

THE
JANUS FACE
OF
LIBERTARIANISM
AYN RAND



By Lee Penn

As the United States slouches toward bankruptcy and despotism, Ayn Rand has offered her followers a new creed that she promised would lead them to victory over the collectivists, the parasites, and the looters. John Galt, the hero of Rand's 1957 magnum opus *Atlas Shrugged*, asked his nationwide audience to promise, along with him, that "I swear – by my life and my love of it – that I will never live for the sake of another man, nor ask another man to live for mine."¹ This oath – made by the Self, to the Self, and in the name of the Self – summarized how people could apply Objectivism, Rand's new philosophy, to their own lives. Rand summarized her own beliefs in an autobiography at the end of the same novel: "My philosophy, in essence, is the concept of man as a heroic being, with his own happiness as the moral purpose of his life, with productive achievement as his noblest activity, and reason as his only absolute."²

Ayn Rand (1905-1982)³ helped to give birth to the modern-day libertarian movement in the US. Outside that movement, those whose world view she has shaped are legion. From today's Tea Party movement to Alan Greenspan, the head of the Federal Reserve Board for 19 years,



Ayn Rand in Manhattan

Rand's teachings live on and affect us all still. Much of what she said is true on its face, and many of her beliefs are easy to accept for those of us who were raised within the American tradition. All of this makes Rand the more seductive as a false teacher. Objectivism is – in the final analysis – a proud and Godless philosophy, an intellectual Tower of Babel. Those who follow Rand's teachings to their conclusion may finish their lives alone in a very small world, just as Rand did in her own final years.

Objectivism: a new, total ideology for the new capitalist man

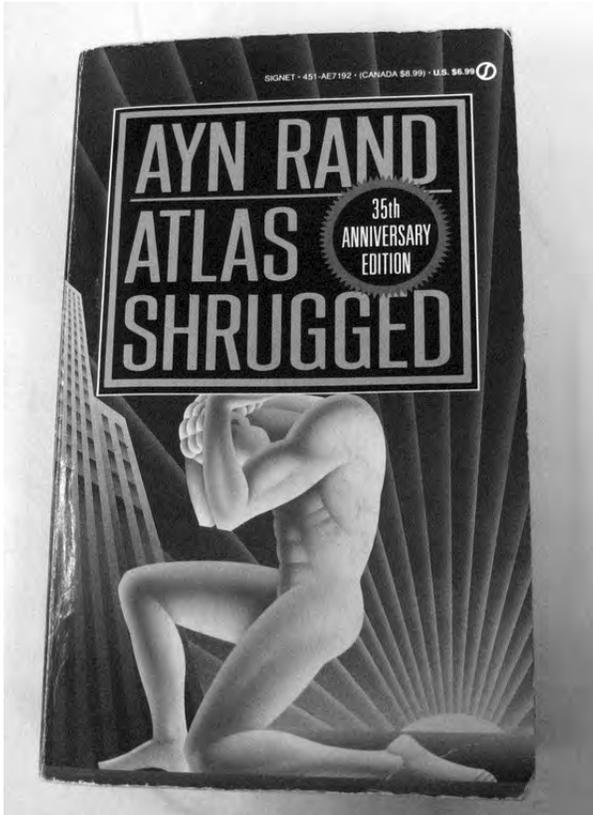
Rand saw herself as the originator of a new school of philosophy, an all-encompassing system that "new intellectuals"⁴ could use to

defend realism, reason, and laissez-faire capitalism. For her, the "best representative" of Objectivism was John Galt⁵ – the *fictional* character whom she created in the 1950s.

In 1960, Rand described Objectivism as "a new philosophical system" that offers "an integrated view of existence."⁶ Biographer Jennifer Burns notes, "Rand's cast of mind saw all of reality as integrated by a few fundamental principles. Therefore adoption of these principles would radiate out infinitely into every aspect of a person's life."⁷ A historian of the libertarian movement says that Rand "thought she was recreating philosophy from the ground up. ... She insisted that a philosophical system must be one airtight unified structure, and generally had contempt for those who reached the same conclusions as she without the same base."⁸ For Christians, this should raise an immediate alert. Creating an all-encompassing belief system that

excludes God is rebellion and idolatry; for a Christian to accept such beliefs as a guide for life is apostasy.

Rand and her inner circle jealously guarded the right to define what Objectivism was – and who were its spokesmen. While he was still Ayn Rand’s protégé and consort, Nathaniel Branden decreed that the “term Objectivist was ‘intimately and exclusively associated with Miss Rand and me. ... A person who is in agreement



with our philosophy should describe himself, not as an Objectivist, but as a student or supporter of Objectivism.”⁹ Any supporter of Rand’s who flew the flag of Objectivism without the two leaders’ approval risked ostracism or cease-and-desist demands.¹⁰ For the leaders of this individualist movement, it was “my way or the highway.”

The clearest statements of Rand’s philosophy are in the title essay and excerpts from her novels contained in her 1961 book, *For the New Intellectual*.¹¹

At the core of Rand’s philosophy was the affirmation that “A is A.” This code phrase means that reality exists, and is objective; it is external to the human observer, and it cannot

be altered by our feelings or by changing our consciousness or our perception of reality. The exercise of human reason and effort are essential to lift mankind from animal existence to a life with human dignity.

Morality should be based on human nature, and on the requirements for human existence *on earth*. As Rand said through John Galt, “There is a morality of reason, a morality proper to man, and *Man’s Life* is its standard of value. All that which is proper to the life of a rational being is the good; all that which destroys it is the evil. Man’s life, as required by his nature, is not the life of a mindless brute, of a looting thug or a mooching mystic, but the life of a thinking being – not life by means of force or fraud, but life by means of achievement ... Man’s life is the *standard* of morality, but your own life is its *purpose*. If existence on earth is your goal, you must choose your actions and values by the standard of that which is proper to man – for the purpose of preserving, fulfilling, and enjoying the irreplaceable value which is your life.”¹²

A world-centered, commercial philosophy

For Rand, the pursuit of “*rational* self-interest” requires adherence to “a rational, objectively demonstrated and validated code of moral principles which define and determine his actual self-interest. It is not a license ‘to do as he pleases’ and is not applicable to the altruists’ image of a ‘selfish’ brute nor to any man motivated by irrational emotions, feelings, urges, wishes, or whims.”¹³ Furthermore, “If you achieve that which is the good by a rational standard of value, it will necessarily make you happy; but that which makes you happy, by some undefined emotional standard, is not necessarily the good. To take ‘whatever makes one happy’ as a guide to action means: to be guided by nothing but one’s emotional whims.”¹⁴ Rand added that “Objectivist ethics holds that *human* good does not require human sacrifices and cannot be achieved by the sacrifice of anyone to anyone. It holds that the *rational* interests of men do not clash – that there is no conflict of interests among men who do not desire the unearned, who do not make sacrifices nor accept them, who deal with one another as

traders, giving value for value. The principle of *trade* is the only rational ethical principle for all human relationships, personal and social, private and public, spiritual and material. It is the principle of *justice*.¹⁵ When Rand said that “all human relationships, personal and social” should be carried out on “the principle of trade,” she was making love and friendship into a form of commerce.

Rand said, “The three cardinal virtues of the Objectivist ethics – the three values which, together, are the means to and the realization of one’s ultimate value, one’s own life – are: Reason, Purpose, Self-Esteem, with their three corresponding virtues: Rationality, Productiveness, Pride. Productive work is the central *purpose* of a rational man’s life, the central value that integrates and determines the hierarchy of all his other values. Reason is the source, the precondition of his productive work – pride is the result. Rationality is man’s basic virtue, the source of all his other virtues.”¹⁶ “The virtue of *Rationality* means the recognition and acceptance of reason as one’s only source of knowledge, one’s only judge of values, and one’s only guide of action.”¹⁷ “The virtue of *Productiveness* is the recognition of the fact that productive work is the process by which man’s mind sustains his life, the process that sets man free of the necessity to adjust himself to his background, as all animals do, and gives him the power to adjust his background to himself.”¹⁸ “The virtue of *Pride* ... can best be described by the term: ‘moral ambitiousness.’ It means that one must earn the right to hold oneself as one’s own highest value by achieving one’s own moral perfection.”¹⁹ Such were the hollow, man-made idols that Rand offered to replace the Christian virtues of faith, hope, and love.

Rand said that two basic principles should be at basis for the “movement toward an intellectual Renaissance:” recognition that “emotions are not tools of cognition,” and that “no man has the right to initiate the use of physical force against others.”²⁰ When challenged to summarize her worldview while standing on one foot, Rand did so: “Metaphysics: Objective reality. Epistemology: Reason. Ethics: self-interest. Politics: capitalism.”²¹

Rand also defended what she considered to be rational egoism. She said, “The egoist 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. He does not function through them. He is not concerned with them in any primary matter. Not in his aim, not in his motive, not in his thinking, not in his desires, not in the source of his energy. He does not exist for any other man – and he asks no other man to exist for him. This is the only form of brotherhood and mutual respect possible between men.”²²

For Rand, the opposite of rational egoism was altruism, which “declares that any action taken for the benefit of others is good, and any action taken for one’s own benefit is evil. Thus the *beneficiary* of an action is the only criterion of moral value – and so long as that beneficiary is anybody other than oneself, anything goes.”²³ Furthermore, “altruism *permits no concept* of a self-supporting, self-respecting man – a man who supports his own life by his own effort and sacrifices neither himself nor others.”²⁴

Market Leninism

Rand viewed world history as a perennial struggle among antagonistic interests: “Witch Doctors,” “Attilas,” and “producers.”

Witch doctors were religious and philosophical leaders of any tradition who promised to shield the people from divine wrath, as long as the masses obeyed them and their allies. These “mystics of spirit” claimed to interpret reality for the people, and sought to rule their souls. Rand listed “the necessary tenets of the Witch Doctor’s view of existence”²⁵ in every age: “The damnation of this earth as a realm where nothing is possible to man but pain, disaster, and defeat, a realm inferior to another, ‘higher,’ reality; the damnation of all values, enjoyment, achievement, and success on earth as a proof of depravity; the damnation of man’s mind as a source of *pride*, and the damnation of reason as a ‘limited,’ deceptive, unreliable, impotent faculty, incapable of perceiving the ‘real’ reality and the ‘true’ truth; the split of man in two, setting his consciousness (his soul) against his body, and his moral values against his own interest; the damnation of man’s nature, body, and *self* as evil; the commandment of self-sacrifice, renunciation, suffering, obedience, humility, and faith, as the good; the damnation

of life and the worship of death, with the promise of rewards beyond the grave.”²⁶ Such was Rand’s summation of religion, and of most philosophy and psychology.

