejected dozens of times and eat in soup kitchens?”

And yet, we today are still complaining and ignoring the truth of this amazing technology. Parents in the 1920s and 1930s complained about those nuisances called nickelodeons and motion pictures, too.

I have some advice for anyone curious about being a Randian Revolutionary.

First, go to your app store.

Second, download Snapchat, Instagram, music.ly, Anchor and any other social media platform you may not already possess.

Third, watch. Read. Listen.

That's right, just consume like a child. Explore every day for two or three hours (kind of like watching a movie a day). Follow social media stars. Read viral articles by [Ryan Holiday](#). Listen to the DJ Khaleds and [Gary Vaynerchuks](#) on Snapchat.

We have already forgotten just how young the consumer web really is. Netscape and Windows 95 were launched . . . well, in 1995. That's only 22 years ago. Really, the consumer web is in its childhood, maybe it's a teenager. It will mature in the next 5–10 years. And then?

VR baby.

Originally published on [Smash Cut Culture](#), January 26, 2017.

That Day I Interviewed Ayn Rand

Jeffrey A. Tucker

“**T**hey are playing it straight!”
That was the first comment on the live stream as my interview with Ayn Rand went live, conducted 35 years after her death.

Maybe people figured it was going to be satirical, but this would be impossible, at least for me. Jennifer Grossman of the [Atlas Society](#) made an excellent Rand, in her ideas, costume, and even accent. In order for me honestly to interview her, I had to suspend disbelief.

As soon as Ms. Grossman proposed this, I saw the merit in the idea. Rand died in 1982 and too few today know her work. Instead they accept the caricatured reputation. This is the sad fate of fame. Even the greatest thinkers have their great works reduced to slogans and phrases. It's happened to Plato, Aristotle, Locke, Darwin, Freud, Hayek, and thousands of others, and it's happening to Rand too.

What if we brought the person back to life and had him or her present a biographical story and passing observations on our times in contemporary vernacular? I've seen this done with Benjamin Franklin, Oscar Wilde, and Mark Twain. Why not Ayn Rand?

Yes, it is a risk. It bothers me when the living purport with certainty to speak for the dead. Death ends the life of the mind, so it is no longer allowed to evolve with changes in evidence. When people ask me, as they often do, “what would Murray Rothbard say about x?” my response is always “I do not know because he is not here to speak.”

How do you overcome the risk of misrepresentation or the appearance of outright impiety? You need a certain humility. You need to approach the task not with the purpose of fully capturing the mind of a great thinker but rather with a deferential desire to represent a habit of thought and a personality with the aim of intriguing others enough to inspire further investigation.

So Ms. Grossman had a very difficult job to do. In fact, I suspect if she had known ahead of time the challenge she faced, she never would have taken it on. I had the easy part: just asking questions. She had the impossible part: answering them. And yet she did a splendid job.

I did choose a certain emphasis in my line of questioning. I’ve had the sense that even among those who appreciate Rand’s work, the heroism of her life itself is underappreciated and even disparaged. I wanted Rand to explain how she overcame enormous obstacles to rise from a doomed child of a bourgeois family ruined by the Bolsheviks to become one of the most successful American novelists of the 20th century. I was pretty sure that much of this would be new to people.

I always wanted Rand to rebut some common misperceptions about her work.

She did both very well.

This was an experiment, and the results are far from perfect. But it is my hope that we have a chance for a repeat performance. There is so much more I want to ask her, and there are so many

more who need to see and hear her in our times, if only to inspire people to visit her actual writings, or revisit them again.

Rand has so much to teach the world, right now. Every bit of creativity is necessary to keep those lessons alive.

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Nathaniel Branden, Rest in Peace

Jeffrey A. Tucker

It was sometime in the late 1980s when I first met Nathaniel Branden, the objectivist psychologist and author who died recently at the age of 84. I went to see his speech being hosted by the Heritage Foundation.

Not having updated my information about him, I still pictured him as the enforcer at the Ayn Rand circle in New York in the 1960s. I had once been cast as the character of Nathaniel Branden in a [hilarious play written by Murray Rothbard about the Rand circle](#). I played Branden as I imagined him.

As I recall, his lecture in the late 1980s concerned how a large and expanding government strangles the human personality. We need the freedom to create, to experiment, to form our own sense of ourselves in order to realize our potential. Dependency relationships with the state, he said, discourage and distort that capacity. Big government, if we let it, makes us less than fully human.