Regarding philosophers, Rand said, that their “great treason” was that they “were not willing to doubt the doctrine that man is a sacrificial animal, that he 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 the highest moral duty, virtue, and value.”²⁷ Thus, they “defaulted on the responsibility of providing a rational society with a code of *rational morality*.”²⁸

“Attilas” were the leaders and representatives of government, from tribal chiefs to kings to dictators; these “mystics of muscle” claimed the right to rule the bodies of the people, and to take their property. These two classes, the witch doctors and the Attilas, would sometimes clash, but would usually unite in order to dominate the population and to exploit the small minority of “producers:” the innovators, scientists, engineers, and entrepreneurs of the world. Neither the witch doctors nor the Attilas had any use for reason. Throughout most of history, the producers were silent and oppressed; only during Renaissance and the Enlightenment – and in particular, in the pre-New Deal US – did businessmen come into their own. Rand said, “The industrial revolution completed the task of the Renaissance: it blasted Attila off his throne. For the first time in history, men gained control over physical nature and threw off the control of men over men – that is: men discovered science and political freedom.”²⁹ By the middle of the 20th century, Rand believed that the US was sinking into a new Dark Age of irrationality and collectivism.

With a contemptuous wave of the hand, Rand dismissed traditional societies and their beliefs: “With very rare and brief exceptions, pre-capitalist societies had no place for the creative power of man’s mind, neither in the creation of ideas nor in the creation of wealth. Reason and its practical expression – free trade – were forbidden as a sin and a crime, or were tolerated, usually as ignoble activities, under the control of authorities who could revoke the tolerance at whim. Such societies were ruled by faith and its practical expression: force. There

were no makers of knowledge and no makers of wealth: there were only witch doctors and tribal chiefs. These two figures dominate every anti-rational period of history.”³⁰ In like manner, Karl Marx hailed the “most revolutionary part” played by the bourgeoisie in overthrowing irrational, stagnant, feudal societies; he had no good words for pre-industrial, pre-capitalist society.³¹

Rand urged “full, perfect, totally unregulated *laissez-faire* capitalism.”³² She said, “Capitalism demands the best of every man – his rationality – and rewards him accordingly. ... His success depends on the *objective* value of his work and on the rationality of those who recognize that value. When men are free to trade, with reason and reality as their only arbiter, when no man may use physical force to extort the consent of another, it is the best product and the best judgment that win in every



field of human endeavor, and raise the standard of living – and of thought – ever higher for all those who take part in mankind’s productive activity.”³³ Furthermore, “Capitalism and altruism are incompatible; they are philosophical opposites; they cannot co-exist in the same man or in the same society. Today, the conflict has reached its ultimate climax; the choice is clear-cut: either a new morality of rational self-interest, with its consequences of freedom, justice, progress, and man’s happiness on earth – or the primordial morality of altruism, with its consequences of slavery, brute force, stagnant terror and sacrificial furnaces.”³⁴ As did the Marxists, Rand envisioned a future paradise *on earth*, a world in which the state had withered away, and mankind could enjoy freedom, justice, and progress.

Only the emergence of a cadre of “new intellectuals” armed with the new philosophy of



Objectivism could turn the tide, providing the producers with intellectual weapons to use against the plunderers. Rand’s emphasis on history as defined by the struggle between contending, hostile classes is reminiscent of Marx, and the assignment of a critical, salvific role to the “new intellectuals” is reminiscent of the role that Lenin assigned to professional revolutionaries in his “vanguard party,” the Bolsheviks. (As Rand said, “Professional intellectuals are the voice of a culture and are, therefore, its leaders, its integrators, and its bodyguards.”³⁵) It is as if Rand had fled Soviet Communism, only to devise an inverted form of Marxism – shall we call it “Market Leninism”? – in which the elite “producers,” led by the “new intellectuals,” struggle to attain their rightful leadership role in society. As Rand said, “The New Intellectuals must assume the task of building a new culture on a new moral foundation, which, for once, will not be the culture of Attila and the Witch Doctor, but the culture of the Producer. ... Let those who do care about the future, those willing to crusade for a perfect society, realize that the new *radicals* are the fighters for capitalism.”³⁶

“No more tradition’s chains shall bind us . . . ”

Rand opposed conservatism; she viewed herself as the inaugurator of a new tradition. As her *alter ego*, Howard Roark said in *The Fountainhead*, “I can find the joy only if I do my work in the best way possible to me. But the best is a matter of standards – and I set my own standards. I inherit nothing. I stand at the end of no tradition. I may, perhaps, stand at the beginning of one.”³⁷ In a postscript to *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand said, “The only philosophical debt I can acknowledge is to Aristotle.”³⁸ (By contrast, her chief philosophical foe was Immanuel Kant, whom Rand blamed for severing philosophy from reason and from objective reality.)³⁹ In the first issue of *The Objectivist Newsletter*, issued in 1962, she wrote, “Objectivists are *not* ‘conservatives’. We are *radicals for capitalism*.”⁴⁰

Rand made slashing attacks on religious and traditionalist conservatism. In her 1960 essay, “Conservatism: An Obituary,” Rand said,

“Sensing their need of a moral base, many ‘conservatives’ decided to choose *religion* as their moral justification; they claim that America and capitalism are based on faith in God. Politically, such a claim contradicts the fundamental principles of the United States: in America, religion is a private matter which cannot and must not be brought into political issues. Intellectually, to rest one’s case on *faith* means to concede that reason is on the side of one’s enemies – that one has no rational arguments to offer. ... Now consider the second argument: the attempt to justify capitalism on the ground of *tradition*. ... America was created by men who broke with all political traditions and who originated a system unprecedented in history, relying on nothing by the ‘unaided’ power of their own intellect. But the ‘neo-conservatives’ are now trying to tell us that America was the product of ‘faith in revealed truths’ and of uncritical respect for the traditions of the past. It is certainly irrational to use the ‘*new*’ as a standard of value ... But it is much more preposterously irrational to use the ‘*old*’ as a standard of value, to claim that an idea or policy is good merely because it is ancient. ... The plea to preserve ‘*tradition*’ as such, can appeal only to those who have given up or to those who never intended to achieve anything in life. It is a plea that appeals to the worst elements in men and rejects the best: it appeals to fear, sloth, cowardice, conformity, self-doubt – and rejects creativeness, originality, courage, independence, self-reliance. ... The argument that we must respect ‘*tradition*’ as such, respect it *merely* because it is a ‘*tradition*,’ means that we must accept the values other men have chosen, *merely* because other men have chosen them – with the necessary implication of: who are *we* to change them? This affront to man’s self-esteem, in such an argument, and the profound contempt for man’s nature are obvious.”⁴¹

Against the “opium of the people”

From age 13 until her death, Rand was militantly atheist and anti-religious.⁴² In an early diary entry, she wrote, “I had decided that the concept of God is degrading to men. Since they say God is perfect, and man can never be that perfect, then man is low and imperfect and there is something above him – which is

wrong.”⁴³ Rand added, “since the concept of God is rationally untenable and degrading to man, I’m against it.”⁴⁴ In 1934, at age 29, she began recording a philosophical diary. At the end of the first entry, Rand said, “I want to be known as the greatest champion of reason and the greatest enemy of religion.”⁴⁵ This mirrored Blavatsky’s hope that *The Secret Doctrine* would “some day become the just Karma of the Churches.”⁴⁶

In a 1968 introduction to *The Fountainhead*, Rand reiterated her belief that “religious abstractions are a product of man’s mind, not of supernatural revelation.”⁴⁷ In her 1971 essay, “The Age of Envy,” Rand asserted that “Men create gods – and demons – in their own likeness.”⁴⁸ (She thus agreed with Marx’s 1843 pronouncement that “Man makes religion, religion does not make man.”⁴⁹) Biographer Anne Heller said, “Rand held faith of any kind to be inconsistent with rationality; she particularly despised Christianity, with its emphasis on suffering and brotherhood, as the ‘best possible kindergarten of communism.’”⁵⁰ After her husband died in 1979, Rand continued to avow her own atheism and disbelief in life after death. The most prominent symbol at Rand’s 1982 funeral was, next to her coffin, “an enormous topiary, shaped into the sign of the dollar.”⁵¹

In Rand’s view, the Self was not to be subordinated to any divinity, or to any other human beings; the Self was to become its own god. As the hero of *Anthem* said upon discovering his individuality, “And now I see the face of god, and I raise this god over the earth, this god whom men have sought since men came into being, this god who will grant them joy and peace and pride. This god, this one word: I.”⁵² In 1968, Rand said that in her work, she hoped to redeem the “highest level of man’s emotions ... from the murk of mysticism” and redirect this toward “its proper object: man. It is in this sense, with this meaning and intention, that I would identify the sense of life dramatized in *The Fountainhead* as *man-worship*.”⁵³

In *The Fountainhead*, the protagonist praised Adam for his defiance of a divine prohibition, and for his self-divinization: “Adam was condemned to suffer – because he had eaten of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. Whatever the legend, somewhere in the shadows of its mem-

ory mankind knew that its glory began with one and that that one paid for his courage. ... The creators were not selfless. It is the whole secret of their power – that it was self-sufficient, self-motivated, self-generated. A first cause, a fount of energy, a life force, a Prime Mover. The creator served nothing and no one. He lived for himself. And only by living for himself was he able to achieve the things which are the glory of mankind.”⁵⁴

In *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand further glorified man’s fall as a real ascent: “What are the evils man acquired when he fell from a state they consider perfection? Their myth declares that he ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge – he acquired a mind and became a rational being. It was the knowledge of good and evil – he became a moral being. He was sentenced to earn his bread by his labor – he became a productive being. He was sentenced to experience desire – he acquired the capacity for sexual enjoyment. The evils for which they damn him are reason, morality, creativeness, joy – all the cardinal values of his existence. It is not his vices that their myth of man’s fall is designed to explain and condemn, it is not his errors that they hold as his guilt, but the essence of his nature as man. Whatever he was – that robot that existed in the Garden of Eden, who existed without mind, without values, without labor, without love – he was not man.”⁵⁵

Here again, Rand mirrored Blavatsky, who had hailed the Fall as a liberation for mankind. In *The Secret Doctrine*, Blavatsky had said, “The Fall was the result of man’s knowledge, for his ‘eyes were opened.’ Indeed, he was taught Wisdom and the hidden knowledge by the ‘Fallen Angel,’ for the latter had become from that day his *Manas*, Mind and Self-Consciousness. ... And now it stands proven that Satan, or the Red *Fiery* Dragon, the ‘Lord of Phosphorus’ (brimstone was a theological improvement), and *Lucifer*, or ‘Light-Bearer,’ is in us: it is our *Mind* – our tempter and Redeemer, our intelligent liberator and Saviour from pure animalism.”⁵⁶ Both of these Russian-born writers exalted the self-directed human mind as “our intelligent liberator.”