I appreciated his talk, because it drew together political philosophy, economics, and human psychology in the same way that Ludwig von Mises did in his great 1920 work [Socialism](#). Branden's lecture was warm, humane, broad, and sensible. He came across as very intelligent (no surprise there) but also very reasonable.

He was clearly not the man I thought he was. He represented the Randian perspective very well that day. He showed how what many people regard as an intolerant creed (**Objectivism**) could be quite useful in analyzing and describing the world around us.

I went up to him afterward and introduced myself. The crowds were thinning out, so we had a chance to talk at length. He was engaging and charming, and very thoughtful. We talked about various policy issues and some personal details. We spoke about Rand, of course (I had been reading her since I was 15 years old). As I think back on it, he must have, at some level, been ready to move beyond her for decades, but he was still very gracious in answering my questions.

I was so pleased to discover that this legendary figure—famous to me for being the paragon of intolerance—was so affirming and personable. Something was different.

From then on, I developed my own template for his life, based purely on what I imagined must have happened. He was a very young man in the midst of a very strange cultural moment. It was the height of the Cold War and he had read the writings of Rand, who was a rare figure in her time: an intellectual and novelist who supported freedom. He fell in love with her ideas and, eventually, with Rand herself.

It was a heady time, full of rampant and fanatical ideology on the left and the right. The flow of information was inhibited by the level of technology and by gatekeepers everywhere. There was no surfing the web, and there was little ongoing public debate. Social and intellectual groups existed only within physical spaces. The perception at the time was that everyone had to choose one group and double down on that choice. The Cold War mentality afflicted even the intellectual world: there were only trusted friends and external enemies.

Branden's chosen mentor said things that few others were willing to say. As so many did, he found Rand compelling and courageous. To be her champion and gatekeeper, to be part of her inner circle and eventually its leading figure, was a powerful feeling. The cult of personality played a role, too. With his appointment as topic cadre member came a sense of belonging, the sure-footedness that comes with having found the whole truth. There were no more questions to ask, only doctrines to preach and enforce. And he did it with gusto.

After his disastrous falling-out with Rand, it took him some years to see the episode clearly. Eventually, he realized that a genuinely great idea does not need people who crack skulls, purge, condemn, and exclude. It needs people who explain, edify, listen, and learn. A great body of thought shines on its own, without shouting, extremist dogmatism, or the pose of omniscience. He never repudiated his Objectivism or his deep love for Rand's ideas, but he came to wear them lightly, as part of a life well lived.

Rather than an enforcer, he had come to see himself as a servant. He served Objectivism well by being the more humane face of the inner circle to which he once belonged. He also sought to serve his readers and was busy putting out a nice shelfful of books. He came to see Rand's philosophy not as a gnostic teaching intended only for purists, to be imposed with severity and shouting, but as a gift to the world, a perspective that illuminates the potential of the human person and the dangers of all barriers to self-achievement.

He learned that being principled does not require being a jerk, and that having convictions does not mean insulting your opponents. In many ways, he was a survivor, and the life lessons he learned were hard won. For the rest of his life after

the break with Rand, he endured slings and arrows from Rand's closest followers.

But he didn't seem to have let the turn of events demoralize him. He kept working and kept producing, with high spirits and brave persistence.

And you know what I admire about him most? As far as I know, he never fired back at his enemies after being purged from their inner circle. And he continued to speak about Rand with genuine affection and respect.

The course of Branden's life and work reveals lessons for everyone. He learned over time that true ideas do not need gatekeepers to cast out nonconformists, much less crusaders dedicated to crushing deviants.

Rather, the truth needs sincere hearts that believe with genuine conviction, public intellectuals who share their ideas generously while remaining open to new ideas, and adherents who shine the light of truth for all who seek it.

I think back to Rothbard's play. It is a send-up of imperialist, fanatical ideology as driven by the cult of personality. The character who represents Rothbard is taken aback because, to him, the whole purpose of human liberty is to unleash the wonders and magnificence of the human personality—to provide the maximum amount of room for its creative expression in the world.

How interesting that Branden himself seemed to come around to that view: if we are to love liberty, we need to love it not just as a policy, but as a life principle. Nathaniel Branden spent the best and most productive part of his career explaining and modeling that idea.