With self-divinization came egotism. Cain had asked God, “Am I my brother’s keeper?”



THE UNCONTESTED ABSURDITIES OF TODAY ARE THE ACCEPTED SLOGANS OF TOMORROW.

They come to be accepted by degrees, by precedent, by implication, by erosion, by default, by dint of constant pressure on one side and constant retreat on the other - until the day when they are suddenly declared to be the country's official ideology.

~ Ayn Rand

(Genesis 4:9). In Rand’s *Anthem*, the hero answered this question in the negative: “I owe nothing to my brothers, nor do I gather debts from them.”⁵⁷

Moving away from Nietzsche

Rand started out as a follower of Friedrich Nietzsche, but did not remain so.⁵⁸ She had first encountered the German atheist’s work while she was a university student, and was captivated by it. When Rand came to the US, the first English-language book she bought was *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. Her works, published and unpublished, written before *The Fountainhead* were tinged with Nietzsche’s contempt for the common man. The first draft of *Fountainhead* had contained aphorisms from Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil*. In her final version of the novel, she eliminated these quotations, and deleted other direct allusions to Nietzsche from the text. In this book, Roark’s self-defense speech at his trial showed how the common person could prove to be worthy of respect in Rand’s universe: “Degrees of ability vary, but the basic principle remains the same; the degree of man’s independence, initiative, and personal love for his work determine his talent as a worker and his worth as a man.”⁵⁹ In the late 1950s, Rand revised her 1936 novel, *We the Living*, to temper the heroine’s contempt for the masses. The novelist excised Kira’s statement to a

Communist that “I loathe your ideals. I admire your methods. If one believes one’s right, one shouldn’t wait to convince millions of fools, one might just as well force them. I don’t know, however, whether I’d include blood in my methods.”⁶⁰

In Rand’s signature essay, “For the New Intellectual,” she explicitly criticized Nietzsche: “Nietzsche’s rebellion against altruism consisted of replacing the sacrifice of oneself to others by the sacrifice of others to oneself. He proclaimed that the ideal man is moved, not by reason, but by his ‘blood,’ by his innate instincts, feelings and will to power – that he is predestined by birth to rule others and to sacrifice them to himself, while *they* are predestined by birth to be his victims and slaves – that reason, logic, principles are futile and debilitating, that morality is useless, that the ‘superman’ is ‘beyond good and evil,’ that he is a ‘beast of prey’ whose ultimate standard is nothing but his own whim. Thus Nietzsche’s rejection of the Witch Doctor consists of elevating Attila into a moral ideal.”⁶¹ In her 1964 *Playboy* interview with Alvin Toffler, Rand likewise said that “Objectivist ethics required not only that a man not sacrifice himself to others but also, and equally importantly, that he not sacrifice others to himself.”⁶² In 1968, Rand said that Nietzsche was “a mystic and an irrationalist.”⁶³

Nevertheless, a strain of elitism remained within Rand’s beliefs, even after she parted company with Nietzsche. In 1945, she wrote to a fan, “If there is such a thing as an average man, who cares about him, or why should anyone care? What I am interested in is the great and the exceptional.”⁶⁴ In *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand took a hard line on the competence of the elite, and the utter dependency of the masses upon them. John Galt told his audience: “The man at the top of the intellectual pyramid contributes the most to all those below him, but gets nothing except his material payment, receiving no intellectual bonus from others to add to the value of his time. The man at the bottom who, left to himself, would starve in his hopeless ineptitude, contributes nothing to those above him, but receives the bonus of all their brains. Such is the nature of the ‘competition’ between the strong and the weak of the intellect. Such is the pattern of ‘exploitation’ for which you have damned the strong.”⁶⁵

Libertarian economist Ludwig von Mises got the message, and sent a letter of praise to Rand in 1958: “You have the courage to tell the masses what no politician has told them: you are inferior and all the improvements in your conditions which you simply take for granted you owe to the effort of men who are better than you.”⁶⁶

Ayn Rand’s journey: from Russia, with pride

Ayn Rand was born in 1905 to secular Jewish parents, well-to-do shop owners in St. Petersburg, Russia.⁶⁷ (Her birth name was Alyssa Rosenbaum. Alyssa adopted the “Ayn Rand” name in 1926 when she moved to the US.) From childhood, Rand’s aloof personality set her apart; she was “serious and stern, uncomfortable with gossip, games, or the intrigues of popularity.”⁶⁸ Rand and her family supported Kerensky’s overthrow of the Czar in February 1917, and opposed the Bolsheviks. The family house and her father’s once-prosperous pharmacy were promptly seized by the Soviets. Rand’s family was forced to flee in 1918 to the Crimea, a region that remained under Czarist control until the Reds won the civil war. Upon their return to Petrograd in 1921, the family faced near-starvation, and – because of their “capitalist” background – difficulty in getting jobs, health care, and rations. By the mid-1920s, Rand’s mother supported the family by teaching and by translating books and magazine articles for Gossizdat, the Soviet state publishing house.

Rand benefited from some Soviet education policy changes. Before the Bolshevik Revolution, women – and all but a few Jews – had been excluded from higher education. Under the new regime, Rand could go to Petrograd State University to study philosophy and history, for free. In 1923, she and other students from “bourgeois” backgrounds were expelled; it took public pressure from a visiting Western delegation of scientists to get this ruling reversed, so that Rand and her ex-capitalist classmates could graduate in 1924. She then attended the State Institute for Cinema Arts to learn screen-writing; this background, and Rand’s passion for movies, prepared Rand for

her later work in Hollywood. In the spring of 1925, she applied for permission to leave the USSR to visit relatives in the US for six months. She told US and Soviet authorities that she would return – but Rand always intended to remain in the US permanently, one way or another. Rand received her passport in the fall of 1925, and left Russia in January 1926.

Rand could, and did, spin her own history. In her *Atlas Shrugged* autobiography, Rand said that she had been “born in Europe,” and graduated “from a European college.”⁶⁹ She did not mention that she had been born in Tsarist Russia, or that she graduated from the University of Petrograd under the Soviet regime. Rand claimed to have graduated “with highest honors,” but such rankings were no longer given under the Soviets; her university records show that she had passing grades in all her classes.⁷⁰ Rand chose her new name in 1926, and assiduously kept her birth name secret; “not a single one of her close friends or followers knew her real name when she died.”⁷¹ She likewise said nothing of her Jewish background, except to a handful of close friends and family members.⁷² Rand and her followers often said that twelve publishers had rejected *The Fountainhead* before Bobbs-Merrill published it in 1943; they thus projected the image of Rand as a persecuted but ultimately triumphant outsider. This claim was exaggerated. As biographer Anne Heller noted, “She included Knopf in her count, although it hadn’t rejected the book so much as refused to extend her deadline for a second time. She also included two or three publishing houses that had seen only an early, incomplete outline, not the text, and she didn’t mention that her first publisher, Macmillan, had offered her an advance that she turned down.”⁷³

In any event, Rand’s early experiences in Russia formed her attitudes and beliefs for the rest of her life. Outside of St. Petersburg (the family’s home), anti-Jewish pogroms – often incited by the Czarist police – were commonplace. In the capital city, by 1914, “the statutes circumscribing Jewish activities ran to nearly one thousand pages, and anything that wasn’t explicitly permitted was a crime.”⁷⁴ The “holy Russian” government, and its established Russian Orthodox Church, supported this violence and oppression⁷⁵ – providing Rand (and other Jews) the worst possible view of God, of

Christ, and of the Church. Rand’s experience with Soviet Communism drove her hatred of collectivism, and of “altruistic” rhetoric that masked envy and lust for power.

Broken family ties

After Rand arrived in the US, she sent her mother (Anna Rosenbaum) American novels to translate for pay from the Soviets; “Anna marveled at her daughter’s ability to choose works of proletarian fiction” that the Soviet publisher would accept.⁷⁶ Starting in 1929, Rand sent money to her parents in Leningrad; this helped them buy food, but exposed them to the risk of arrest and extortion by the Soviets.⁷⁷ In 1936, when she could prove sufficient income to support them in the US, Rand made an attempt to get her father (Zinovy Rosenbaum) and her mother (Anna Rosenbaum) out of the USSR. (Rand had begun her efforts to get US immigration visas for her parents once she became a citizen in 1931. However, until 1936 her income was too low to meet State Department standards.) Despite appeals, the Soviet authorities refused to allow Rand’s parents to leave. Soon thereafter, Rand stopped writing to her family; she had been warned that having correspondence from the West put the recipients’ lives in danger.

After the end of World War II, Rand attempted to resume communication with her family. She learned that her father had died of heart disease in 1939, and that her mother had died of cancer during the siege of Leningrad, in November 1941. Rand’s sister Natasha died during a Nazi air raid. In 1973, Rand learned that Nora was still alive, so Rand brought her (then the only surviving member of her immediate family) and her husband to New York from the USSR. The two soon feuded vehemently, and Nora and her husband returned to the Soviet Union, of their own accord.

The details of this break reveal much about Rand’s character.⁷⁸ On the first evening that Nora and her husband Fedor were in New York, Rand gave her sister copies of her four novels. However, “she gained no recognition from Nora. With the exception of part of *We the Living*, Nora did not read any of the books; of *We the Living*, she said later that the little she

had read was offensive and contrived. In 1997, Nora told an interviewer that Rand “had just artificially constructed everything. ... She has made up all our lives.” Nora set aside Rand’s books to read a book by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn; much of his work was not available within the USSR. “Rand hated Solzhenitsyn for his outspoken anti-Western views and his religiosity, and when she discovered that Nora preferred his writing to her own, she demanded that Nora return her books. Nora complied. All told, the little sister pronounced her older sister’s writings to be ‘fake’ and ‘lacking in talent,’ and she paid no more attention to it. In the second or third week, Fedor ... collapsed with a sudden heart attack. By then, Rand had stopped speaking to her sister. Nora managed to dial 911, and an ambulance took Fedor to Bellevue Hospital, where he underwent successful surgery. Nora called Rand, but Rand did not come, either that day or during the two weeks of her brother-in-law’s hospitalization. After he had been discharged and taken a few days to recuperate, Rand suggested that the pair return to Russia. She did not see them off. She did contact her lawyer, Eugene Winick, to assure herself that Nora would not automatically inherit any of her money when she died. Nora would not, he told her.” For Rand, ideological purity overrode ordinary family ties. Nora died in St. Petersburg in 1999, without ever again speaking to her famous sister.

Destination: Hollywood

Rand arrived in New York City in February 1926, lived with relatives in Chicago for six months, and then, in September of that year, went to Hollywood to take up a career as a screenwriter.⁷⁹ In her *Atlas Shrugged* autobiography, Rand said that after coming to the US, “I had a difficult struggle, earning my living at odd jobs, until I could make a financial success of my writing. No one helped me, nor did I think at any time that it was anyone’s duty to help me.”⁸⁰ This avowal of self-reliance ignored the assistance that Rand received from her relatives: obtaining sponsorship so that she could get a US visa and permission to leave the USSR, helping Rand establish herself in the US; loan-

ing her money and giving her a train ticket to move to Hollywood in 1926, and loaning her more money during a period of unemployment in 1927. Her Chicago relatives said that Rand “failed to repay – or even to offer to repay – small amounts of money she borrowed during her first difficult years in Hollywood. Minna [Goldberg] recalled Rand’s telling her, ‘I’ll never forget you. I’ll get you a Rolls Royce and a mink coat.’ ‘I didn’t get five cents,’ said Minna.”⁸¹

While working at Cecil DeMille’s studio, Rand met Frank O’Connor; they married in April 1929.⁸² With her marriage to an American citizen, Rand no longer needed to fear an expiration of her visa and a forced return to the USSR. She soon applied for, and got, US citizenship. Rand sold her first screenplay, *Red Pawn*, to Universal Studios in 1932. It was set in the USSR, and told of “a woman pretending to love a Soviet official in order to save the man she really loved – and the emotional complications that arise” as the faked love turned real.⁸³ Her first stage play, *The Night of January 16th*, was produced in 1934 in Hollywood – and then on Broadway in 1935.

Evangelizing with novels

Rand used novels to set forth her philosophy, hoping to use literature to convert the world. Her heroes are flawless, and her villains have no redeeming qualities; they personify the ideas that Rand wished to convey.

Rand’s first novel, *We the Living*, portrayed the injustice of life under Soviet Communism; it was the most autobiographical of her works.⁸⁴ It took two years to find a publisher. *We the Living* was released in 1936 in the US and in England. The US edition of the book earned Rand only \$100 in royalties, and soon was taken out of print. (The book was re-released in 1959, and has sold more than 2 million copies since then.) The struggle to get *We the Living* published, and its negative reception by critics, brought Rand face-to-face with Depression-era pro-Soviet orthodoxy in the American intelligentsia. During World War II, without Rand’s knowledge or consent, a film version of the book was made in Italy, and opened to full theaters. Two months afterward, “Mussolini

ordered the film to be withdrawn and prints and negatives destroyed, on the grounds that it was anti-Fascist as well as anti-communist.⁸⁵ After the war, the master prints were brought out of hiding, and the Italian government paid Rand \$35,000 in the early 1950s for unauthorized use of her work.⁸⁶ Although the Italian version was released in the US in 1972, an American film of *We the Living* has never been made.

Rand's next novel, *Anthem*, was set in a dystopian, collectivist future – a world in which the word “I” is taboo, and primitivism has replaced modern technology.⁸⁷ The hero rediscovers selfhood and individuality – and also rediscovers electric light. *Anthem* was initially published in Britain in 1938, and was released in the US in 1946 by Leonard Reed, the founder of the Foundation for Economic Education (FEE), the first libertarian think tank. (Immediately after World War II, FEE was the most prominent organization opposed to the New Deal; its corporate supporters included Chrysler, General Motors, Monsanto, Montgomery Ward, and US Steel.)

Fame and fortune: The Fountainhead and Atlas Shrugged

Rand began work on *The Fountainhead* in 1935; it was published in 1943.⁸⁸ The novel became a best-seller by word-of-mouth over the next two years, and has never gone out of print since then. The hero of the story was Howard Roark, a modernist architect modeled after Frank Lloyd Wright. Roark accepted a government contract to build a public housing project for the poor, under the condition that it was to be built strictly according to his own iconoclastic design. When the housing was built with unauthorized design changes, Roark defended the integrity of his artistic vision by blowing up the (unoccupied) new building. He went to trial, and won acquittal from a jury after giving a long in-court speech on the glory of uncompromising individualism. In the dock, Roark had said, “I do not recognize anyone’s right to one minute of my life. Nor to any part of my energy. Nor to any achievement of mine. No matter who makes the claim, how large their number, or how great their need. I wished to come here to say that I am a man who does not exist for others.”⁸⁹ With this novel, Rand began to receive passionate fan letters from readers, who said that the novel was a revelation that had changed their lives.

After the end of World War II, Rand continued to work in Hollywood as a screenwriter, until she moved to New York City in 1951.⁹⁰ She began working on *Atlas Shrugged* in 1946, and her capstone novel was published in 1957. The book became a best-seller at once, despite hostile and contemptuous book reviews.

Libertarian historian Brian Doherty said that *Atlas Shrugged* “has changed tens of thousands of lives and become a cornerstone of the modern libertarian movement. *Atlas* achieved everything Rand wanted aesthetically – presented her vision of the perfect man in John Galt; gave vivid, colorful concretizations of her philosophy; and was written and published exactly as she wanted it.”⁹¹ Another historian provided a harsher description of Rand’s definitive work: “*Atlas Shrugged* was a throwback to Socialist realism, with its cardboard characters in the service of an overarching ideology.”⁹²



Nevertheless, many businessmen were consoled by the unconditional absolutism that Rand gave them, and several industrial associations and business schools incorporated the message of *Atlas Shrugged* into their programs. As biographer Anne Heller notes, “The novel is full of detailed parallels with the Russia of Rand’s youth. ... It is surely also the only page-turning critique ever written of the Rooseveltian welfare state, the bureaucratization of the altruistic impulse, and the transformation of America from a culture of self-reliance to one of entitlement.”⁹³

Atlas Shrugged tells what happens when the best of the entrepreneurs, engineers, artists, and professionals stop participating in an ever-more-collectivist United States. At the instigation of John Galt, the prototype Objectivist, the producers go on strike and withdraw to “Galt’s Gulch,” a redoubt in Colorado. There, they await the collapse of a system run by leeches, moochers, and looters, the “mystics of spirit and the mystics of muscle.”⁹⁴ The bewildered and disoriented masses ask each other, “Who is John Galt?” as they watch the US economy and society slide into poverty, squalor, and repression. The collectivists keep their power only because those with creative minds cooperate, offering the authorities “the sanction of the victim.”⁹⁵

Toward the end of the book, Galt commandeers the national radio network, bumps the dictatorial “Head of State” (whom Rand modeled on Harry S. Truman⁹⁶) off the air, and tells the world, “This is John Galt speaking. I am the man who loves his life. I am the man who does not sacrifice his love or his values. I am the man who has deprived you of victims and thus has destroyed your world.”⁹⁷

Atlas Shrugged ends with an Objectivist version of the Apocalypse and the Second Coming. Outside of Galt’s Gulch, “beyond the mountains, there was only a void of darkness and rock, but the darkness was hiding the ruins of a continent: the roofless homes, the rusting tractors, the lightless streets, the abandoned rail. But far in the distance, on the edge of the earth, a small flame was waving in the wind, the defiantly stubborn flame of Wyatt’s Torch, twisting, being torn and regaining its hold, not to be uprooted or extinguished. It seemed to be calling and waiting for the words John Galt was

now to pronounce, ‘The road is cleared,’ said Galt. ‘We are going back to the world.’ He raised his hand and over the desolate earth he traced in space the sign of the dollar.”⁹⁸ There is an eerie resemblance between this Objectivist “parousia” and the anti-resurrection that the evil barrow-wights invoke in Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*, a time when “the dark lord lifts his hand over dead sea and withered land.”⁹⁹

Atlas Shrugged was Rand’s last work of fiction; from then onward, she wrote essays to promote her politics, economics, and philosophy. Her non-fiction books – including *For the New Intellectual*, *The Virtue of Selfishness*, and *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal* – helped define the Objectivist faith for her followers from 1961 onward. Rand became a sought-after campus speaker, and was given an honorary doctorate in humane letters from Portland, Oregon’s Lewis and Clark College in 1963.¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, libertarian historian Brian Doherty said that, “while she lived for another twenty-five years ... she never revived her zest for life, for work. Writing *Atlas* was Rand’s mission, and it was over.”¹⁰¹



From novelist to movement leader

In *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand offered a brief autobiography that concealed more than it revealed about her. She said, “My personal life

... is a postscript to my novels; it consists of the sentence, ‘*And I mean it.*’ I have always lived by the philosophy I present in my books – and it has worked for me, as it works for my characters.”¹⁰²

Rand’s life history – especially from 1949 onward – shows the limitations of her philosophy as a guide to life. As biographer Jennifer Burns noted, “Over time she retreated ever further into a universe of her own creation, joined there by a tight band of intimates who acknowledged her as their chosen leader. ... But Objectivism as a philosophy left no room for elaboration, extension, or interpretation, and as a social world it excluded growth, change or development. ... A woman who tried to nurture herself exclusively on ideas, Rand would live or die subject to the dynamics of her own philosophy. The clash between her rational and romantic sides makes this not a tale of triumph, but a tragedy of sorts.”¹⁰³

A turning point for Rand came in 1949, when she began correspondence with Nathan Blumenthal, a 19-year-old devotee who had

become enamored of *The Fountainhead* at age 14.¹⁰⁴ Blumenthal soon paired off with Barbara Weidman (another Randian follower). Blumenthal and Rand met in person in 1950; Rand was captivated by his energy, ideological zeal, and personal devotion. When Blumenthal

and his fiancée moved to New York in 1951, Rand and her husband followed them, leaving Hollywood permanently. The young couple married in January 1953, with Ayn Rand and her husband Frank O’Connor as matron of honor and best man. The newlyweds would be thenceforward known as Nathaniel and Barbara Branden; Nathaniel’s name change was approved by the courts in 1954. The couple’s new name incorporated Rand’s own (assumed) last name, and was a sign of their allegiance to Rand.