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Ayn Rand, the Movies, and the Idea of America

Laurie Rice

Ayn Rand’s monograph “Textbook of Americanism,” newly published on FEE.org (and included as an appendix to this ebook), is virtually unknown. Written during a decisive turning point in history, it was delivered by Rand personally to FEE’s founder Leonard Read in 1946. The monograph represents Rand’s desire to draw stark lines between an emerging postwar collectivism and the individualism she believed built America. She joined others in pointing out that collectivism had wrought the horrors the world had just endured.

“Textbook of Americanism” also represents her worldview as it came to be shaped by her childhood experiences with communism, her early love of film as a means of artistic expression, and her perceptions about the future of freedom.

As a young student in Russia at the dawn of the Bolshevik takeover, at a small theater for silent films, Rand caught her first glimpse of the New York skyline. The silhouette burned in her mind, a symbol of creative passion and unbounded achievement, outlining the edges of her growing philosophy of individualism.

Beneath the epic geometry of the skyline, communist propagandists prattled on. Rand’s biographer [Anne Heller](#) explains:

Soviet government censors always added absurd subtitles to the films . . . turning an ordinary American family dinner scene into a portrait of greed, for example, by labeling it “A capitalist eating well on profits wrung from his starving workers.”

The image of New York fused two of the major themes in Rand’s life: the art of cinema and the concept of America.

Within a few years of her foray into American silent movies, she would enroll at the State Technicum for Screen Arts in Leningrad in 1924. The school offered free tuition to students sympathetic to Bolshevik ideology, in hopes of grooming future communist propagandists. But Rand wanted to write screenplays *attacking* communism.

Realizing that such writing would lead to imprisonment or death—in purges like one that had swept her university just a few years before—she decided to emigrate. In 1926, she sailed from the Soviet Union and landed at the foot of her beloved New York skyline, with government permission to visit relatives.

Her excuse was that her cousin owned a theater in Chicago. The conditions of her permission were that she would work at the US theater for six months, then return to Russia to work on communist propaganda films. Within two years after she had left Russia, the opportunity for emigration had closed. She had made it out just in time—and perhaps saved her life.

Once in the United States, she immediately broke the terms of her visa, left Chicago, and traveled to Hollywood. There she worked as a movie extra, a junior screenwriter, and then a wardrobe department manager, while writing plays and notes for novels in her own time. She met her husband on the set of a film called *The King of Kings*; their marriage gained her US citizenship.

By the time Rand wrote “Textbook of Americanism” in 1946, twenty years after she arrived in New York, the world had entered into a decade of massive tectonic shifts throughout the political landscape. During the New Deal, Congress had passed the Social Security Act and set the first US minimum wage, among many other measures that had regimented economic life.

The wartime economy had inflicted New Deal recovery measures on a country still reeling from the Depression. Adolf Hitler had risen to power in Germany and created a horrific spectacle of genocide against the Jewish people. Governments had waged a war of massive carnage across Europe. The United States had suffered an attack at Pearl Harbor and then later dropped atomic bombs—weapons of previously unknown destruction—on both Nagasaki and Hiroshima in Japan.

In response to the chaos of World War II, government leaders had come together to form the United Nations, sparking both hopes of a lasting world peace and fears of an oppressive global government. The stage was set for crises in Berlin, the political upheaval in Greece with a communist victory, and the upcoming Cold War. The lines of nation-states had been crossed, broken, and redrawn all over the world.

It’s best to understand the mindset of Rand, other intellectuals, and much of the world population after World War II as post-traumatic. Of course, people who had experienced combat directly, such as soldiers, suffered the most severe effects. But people everywhere were struggling, sometimes dramatically, to re-establish safety and boundaries, to identify meaning in the chaotic events, and to find a course that would prevent such horrors from ever happening again.

It was during this eerie twilight of war that Rand joined the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American

Ideals. This organization consisted of a number of prominent conservative figures in Hollywood, including Ronald Reagan, Walt Disney, Gary Cooper, Ginger Rogers, Clark Gable, and John Wayne.

The alliance's immediate purpose was to assemble well-known people as witnesses to a congressional investigation of the motion picture industry. The alliance's longer-term mission was to organize the motion picture industry's pro-freedom figures to defend their field against the ideas of communism. Movies in Hollywood at the time frequently portrayed Russia and communism sympathetically, or spread implicit communist messages within other stories.

"Textbook of Americanism" was written toward this bigger goal, with Rand calling for the values of individualism and freedom to be portrayed in her beloved movie industry. The essay appeared in a publication for the Motion Picture Alliance called *The Vigil*.