Soon after Rand moved to New York, she began collecting a group of ardent young devotees, who – with or without irony – called themselves “The Collective.”¹⁰⁵ Members of this “inner ring”¹⁰⁶ included the Branden couple, Leonard Peikoff (a cousin of Barbara Branden, and the leader of the Objectivist movement after Rand’s death in 1982), former Federal Reserve chairman Alan Greenspan, and several other friends and relatives of Nathaniel and Barbara Branden. Greenspan was one of Rand’s few early followers with whom she never broke ties.

Biographer Jennifer Burns said, “The Collective put Rand in the position of authority she had always craved. She initiated and guided discussion, and participants always deferred to her. It was a hierarchical, stratified society, with Rand unquestionably at the top. Closely following her in stature was Nathan, then Barbara, with the other students shifting status as their relationship with Rand ebbed and flowed. ... The Collective was becoming a hermetically sealed world.”¹⁰⁷ Biographer Anne Heller said, “Beyond family ties, these young people had a lot in common with one another and with their new leader. ... Everyone but Mary Ann Sures was Jewish. With the exception of Sures and Alan Greenspan, all were the children of first- or second-generation Russian immigrants whose religion they rejected, and all were seeking an ethical system and a moral worldview to replace it.”¹⁰⁸ This Collective spawned a “Junior Collective,” neophyte Objectivists who had less frequent contact with Rand than the senior members.

Acting as a “St. Paul” for Rand and her philosophy, Nathaniel Branden set up the Nathaniel Branden Lectures in 1958; this became the Nathaniel Branden Institute (NBI)

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Gary Cooper as Architect Howard Roark in *The Fountainhead*

in 1961.¹⁰⁹ The NBI, which provided lectures and newsletters on Objectivism, created an organized movement for Rand's followers. Branden became second only to Rand as the public representative of Objectivism. By 1965, the NBI was giving courses in 80 cities in the US and Canada, and 5,000 students were taking its courses each year. By 1967, the *Objectivist* magazine had a circulation of 21,000; the movement had taken out a long-term lease for office space in the Empire State Building, a building which symbolized human achievement and glory for Rand. In 1967, Ted Turner – then a little-known, but affluent, media executive – paid to set up 248 billboards in major Southern towns, reading “Who is John Galt?”

The wages of adultery

All of this came to a squalid anticlimax in 1968, when the hidden truths about Ayn Rand's affair with Nathaniel Branden came to light.

In 1954, Ayn and Nathaniel announced to their spouses that the two wished to begin an affair based on the Randian theory of romantic love: that its basis is the imperative for each individual to align with the partner who best

expresses his/her highest values. With pain, Barbara Branden and Frank O'Connor “permitted” this dalliance, and the ensuing sexual liaison, between the two Objectivist leaders. From the start, the affair was to be kept secret from the Collective and from the rest of the world.

The relationship between Rand and the Brandens came to a shattering end in August 1968.¹¹⁰ The sexual relationship between Ayn Rand and Nathaniel Branden had been intermittent since 1954. By the mid-1960s, Nathaniel did not wish it to continue; in 1963, he had started a torrid affair with a beautiful young, Objectivist actress, Patrecia Gullison. This affair began while he was still married to Barbara Branden; they divorced in 1965. Soon thereafter, Patrecia divorced her own husband and married Nathaniel.

When Rand learned why, and for whom, she was being jilted, she exploded in fury. The novelist summoned Nathaniel to the foyer of her apartment (he was not worthy of admission to the living room), cursed him (saying, ‘If you have an ounce of morality left in you, an ounce of psychological health – you’ll be impotent for the next twenty years!’), and slapped him three times across the face. When Barbara Branden defended her ex-husband to Rand, she too was cast into Objectivist outer darkness. Thus ended the Nathaniel Branden Institute, and thus ended the nearly two-decade alliance between Rand and the Brandens. Rand did her utmost to disrupt Nathaniel's own book publishing, and attempted to stop him from obtaining a state license to practice psychology. Nevertheless, Branden obtained his license from New Jersey in 1969 – and it remains part of Rand's “permanent record” that she tried to use government regulatory power to strike back at an enemy. The grudge outlasted Rand's death. Guards were posted at her memorial service to prevent either of the Brandens from entering – and this precaution was needless.

This breach shook the Objectivist movement to its foundations.¹¹¹ For its followers, Ayn Rand and Nathaniel Branden had been exem-

plars, living proof that the rational heroes that Rand wrote about in her novels existed in reality. Now, Rand's followers had to guess – from Rand's opaque condemnations in the *Objectivist*, why both Nathaniel and Barbara Branden were *anathema*. In a Soviet-style twist, this purge divided the Brandens from some of their relatives. NBI lecturers Allan Blumenthal (Nathaniel Branden's cousin) and Leonard Peikoff (Barbara Branden's cousin) told the public that they condemned and repudiated their own relatives, and that they had “terminated all association with them and with Nathaniel Branden Institute.”¹¹² For Rand's followers, the emotional shock of the break with the Brandens lingered for years thereafter.

Meanwhile, in 1957, Rand had dedicated *Atlas Shrugged* to her husband Frank O'Connor, whom she had married in 1929. She said that “I knew what values of character I wanted to find in a man. I met such a man, and we have been married for twenty-eight years.”¹¹³ In May 1968, Rand likewise dedicated a new edition of *The Fountainhead* to O'Connor.¹¹⁴ The couple never had children. Despite Rand's adultery in the 1950s and 1960s, O'Connor remained faithful to her until he died in 1979.

During his final decade, O'Connor declined into dementia; Rand diligently cared for him throughout his illness. When he died in 1979, Rand mourned deeply. When Phil Donahue interviewed her in 1980, he asked Rand whether she now wished to believe in a heaven wherein she and he husband could be reunited. She replied, “if I really believed that for five minutes, I'd commit suicide immediately to get to him. I've [also] asked myself how I'd feel if I thought that he was now on trial before God or Saint Peter. ... My first desire would be to run and help him, to say how good he was.”¹¹⁵

An individualist's cult of personality

In her teaching, Rand proclaimed the value of individual independence of mind. In *Atlas*

Shrugged, she said, “Independence is the recognition of the fact that yours is the responsibility of judgment and nothing can help you escape it ... the vilest form of self-abasement and self-destruction is the subordination of your mind to the mind of another, the acceptance of an authority over your brain, the acceptance of his assertions as facts, his say-so as truth.”¹¹⁶

Nevertheless, Rand demanded unquestion-



AYN RAND INSTITUTE

ing obedience and homage from her associates and followers.¹¹⁷ Sins could include favoring the “wrong” political candidate, or “expressing respect for intellectual enemies of Rand or approving of a movie Rand thought evil (without ever seeing it).”¹¹⁸ Dissent, a perceived affront, or insubordination often led to a “trial” and – likely enough – swift retribution, up to and including permanent excommunication from her circle. Such was the fate of libertarian economist Murray Rothbard, Isabel Paterson, Rose Wilder Lane, novelist Kay Nolte Smith, libertarian activist Richard Cornuelle, libertarian philosopher John Hospers, journalist Edith Efron, and – in the end – Nathaniel and Barbara Branden. At one time or another, every member of the “Collective” underwent at least one courtroom-style trial by Rand or by Nathaniel Branden for philosophical deviation from Objectivist orthodoxy; most endured the humil-

iation because of Rand's force of personality.

Rand continued in this way to the end of her life; during the 1970s, "most of Rand's friends and associates gradually drifted, or were driven, away."¹¹⁹ By the time that Rand died in 1982, only one of her Collective members, Leonard Peikoff, remained on good terms with her. Peikoff became Rand's sole heir; she had disinherited everyone else. Rand had wished to rule her own world – and in the end, she inhabited a very small world indeed.

Rand considered the pioneering Austrian economist Friedrich Hayek, author of *The Road To Serfdom*, to be "real poison" who did "more good to the communist cause than ours;" she also came to disdain the economists Ludwig von Mises and Henry Hazlitt for their utilitarianism.¹²⁰ In 1946, Rand backed away from the Foundation for Economic Education (FEE) – which had published her *Anthem* in the US – when they declined to allow her to sign off on the ideological purity of their publications. For Rand, the breaking point was FEE's publication of an essay by the University of Chicago economists George Stigler and Milton Friedman ("two reds," according to Rand), which was supposedly too moderate in its arguments against rent control.

Libertarian activist Justin Raimondo says that "the hordes of young people who were converted to the Objectivist creed were urged to cut all ties, to renounce family, tradition, religion, culture; even Mozart was deemed to be "anti-life" and therefore *verboten*. The typical Randian cadre, therefore, lived in a void, alienated from and deeply suspicious of anything and everything outside the Objectivist canon – a condition which seems to have persisted."¹²¹

John Hospers wrote to Ayn Rand of his disconcerting visit to a Nathaniel Branden Institute (NBI) lecture: "I felt as if I were in a strange church where I didn't belong, where ... to deny a single thing was considered heresy. ... And the attitude of the audience in the lecture hall shocked me even more. Rational? Good heavens – an Army of the Faithful, repeating the same incantations and asking questions only about details and applications, never questioning the tenets of the True Faith."¹²² Rand responded with anger: "Today, I am *not* looking for 'intelligent disagreement' any longer, and certainly not from children or amateurs;" the

classes were offered "only for those who have understood enough of *Atlas Shrugged* to agree with its essentials."¹²³ And yet, the movement had two sides, as did Rand's personality; for every student who "found Rand harsh or was the target of an unprovoked rage, there is another who remembers Rand's sensitivity and caring."¹²⁴

The vices of a rationalist

Unsurprisingly, there were other ways in which Rand's beliefs and deeds went astray, from a traditional Christian perspective.