"Textbook of Americanism" is organized in question-and-answer format, from the most basic issues to the more complex. Rand wrote both, with questions as prompts to explain her own perceptions of what it means to be American. The essay features twelve questions; Rand planned to elaborate further, but the full project was never finished.

True to her philosophical roots, Rand used "Textbook of Americanism" to explain in the simplest terms possible what made America unique and great. She opens with an explanation of two starkly contrasting ideas.

What Is the Basic Issue in the World Today?

The basic issue in the world today is between two principles: Individualism and Collectivism. Individualism

holds that man has inalienable rights which cannot be taken away from him by any other man, nor by any number, group or collective of other men. Therefore, each man exists by his own right and for his own sake, not for the sake of the group.

Collectivism holds that man has no rights; that his work, his body and his personality belong to the group; that the group can do with him as it pleases, in any manner it pleases, for the sake of whatever it decides to be its own welfare. Therefore, each man exists only by the permission of the group and for the sake of the group.

These two principles are the roots of two opposite social systems. The basic issue of the world today is between these two systems.

From this foundation, Rand builds her case for limiting the power of the collective, for the difference between arbitrary law and moral law, and for the meaning of rights. She summarizes the proper role of government—the smallest conceivable and essential functions—and the moral imperative not to initiate force. She clarifies that individualism and collectivism are exclusive terms, that any “mix” is a breach against individualism. Finally, she issues a warning: compromising individual rights will lead to society’s destruction.

The tensions surrounding “Textbook of Americanism” are fascinating. It is written about the United States precisely at a time when the idea of the nation-state was crumbling from its own destructive methods, giving way to modern globalization. The essay calls for radical freedom during a dark American paranoia about speech, when communists were put on trial for their beliefs. It is Rand appealing in good faith to the movie industry she loved, at a time when Hollywood was deeply entrenched with

the cronyists and communists she hated. It is Rand's passionate advocacy of ideology while many intellectuals were blaming all systematic ideology for the genocide of the Jewish people. And it enjoins and participates in a propaganda war not long before the dawn of an Internet age that would democratize media and increasingly eliminate the power of propaganda.

But in the midst of the political chaos, upheaval, and conceptual fog of the historical moment, Rand sought to explain the fundamental ideas of individualism and freedom.

Just as she had been inspired by the jagged silhouette of New York City looming in the backdrop of her favorite movies, Rand sought to provide a glimpse of the most essential issue of her time in the clearest possible outline.

[You can read "Textbook of Americanism" in the appendix of this ebook. Also, the original that Rand delivered to Leonard Read is available in PDF on [FEE.org](https://www.fee.org).]

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Appendix: Textbook of Americanism

Ayn Rand

(This department is offered as a kind of intellectual ammunition depot. To help us clarify our own ideas, to help us understand what we are defending and how to defend it, and to enable us to identify our enemies: The Vigil presents the first of a series by Ayn Rand, distinguished American author.)

1. What Is the Basic Issue in the World Today?

The basic issue in the world today is between two principles: Individualism and Collectivism.

Individualism holds that man has unalienable rights which cannot be taken away from him by any other man, nor by any number, group or collective of other men. Therefore, each man exists by his own right and for his own sake, not for the sake of the group.

Collectivism holds that man has no rights; that his work, his body and his personality belong to the group; that the group can do with him as it pleases, in any manner it pleases, for the sake of whatever it decides to be its own welfare. Therefore, each man exists only by the permission of the group and for the sake of the group.

These two principles are the roots of two opposite social systems. The basic issue of the world today is between these two systems.

2. What Is a Social System?

A social system is a code of laws which men observe in order to live together. Such a code must have a basic principle, a starting point, or it cannot be devised. The starting point is the question: *Is the power of society limited or unlimited?*

Individualism answers: The power of society is limited by the unalienable, individual rights of man. Society may make only such laws as do not violate these rights.

Collectivism answers: The power of society is unlimited. Society may make any laws it wishes, and force them upon anyone in any manner it wishes.

Example: Under a system of *Individualism*, a million men cannot pass a law to kill one man for their own benefit. If they go ahead and kill him, they are breaking the law—which protects his right to life—and they are punished.

Under a system of *Collectivism*, a million men (or anyone claiming to represent them) can pass a law to kill one man (or any minority), whenever they think they would benefit by his death. His right to live is not recognized.