- During 1942, while rushing to finish *The Fountainhead* under a tight deadline, Rand began using Dexamyl, a barbiturate/amphetamine combination drug.¹²⁵ Friends began at once to warn her against this; as Isabel Paterson warned, "stop taking that Benzedrine, you idiot. I don't care what excuse you have – stop it."¹²⁶ Rand nevertheless persisted in use of amphetamines for many years, and this may have led to her mood swings and erratic behavior later in life. Notwithstanding her own amphetamine addiction, Rand condemned the drug culture of the 1960s, saying that drugs are "not an escape from society but from oneself. They are an escape from the unendurable state of a living being whose consciousness has been crippled, deformed, mutilated, but not eliminated, so that its mangled remnants are screaming that he cannot go on without it."¹²⁷ In another 1970 essay, Rand further testified against herself: "Drug addiction is the attempt to obliterate one's consciousness, the quest for a deliberately induced insanity. As such, it is so obscene an evil that any doubt about the moral character of its practitioners is itself an obscenity."¹²⁸
- In March 1964, when *Playboy* magazine was at its height of prosperity and influence, the magazine gave Rand a long, respectful interview by the futurist Alvin Toffler.¹²⁹ Hugh Hefner had long been one of Rand's fans, and she returned the favor.

Rand visited a Playboy Club, and pronounced it to be “a wonderful place and a brilliant undertaking.”¹³⁰ She thus gave her approval to one of the makers of the 1960s Sexual Revolution.

- During the early 1930s, her husband’s family lent Rand money to pay for an abortion.¹³¹ By Rand’s choice, her marriage remained childless. During the late 1960s and the 1970s, Rand was an ardent supporter of legalization of abortion. She said that abortion was “a moral right which should be left to the sole discretion of the woman involved,” and that “An embryo has *no rights*.”¹³²

A “founding mother” for American libertarianism

The American conservative movement is an uneasy ideological coalition of social conservatives (most of whom are devoutly religious Evangelicals and Catholics), secular libertarians, traditionalists with nostalgia for pre-1789 European monarchy and aristocracy, ex-Communist neoconservative crusaders for global American hegemony, unconditional supporters of “Greater Israel,” and those with nostalgia for the Southern “lost cause.” This is an unstable mix of ideas and interests, and its internal incoherence may explain the long defeat of the American Right. Ayn Rand contributed much to the development of the secular, libertarian strain of this movement.

Rand had voted for Roosevelt in 1932, largely because of his promise to end Prohibition.¹³³ However, she was appalled by the New Deal and the ascendancy of leftism after 1932; it seemed as if the US was following the trail blazed by the USSR. She began her career as a political activist by campaigning for the 1940 Republican nominee for President, Wendell Willkie. She soon became disillusioned with him, and soon sought ideological allies who would not compromise. The 1940 campaign was Rand’s last venture into electoral politics until the Goldwater campaign of 1963-1964. As with Willkie, Rand was disappointed by Goldwater’s (unsuccessful) attempts to portray himself as moderate in the general election.

In a late-1964 essay in *The Objectivist*, Rand expressed her shock at one of the results of the November debacle: “As it stands, the most grotesque, irrational and disgraceful consequence of the campaign is the fact that the only section of the country left in the position of an alleged champion of freedom, capitalism, and individualism is the agrarian, feudal, racist South.”¹³⁴ One of Goldwater’s speech writers, Karl Hess, was a follower of Rand and a student at the Nathaniel Branden Institute.

During World War II, Rand was a close friend of the pioneering libertarian author



Isabel Paterson.¹³⁵ She also fraternized with Rose Wilder Lane, Albert Jay Nock, Henry Hazlitt, John Chamberlain, Frank Chodorov, and other opponents of the New Deal. Rand’s immersion in the world of 1940s libertarians helped to shape *The Fountainhead*. In the early and mid-1950s, at the urging of Nathaniel Branden, Rand “stepped out of the conservative movement at its most critical hour.”¹³⁶ Thus, *Atlas Shrugged* was completed, and Objectivist philosophy was defined, during a period in which Rand lived within her own private world,

when she centered on and dominated her Collective of disciples.

Despite the collapse of the Rand/Branden movement in 1968, Rand's ideas and influence continued to spread among libertarians and conservatives.¹³⁷ One of Rand's longest-enduring ideological legacies is an oath that those who seek to join the national Libertarian Party must sign, vowing that they "oppose the initiation of force to achieve political or social goals."¹³⁸ This was central to Rand's ethics, as she expressed them in *Atlas Shrugged* and *For the New Intellectual*.¹³⁹ For Rand, as for many present-day libertarians, "force" is not just violence; it also includes fraud, extortion, breach of contract, and taxation.

Although many active libertarians credit Rand as "integral to their intellectual and ideological development," and although Rand is the libertarian writer who is best-known to the general public, she told anyone who asked her that she was not a libertarian, and that libertarians were her "avowed enemies."¹⁴⁰ She was sure that the movement's leaders "had stolen her ideas while failing even to try to master her complete philosophy."¹⁴¹ Rand maintained this stance from the late 1960s until her death. She ended a phone conversation with libertarian science fiction author J. Neil Schulman by saying, "I despise all libertarians, including you!"¹⁴² Rand "threatened *Reason* magazine with a lawsuit when it used her likeness on a cover of an issue filled with stories about her. Manuel Klausner, a lawyer and then one of *Reason's* editors, rather hoped the suit would go forward (it didn't) because he was sure they'd win, first of all. And he couldn't help mordantly relishing a case on the record in a U.S. court called *Rand v. Reason*."¹⁴³

Rand vs. National Review

There has been long-standing, mutual scorn between Rand and religious/traditionalist conservatives.¹⁴⁴ After World War II, conservatives turned increasingly toward religion and European-style traditionalism as weapons against domestic and international Communism. In the face of this right-wing turn to religion and hierarchy, Rand re-emphasized her atheism. After Goldwater praised *Atlas*

Shrugged in 1960, Rand wrote to him, urging him to separate politics and religion, and to defend capitalism based on reason alone. She dismissed traditionalist conservatives as the "God-family-country swamp."¹⁴⁵ (No Bolshevik could have said it in fewer words.) At a cocktail party, Rand confronted William F. Buckley, the founder of *National Review*, and proclaimed in her thick Russian accent, "Mr. Buckley, you are too intelligent to be-leef in gott."¹⁴⁶

For decades, the magazine has repaid her in kind. In 1957, Buckley assigned the devoutly religious, ex-Communist Whittaker Chambers to review *Atlas Shrugged*. Chambers' review, titled "Big Sister is Watching You," was an over-the-top hatchet job that climaxed with the warning, "From almost any page of *Atlas Shrugged*, a voice can be heard, from painful necessity, commanding: 'To a gas chamber — go!'"¹⁴⁷ Rand, meanwhile, carried on her evangelism for atheism; she converted several libertarians (including Karl Hess and Tibor Machan) from Christianity to unbelief. *National Review* struck back again at Rand's popularity in October 1967, with a pointed critique by M. Stanton Evans titled "The Movement to Canonize Ayn Rand." In December 1968, after the Objectivist movement imploded due to Rand's break with the Brandens, William F. Buckley gloated, "Remember, there were the people who were telling the rest of the world how to reach nirvana. By being like them."¹⁴⁸ When Rand died, Buckley's obituary gloated, "Ayn Rand is dead. So, incidentally, is the philosophy she sought to launch dead; it died still born."¹⁴⁹

Rand's followers: A Republican Who's Who

Despite this ungracious obituary, Ayn Rand's influence lives on.

All of Ayn Rand's books remain in print; more than 20 million copies of her works have been sold since the 1930s — including more than five million copies of *The Fountainhead*, and a similar number for *Atlas Shrugged*.¹⁵⁰ During 2008, her four novels had combined sales of over 800,000 — a remarkable level for books that were published at least 50 years ago. Sales of *Atlas Shrugged* nearly tripled after the start of

the world economic crisis that year. Rand's movement is still with us; her mass market paperbacks contain free postcards to send to the Ayn Rand Institute, allowing enthusiastic readers to plug into the movement at once.¹⁵¹

A list of Rand's admirers and followers reads like a *Who's Who* for the conservative wing of the Republican Party.¹⁵² Gale Norton, who became Secretary of the Interior under George W. Bush from 2001 to 2006, was introduced to libertarian and free-market ideas through Ayn Rand in the 1970s. George Gilder, author of *Wealth and Poverty*, and Charles Murray, author of *Losing Ground*, publicly admired Rand's work. Former Collective member Edith Efron co-authored William Simon's *A Time for Truth*. All three books, and their authors, helped to define Reagan-era conservatism. Senator Rand Paul cites Ayn Rand in his speeches. Tea Party activists (many of whom are Evangelicals or Southern populists) put Randian slogans onto their protest signs. Rep Ron Paul (R-Tex.) and former SEC Chairman Christopher Cox have praised Rand and her ideas. After the financial crisis of 2008 – and with the election of Barack Obama – sales of Rand's works surged, and Rush Limbaugh promoted her work on his radio program.