Under *Individualism*, it is illegal to kill the man and it is legal for him to protect himself. The law is on the side of the right. Under *Collectivism*, it is legal for the majority to kill a man and it is illegal for him to defend himself. The law is on the side of a *number*.

In the first case, the law represents a moral principle.

In the second case, the law represents the idea that there *are no* moral principles, and men can do anything they please, provided there's enough of them.

Under a system of Individualism, men are equal before the law at all times. Each has the same rights, whether he is alone or has a million others with him.

Under a system of Collectivism, men have to gang up on one another—and whoever has the biggest gang at the moment, holds *all* rights, while the loser (the individual or the minority) has none. Any man can be an absolute master or a helpless slave—according to the size of his gang.

An example of the first system: *The United States of America*. (See: The Declaration of Independence.)

An example of the second system: *Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany*.

Under the Soviet system, millions of peasants or “kulaks” were exterminated by law, a law justified by the pretext that this was for the benefit of the majority, which the ruling group contended was anti-kulak. Under the Nazi system, millions of Jews were exterminated by law, a law justified by the pretext that this was for the benefit of the majority, which the ruling group contended was anti-Semitic.

The Soviet law and the Nazi law were the unavoidable and consistent result of the principle of Collectivism. When applied in practice, a principle which recognizes no morality and no individual rights, can result in nothing except brutality.

Keep this in mind when you try to decide what is the proper social system. You have to start by answering the first question. *Either the power of society is limited, or it is not*. It can't be both.

3. What Is the Basic Principle of America?

The basic principle of the United States of America is Individualism.

America is built on the principle that Man possesses Unalienable Rights;

- that these rights belong to each *man* as an individual—not to “men” as a group of collective;
- that these rights are the unconditional, private, personal, individual possession of each man—not the public, social, collective possession of a group;
- that these rights are granted to man by the fact of his birth as a man—not by an act of society;
- that man holds these rights, not *from* the Collective nor *for* the Collective, but *against* the Collective—as a barrier which the Collective cannot cross;
- that these rights are man’s protection against all other men;
- that only on the basis of these rights can men have a society of freedom, justice, human dignity, and decency.

The Constitution of the United States of America is not a document that limits the rights of man—but a document that limits the power of society over man.

4. What Is a Right?

A right is the sanction of independent action. A right is that which can be exercised without anyone’s permission.

If you exist only because society permits you to exist—you have no *right* to your own life. A permission can be revoked at any time.

If, before undertaking some action, you must obtain the permission of society—you are not free, whether such permission is granted to you or not. Only a slave acts on permission. A permission is not a right.

Do not make the mistake, at this point, of thinking that a worker is a slave and that he holds his job by his employer's permission. He does not hold it by permission—but *by contract*, that is, by a voluntary mutual agreement. A worker can quit his job. A slave cannot.

5. What Are the Inalienable Rights of Man?

The inalienable Rights of Man are: Life, Liberty and The Pursuit of Happiness.

The Right of Life means that Man cannot be deprived of his life for the benefit of another man nor of any number of other men.

The Right of Liberty means Man's right to individual action, individual choice, individual initiative and individual property. Without the right to private property no independent action is possible.

The Right to the Pursuit of Happiness means man's right to live for himself, to choose what constitutes his own private, personal, individual happiness and to work for its achievement, so long as he respects the same right in others. It means that Man cannot be forced to devote his life to the happiness of another man nor of any number of other men. It means that the collective cannot decide what is to be the purpose of man's existence nor prescribe his choice of happiness.

6. How Do We Recognize One Another's Rights?

Since Man has inalienable individual rights, this means that the same rights are held, individually, by every man, by all men, at all times. Therefore, the rights of one man cannot and must not violate the rights of another.

For instance: a man has the right to live, but he has no right to take the life of another. He has the right to be free, but no right to enslave another. He has the right to choose his own happiness, but no right to decide that his happiness lies in the misery (or murder or robbery or enslavement) of another. The very right upon which he acts defines the same right of another man, and serves as a guide to tell him what he may or may not do.

Do not make the mistake of the ignorant who think that an individualist is a man who says: "I'll do as I please at everybody else's expense." An individualist is a man who recognizes the inalienable individual rights of man—his own and those of others.

An individualist is a man who says: "I will not run anyone's life—nor let anyone run mine. I will not rule nor be ruled. I will not be a master nor a slave. I will not sacrifice myself to anyone—nor sacrifice anyone to myself."