Alan Greenspan was an ardent Objectivist who had been close to Rand since the early 1950s. At Nathaniel Branden's request, in the late 1950s Greenspan had given lectures on economics to students at Branden's academy. He also contributed three essays to Rand's *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal*.¹⁵³ Despite his prior ties to the Brandens, Greenspan sided with Rand in her 1968 break with the couple, and publicly avowed his acceptance of Rand's philosophy.¹⁵⁴ He rose swiftly in Republican circles, aided by his friendship with Martin Anderson, who had regularly attended Objectivist lectures and Rand's private discussion meetings. Both Anderson and Greenspan served on the Gates Committee, which successfully urged the Nixon Administration to repeal the draft. From 1974 to 1977, Greenspan was chairman of President Ford's Council of Economic Advisers; Rand stood next to him for his swearing-in at the White House. From 1987 until 2006, he was the Chairman of the Federal Reserve, the central bank for the US. In his 2007 autobiography, Greenspan said, "Ayn



Rand and I remained close until she died in 1982, and I'm grateful for the influence she had on my life. ... Rand persuaded me to look at human beings and their values, how they work, what they do and why they do it, and how they think and why they think. This broadened my horizons far beyond the models of economics that I had learned. ... All of this started for me with Ayn Rand."¹⁵⁵

A straight line from Ayn Rand to Rush Limbaugh

In many respects, Rand's message was – and still is – appealing to American conservative activists. Rand testified as a friendly witness before the House Committee on Un-American Activities in 1947; she decried pro-Soviet propaganda in US films made during World War II.¹⁵⁶ In response to Soviet persecution of political dissidents in the late 1960s, Rand urged a boycott of any Soviet-sponsored "cultural exchange" events, and added, "Do not patronize, support, or deal with any Soviet supporters and apologists in this country; *they* are the guiltiest men of all."¹⁵⁷ Although Rand accepted



– and indulged in – extramarital sex, she loathed homosexuality.¹⁵⁸ Regarding lesbian feminism, Rand said, “to proclaim spiritual sisterhood with lesbians, and to swear eternal hostility to men – is so repulsive a set of premises from so loathsome a sense of life that an accurate commentary would require the kind of language I do not like to see in print.”¹⁵⁹

Rand condemned the environmentalist movement that arose after the mid-Sixties as “the Anti-Industrial Revolution,” saying that “Clean air is not the issue nor the goal of the ecologists’ crusade ... it is technology and progress that the nature-lovers are out to destroy.”¹⁶⁰ Although Rand favored freedom for women to assume any professional work for which they qualified, and although she rallied her readers in support of legal abortion, Rand despised the modern feminist movement. She considered it to be a variation of Marxism that identified women, rather than the proletariat, as the oppressed class; in a 1971 essay titled “The Age of Envy,” Rand said that “Every other pressure group has some semi-plausible complaint or pretense at a complaint, as an excuse for existing. Women’s Lib has none.”¹⁶¹ Furthermore, feminism was a revolt “against strength itself, by those who neither attempt nor intend to develop it.”¹⁶²

Although Rand opposed the draft, she dismissed Vietnam-era draft resisters as “bums”

who “deserve to be sent permanently to Russia or South Vietnam at public expense.”¹⁶³ Rand loathed the radical student movement of the 1960s, saying that “the main ideological purpose of the student rebellion’s leaders” was “to condition the country to accept force as the means of settling political controversies.”¹⁶⁴ In 1970, Rand said that the New Left could not win on its own terms, but “might plunge the country into a blind, hopeless civil war, with nothing but some other product of irrationality, such as George C. Wallace, to oppose them.”¹⁶⁵ Starting in 1972, Rand praised Sen. Henry Jackson (D-Wash.) for his opposition to arms control deals with the Soviet Union, since she believed that the USSR could never be trusted.¹⁶⁶ In a 1974 speech to West Point seniors, Rand said that the “military-industrial complex” was “a myth or worse;” she also condemned those who wished to kick ROTC off college campuses, and to cut defense spending.¹⁶⁷

Rand considered “Native Americans as savages, arguing that European colonists had a right to seize their land because native tribes did not recognize individual rights. She extended this reasoning to the Israel-Palestine conflict, arguing that Palestinians had no rights and that it was moral to support Israel, the sole outpost of civilization in a region ruled by barbarism. Rand revealed that Israel was the first public cause to which she had donated money.”¹⁶⁸ Rand endorsed Nixon in 1972 as the lesser of two evils, as she had done in 1968.¹⁶⁹ It seems that, in the final decade of her life, Rand was veering toward a form of neo-conservatism.

What Ayn Rand got right: why her beliefs tempt so many

Biographer Jennifer Burns said in 2009, “In many ways, Rand is a more active presence in American culture now than she was during her lifetime.”¹⁷⁰ Burns added, “*Atlas Shrugged* is still devoured by eager young conservatives, cited by political candidates, and promoted by corporate tycoons. Critics who dismiss Rand as a shallow thinker appealing only to adolescents miss her significance altogether. For over half a century Rand has been the ultimate gateway drug to life on the right,” whether “right” is defined as Objectivism, libertarianism, or conservatism.¹⁷¹

Burns summarizes why Rand still appeals to so many Americans: “What Rand confronted in her work was a basic human dilemma: the failure of good intentions. Her indictment of altruism, social welfare, and service to others sprang from her belief that these ideals underlay Communism, Nazism, and the wars that wracked the century. Rand’s solution, characteristically, was extreme: to eliminate all virtues that could possibly be used in the service of totalitarianism. ... Rand was among the first to identify the problem of the modern state’s often terrifying power and make it an issue of popular concern. She was also one of the first American writers to celebrate the creative possibilities of modern capitalism and to emphasize the economic value of independent thought. In a time when leading intellectuals assumed that large corporations would continue to dominate economic life, shaping their employees into soulless organization men, Rand clung to the vision of the independent entrepreneur. ... Rand has earned the unending devotion of capitalists large and small by treating business as an honorable calling that can engage the deepest capacities of the human spirit. ... Her work sounded anew the traditional American suspicion of centralized authority, and helped inspire a broad intellectual movement that challenged the liberal welfare state and proclaimed the desirability of free markets.”¹⁷² Entrepreneurs whom Rand influenced toward libertarianism include Jimmy Wales, founder of Wikipedia, and Craig Newmark, founder of Craigslist.¹⁷³ John Alison, chairman of the \$157 billion Branch Banking & Trust, funds Objectivist scholarship at various universities.¹⁷⁴

In addition, as Burns noted, Objectivism has appealed to college students because it “contrasted sharply with the dominant ideas in universities, where most intellectuals had become skeptical of claims to objective truth;” Rand’s ideas “spoke powerfully to students who hoped that in college they would study the great questions of existence, and instead found their idealism stifled by a climate of skepticism and moral relativity.”¹⁷⁵ Objectivism “was also appealing because it promised sure footing on the slippery terrain of right and wrong. Rand insisted that ethics could be scientifically derived from the nature of man, properly understood. ... It was not certainty alone that

Rand offered, but the idea that things *made sense*, that the world was rational, logical, and could be understood.”¹⁷⁶

When Rand reaffirmed the objective and knowable nature of reality, and opposed the notion that reality is constructed by human perception, and opposed the idea that we cannot attain certainty about the nature of the world, she was upholding critical parts of the Natural Law. She did the same when she linked the structure and tenets of morality and justice to the reality of human nature.

Many of the perils and evils about which Rand warned 50 years ago are present, now more than ever. In the age of trillion dollar deficits, multi-billion dollar bailouts of politically favored companies, armed raids on natural food providers, collapsing bridges, leaking nuclear plants, and the reduction of travel from a right to a state-granted privilege (with warrantless gropes and radioactive scans for all), Rand’s warnings against statism and collectivism ring true. Her description of the envious, resentment-driven villains in her novels seems to forecast exactly what many Congressmen, Senators, bureaucrats, and commentators are saying and doing now. Just as in Rand’s novels, it is evident that cries for “social justice” and “fairness” may merely cover lust for power, greed, revenge, or envy. Rand also reminded us that evil cannot conquer on its own; to prevail, evil must enlist the cooperation (or at least, the passive acquiescence) of the virtuous. Likewise, Rand said, “In any compromise between food and poison, it is only death that can win. In any compromise between good and evil, it is only



evil that can profit.”¹⁷⁷ In this, she was quite right.

Anyone who yearns for liberty and peace would easily concur with these statements of Rand’s: “Let no man posture as an advocate of peace if he proposes or supports any social system that initiates the use of physical force against individual men, in any form whatever. Let no man posture as an advocate of freedom if he claims the right to establish *his* version of a good society where individual dissenters are to be suppressed by means of physical force. ... No advocate of reason can claim the right to force his ideas on others. No advocate of the free mind can claim the right to force the minds of others.”¹⁷⁸ In 1963, Rand correctly described racism as “the lowest, most crudely primitive form of collectivism. ... Racism is a doctrine of, by, and for brutes.”¹⁷⁹ With equal force, she condemned the legal segregation that prevailed in the South, and the minorities’ demands for favorable racial quotas as a remedy for prior injustices.¹⁸⁰ This prophetic essay went unheeded, and the US still pays the price.

Rand’s description of the liberal intellectual climate of the early 1960s shows a chamber of horrors, a collection of evils that would incite anger and revulsion on the part of most conservatives, then and now: “In philosophy, we are

taught that man’s mind is impotent, that reality is unknowable, that knowledge is an illusion, and reason a superstition. In psychology, we are told that man is a helpless automaton, determined by forces beyond his control, motivated by innate depravity. In literature, we are shown a line-up of murderers, dipsomaniacs, drug addicts, neurotics and psychotics as representatives of man’s soul – and are invited to identify our own among them – with the belligerent assertions that life is a sewer, a foxhole, or a rat race, with the whining injunctions that we must love everything except virtue, and forgive everything except greatness. In politics, we are told that America, the greatest, noblest, freest country on earth, is politically and morally inferior to Soviet Russia, the bloodiest dictatorship in history – and that our wealth should be given away to the savages of Asia and Africa, with apologies for the fact that we have produced it while they haven’t. If we look at modern intellectuals, we are confronted with the grotesque spectacle of such characteristics as militant uncertainty, crusading cynicism, dogmatic agnosticism, boastful self-abasement, and self-righteous depravity.”¹⁸¹ Forty years ago, Rand likewise eviscerated radical environmentalism: “when alleged scientists stretch, fake, or suppress scientific evidence in order to panic the

ignorant ... when sundry hordes block the construction of electric generators and are about to plunge New York City into the catastrophe of an overloaded power system’s failure – it is time to grasp that we are not dealing with man-lovers, but with killers.”¹⁸² Many of Rand’s enemies *deserved* to be exposed, scorned, and resisted.