A collectivist is a man who says: "Let's get together, boys—and then anything goes!"

7. How Do We Determine That a Right Has Been Violated?

A right cannot be violated except by physical force. One man cannot deprive another of his life, nor enslave him, nor forbid him to pursue his happiness, except by using force against him.

Whenever a man is made to act without his own free, personal, individual, *voluntary* consent—his right has been violated.

Therefore, we can draw a clear-cut division between the rights of one man and those of another. It is an *objective* division—not subject to differences of opinion, nor to majority decision, nor to the arbitrary decree of society. NO MAN HAS THE RIGHT TO INITIATE THE USE OF PHYSICAL FORCE AGAINST ANOTHER MAN.

The practical rule of conduct in a free society, a society of Individualism, is simple and clear-cut; you cannot expect or demand any action from another man, except through his free, voluntary consent.

Do not be misled on this point by an old collectivist trick which goes like this: There is no absolute freedom anyway, since you are not free to murder; society limits your freedom when it does not permit you to kill; therefore, society holds the right to limit your freedom in any manner it sees fit; therefore, drop the delusion of freedom—freedom is whatever society decides it is.

It is *not* society, nor any social right, that forbids you to kill—but the inalienable *individual* right of another man to live. This is not a “compromise” between two rights—but a line of division that preserves both rights untouched. The division is not derived from an edict of society—but from your own inalienable individual right. The definition of this limit is not set arbitrarily by society—but is implicit in the definition of your own right.

Within the sphere of your own rights, your freedom *is* absolute.

8. What Is the Proper Function of Government?

The proper function of government is to protect the individual rights of man; this means—to protect man against brute force.

In a proper social system, men do not use force against one another; force may be used only in self-defense, that is, in defense of a right violated by force. Men delegate to the government the power to use force in retaliation—and *only* in retaliation.

The proper kind of government *does not* initiate the use of force. It uses force *only* to answer those who have initiated its use. For example: when the government arrests a criminal, it is not the government that violates a right; it is the criminal who has violated a right and by doing so has placed himself outside the principle of rights, where men can have no recourse against him except through force.

Now it is important to remember that all actions defined as criminal in a free society are actions involving force—and only such actions are answered by force.

Do not be misled by sloppy expressions such as “A murderer commits a crime against society.” It is not society that a murderer murders, but an individual man. It is not a social right that he breaks, but an individual right. He is not punished for hurting a collective—he has not hurt a whole collective—he has hurt one man. If a criminal robs ten men—it is still not “society” that he has robbed, but ten individuals. There are no “crimes against society”—all crimes are committed against specific men, against individuals. And it is precisely the duty of a proper social system and of a proper government to protect an individual against criminal attack—against force.

When, however, a government becomes an *initiator of force*—the injustice and moral corruption involved are truly unspeakable.

For example: When a Collectivist government orders a man to work and attaches him to a job, under penalty of death or imprisonment—it is the government that initiates the use of force. The man has done no violence to anyone—but the government uses violence against him. There is no possible justification for such a procedure in theory. And there is no possible result in practice except the blood and the terror which you can observe in any Collectivist country.

The moral perversion involved is this: If men had no government and no social system of any kind, they might have to exist through sheer force and fight one another in any disagreement; in such a state, one man would have a fair chance against one other man; but he would have no chance against ten others. It is not against *an individual* that a man needs protection—but *against a group*. Still, in such a state of anarchy, while any majority gang would have its way, a minority could fight them by any means available. And the gang could not make its rule last.

Collectivism goes a step below savage anarchy: it takes away from man even the chance to fight back. It makes violence legal—and resistance to it illegal. It gives the sanction of law to the organized brute force of a majority (or of anyone who claims to represent it)—and turns the minority into a helpless, disarmed object of extermination. If you can think of a more vicious perversion of justice—name it.

In actual practice, when a Collectivist society violates the rights of a minority (or of one single man), the result is that the majority loses its rights as well, and finds itself delivered into the total power of a small group that rules through sheer brute force.

If you want to understand and keep clearly in mind the difference between the use of force as retaliation (as it is used by the government of an Individualist society) and the use of force as primary policy (as it is used by the government of a Collectivist society), here is the simplest example of it: it is the same difference as that between a murderer and a man who kills in self-defense. The proper kind of government acts on the principle of man's self-defense. A Collectivist government acts like a murderer.

9. Can There Be A “Mixed” Social System?

There can be no social system which is a mixture of Individualism and Collectivism. Either individual rights are recognized in a society, or they are not recognized. They cannot be half-recognized.

What frequently happens, however, is that a society based on Individualism does not have the courage, integrity and intelligence to observe its own principle consistently in every practical application. Through ignorance, cowardice or mental sloppiness, such a society passes laws and accepts regulations which contradict its basic principle and violate the rights of man. To the extent of such violations, society perpetrates injustices, evils and abuses. If the breaches are not corrected, society collapses into the chaos of Collectivism.

When you see a society that recognizes man's rights in some of its laws, but not in others—do not hail it as a “mixed” system and do not conclude that a compromise between basic principles, opposed in theory, can be made to work in practice. Such a society is not working—it is merely disintegrating. Disintegration takes time. Nothing falls to pieces immediately—neither a human body nor a human society.

10. Can A Society Exist Without A Moral Principle?

A great many people today hold the childish notion that society can do anything it pleases; that principles are unnecessary, rights are only an illusion, and *expediency* is the practical guide to action.

It is true that society *can* abandon moral principles and turn itself into a herd running amuck to destruction. Just as it is true that a man *can* cut his own throat any time he chooses. But a man *cannot* do this if he wishes to survive. And society *cannot* abandon moral principles if it expects to exist.

Society is a large number of men who live together in the same country, and who deal with one another. Unless there is a defined, objective moral code, which men understand and observe, they have no way of dealing with one another—since none can know what to expect from his neighbor. The man who recognizes no morality is the criminal; you can do nothing when dealing with a criminal except try to crack his skull before he cracks yours; you have no other language, no terms of behavior mutually accepted. To speak of a society without moral principles is to advocate that men live together like criminals.

We are still observing, by tradition, so many moral precepts, that we take them for granted and do not realize how many actions of our daily lives are made possible only by moral principles. Why is it safe for you to go into a crowded department store, make a purchase and come out again? The crowd around you needs goods, too; the crowd could easily overpower the few salesgirls, ransack the store and grab your packages and pocketbook as well. Why don't they do it? There is nothing to stop them and nothing to protect you—*except the moral principle of your individual right of life and property.*

Do not make the mistake of thinking that crowds are restrained merely by fear of policemen. There could not be enough policemen in the world if men believed that it is proper and practical to loot. And if men believed this, why shouldn't the policemen believe it, too? Who, then, would be the policemen?

Besides, in a collectivist society the policemen's duty is not to protect your rights, but to violate them.

It would certainly be expedient for the crowd to loot the department store—if we accept the expediency of the moment as a sound and proper rule of action. But how many department stores, how many factories, farms or homes would we have, and for how long, under this rule of expediency?

If we discard morality and substitute for it the collectivist doctrine of unlimited majority rule, if we accept the idea that a majority may do anything it pleases, and that anything done by a majority is right *because* it's done by a majority (this being the only standard of right and wrong)—how are men to apply this in practice to their actual lives? Who is the majority? In relation to each particular man, all other men are potential members of that majority which may destroy him at its pleasure at any moment. Then each man and all men become enemies; each has to fear and suspect all; each must try to rob and murder first, before he is robbed and murdered.

If you think that this is just abstract theory, take a look at Europe for a practical demonstration. In Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany, private citizens did the foulest work of the G. P. U. and the Gestapo, spying on one another, delivering their own relatives and friends to the secret police and the torture chambers. *This* was the result in practice of collectivism in theory. *This* was the concrete application of that empty, vicious collectivist slogan

which seems so high-sounding to the unthinking: “The public good comes above any individual rights.”

Without individual rights, no public good is possible.

Collectivism, which places the group above the individual and tells men to sacrifice their rights for the sake of their brothers, results in a state where men have no choice but to dread, hate and destroy their brothers.

Peace, security, prosperity, co-operation and good will among men, all those things considered socially desirable, are possible only under a system of Individualism, where each man is safe in the exercise of his individual rights and in the knowledge that society is there to *protect* his rights, *not* to destroy them. Then each man knows what he may or may not do to his neighbors, and what his neighbors (one or a million of them) may or may not do to him. Then he is free to deal with them as a friend and an equal.

Without a moral code no proper human society is possible.

Without the recognition of individual rights no moral code is possible.

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