Notwithstanding the ways in which Rand spoke accurately, and notwithstanding that she said many things



Wall Street Protest Sept. 29, 2011

congenial to conservatives, her system is – at best – an elaborately rationalized, seductive half-truth. The traditionalist Catholic historian John Lukacs has warned, “as St. Thomas said, a half truth may be more evil than a lie. ... A half truth is not equivalent to 50 percent of the truth. It means, instead, a 100 percent truth compounded with, and subordinated to, a 100 percent untruth, the result being an especially dangerous corruption of truth.”¹⁸³

Ayn Rand is a blind guide – and “if a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit.” (**Matthew 15:14**) If many Americans have found Rand to be inspirational and exemplary, that is evidence of the darkness of the times; when small people cast long shadows, nightfall is near.

The historical evidence against Objectivism

The political aim of Objectivism is to establish a perfect society on earth by instituting – for the first time anywhere – “full, pure, uncontrolled, unregulated laissez faire capitalism.”¹⁸⁴ Given the envy-driven, bureaucratic tyranny into which the US is descending, this may seem to be the correct cure for our current social illness. It is not. Against Rand’s dream of a future, perfect capitalism, we must soberly examine the record of “actually existing capitalism” in the US and elsewhere.

The theory of unrestricted capitalism assumes that businesses should have a sole binding, fiduciary obligation: maximizing profits for their owners. This standpoint takes for granted that businesses may go as far in this direction as the law allows. Furthermore, since corporations are legal persons, they have full rights to freedom of speech – including making large campaign donations – and using any other influence they have, as necessary, to gain favorable legislation. Businesses (and other groups) are not merely staying within the rules; they get to write the rules on their own behalf. To assume a good result from this dynamic, one would have to assume a high degree of virtue and self-



restraint on the part of business (and other interest groups). No such beneficent morality is in evidence anywhere. Those who can cut corners in their own interest and get away with it, do so; those who can get political advantage over their competition, seek it and exploit it. At the end of this road, as we now see, is not laissez faire capitalism and free markets; it is the system of corrupt, politicized crony capitalism that we have now in the US and Europe. The notion of an “invisible hand” that keeps market economies on course, harnessing lust and greed for the good of all, is not consistent with how individuals and societies have consistently behaved since the Fall.

With Alan Greenspan as Chairman of the Federal Reserve from 1987 to 2006, we had a chance to see how an Objectivist would manage this economically critical function. The verdict is negative. Despite his early-career avowal of sound money and a gold standard, Greenspan as central banker oversaw the fiat-money inflation of the 1990s that led to the tech bubble (and its crash in 2000 and afterward). Greenspan’s response to the economic recession of 2000–2001 was to inflate credit again, creating the housing bubble – a speculative frenzy that spread globally, and led to the present depression. In 2004 and 2005, Greenspan praised the spread of sub-prime mortgage lending¹⁸⁵ and urged homeowners to consider using

adjustable-rate mortgages.¹⁸⁶ Such loans imploded en masse in 2007-2008, paving the way for the world slump that began in 2008. Greenspan opposed regulation of credit derivatives and related debt instruments; defaults on these securities now threaten to amplify local crises into a global financial collapse. He also supported repeal of Depression-era regulations that had successfully limited risk in the financial system by separation investment banking from commercial banking.¹⁸⁷

When questioned by Congress in October 2008 about his policies and their fallout, all Greenspan could say was “oops!” “Those of us who have looked to the self-interest of lending institutions to protect shareholders’ equity, myself included, are in a state of shocked disbelief.”¹⁸⁸ When Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.), the chairman of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, asked Greenspan, “Do you feel that your ideology pushed you to make decisions that you wish you had not made?” Greenspan replied, “Yes, I’ve found a flaw. I don’t know how significant or permanent it is. But I’ve been very distressed by that fact.”¹⁸⁹ All of Greenspan’s Objectivist philosophy, and all his study and experience in business and finance, did not allow him to see emerging crises that were – as early as 2004-2005 – evident to outside observers who remembered what had happened during the 1920s and 1930s.

Ayn Rand said that “Capitalism wiped out slavery in matter and in spirit.”¹⁹⁰ This reading of history is overoptimistic. Use of government force is woven through the entire history of the US economy. It was not “capitalism” that ended US slavery; it was invasion, military occupation, rule by decree, and uncompensated expropriation of property (in this case, property in humans) that did so. We did not gain possession of North America by trading with the indigenous inhabitants of the land; we conquered the American Indians, took their land, sent them into internal exile, and often killed them outright. Industry benefited from violent suppression of unions and strikes, from the Civil War through the New Deal. Railroads received massive land grants, and many industries took shelter behind protective tariffs between the Civil War and the Great Depression. Long before the “Progressive Era,” World War I, and the

New Deal, business and government were intertwined. In the 19th century as well as since 1913, government actions have gone far beyond the libertarian-approved functions of keeping the peace and providing a stable legal system to manage disputes.

Followers of Ayn Rand, and many other supporters of free markets, believe that the source of oppression is government power, and the basis of liberty is private enterprise. They hope that principled business resistance to governmental tyranny will lead the defense of freedom. The reality is otherwise; the heroic individualist-capitalist strikers of *Atlas Shrugged* are **fictional**. Businesses almost always take the path of least resistance, attempt to stay out of trouble, and go where the money is. When it’s profitable to work for government – even a dictatorship – almost all companies will do so. Examples abound. American companies (including Yahoo, Microsoft, and Google) have cooperated with the Chinese Communists in enforcing the regime’s Internet censorship – and they are not under Peking’s jurisdiction.¹⁹¹ A German IBM subsidiary provided the Nazis with punch-card machines that they used to track the Jewish population, outside and inside the concentration camps.¹⁹² To a far greater extent, we can expect businesses to comply with the orders of our own government, no matter how dictatorial it may become.

One of the themes of *Atlas Shrugged* is the idea that creators and innovators will not submit to coercion; the only people who will comply with collectivist edicts are the incompetent, the stupid, and the corrupt. It is a fine story, but it is a fiction that could lead us to dangerously underestimate our foes, at home and abroad. Many highly skilled, innovative, determined people are perfectly satisfied to work for a dictator, or to be a cog in a bureaucratic machine. Such were the people who made Nazi Germany and imperialist Japan into countries that came close to winning World War II. Such were the people who built nuclear weapons and intercontinental rockets for the USSR and Communist China. Such are the innovators now in the US who are giving the Department of Homeland Security its tools for universal surveillance. Competence and dedication are not the monopoly of libertarian-minded entrepreneurs.

For Rand, “there is no such entity as ‘soci-

ety,' since society is only a number of individual men."¹⁹³ This is a tempting idea for libertarians and conservatives, given the manipulative, dishonest, and coercive way that leftists often use the ideas of "social justice" and "the common good." However, Rand's social theory dissolves all enduring, non-commercial ties between people. Try applying her notion to more specific groupings of people, and ponder the results: "a family is only a number of individual people;" "a church is only a number of individual people;" "a country is only a number of individual people." If Rand's theory were applied consistently, social dissolution would be the result.

Rand viewed free-market capitalism as the source and underwriter of reason and progress. She described how progress was going into reverse, led by the intellectuals' betrayal: "Thus our great industrial civilization is now expected to run railroads, airlines, intercontinental missiles, and H-bomb stock piles by the guidance of philosophical doctrines created by and for barefoot savages who lived in mudholes, scratched the soil for a handful of grain, and gave thanks to the statues of distorted animals whom they worshipped as superior to man."¹⁹⁴ The irony of this description is that these examples of rational modernity that Rand cited are weapons of mass destruction directly funded by government (missiles and H-bombs), or are industries that have depended heavily on land grants and other public subsidies (railroads and airlines).

A Christian case against Objectivism

The Christian case against Objectivism is clear for anyone who puts God before Mammon. (**Matthew 6:24**) Whatever is true in Rand's system is not original or unique to her – and what is unique to her system, is not good.

Ayn Rand claimed to be devoted to reason, and to have devised a belief system that conforms with reality and human nature. However, she was a militant atheist. Such a belief is a great folly, and shows her divorce from a reality that is apparent to any attentive human being. St. Paul set forth the origins of atheism, and its sordid end: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the

truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; for although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen." (**Romans 1:18-25**).

Rand sets forth the rational, productive individual as his own authority and his own standard of value. As such, he owes no duty to other men, unless he wishes to take this up for his own self-interested reason. This exaltation of the self-made man, the one who stands alone, is itself irrational. No one creates himself. Each of us obtained our life, talents, and virtues from God, by His grace. We owe God love and obedience. Even on the earthly level, no one stands alone or creates himself. Everyone was begotten by parents, and was raised as part of a family, a neighborhood, and a country. Much of what makes individual achievement possible – for anyone – is bestowed upon even the greatest of achievers through education, religion, those who keep the peace, and all those whose labor and invention created and sustain the modern economy. As each of us has received such gifts from the rest of society, we also have a duty to offer analogous grace to society. To deny this is not the mark of heroic rationality; it is the mark of the scoundrel and the ingrate.

The ex-Communist Whittaker Chambers' description of Communist atheism fits, almost exactly, Rand's own atheist system; it "is the vision of Man without God. It is the vision of man's mind displacing God as the creative intelligence of the world. It is the vision of man's liberated mind, by the sole force of its rational intelligence, redirecting man's destiny and reorganizing man's life and the world. It is the vision

of man, once more the central figure of the Creation ... ”¹⁹⁵

Brian Doherty, a libertarian writer and movement historian, accurately sums up the meaning of Rand’s rejection of God: “Rand is the archetype of the Luciferian atheist, rejecting God because of overweening pride.”¹⁹⁶ Rand herself said, “Observe the nature of mankind’s earliest legends – such as the fall of Lucifer, ‘the light bearer,’ for the sin of defying authority; or the story of Prometheus, who taught men the practical arts of survival. Power-seekers have always known that ... if men are to be ruled, the enemy is reason.”¹⁹⁷ Rand’s inversion of the meaning of the Fall, and her praise for the tower-builders of Babel,¹⁹⁸ further establishes her membership in the party of Lucifer.

When Rand declared, “Let those who do care about the future, those willing to crusade for a perfect society, realize that the new *radicals* are the fighters for capitalism,”¹⁹⁹ she avowed her own quest for earthly utopia, a man-made substitute for Christ and for His Kingdom. Alvin Toffler, the futurist who interviewed Rand for *Playboy* in 1964, accurately said that Rand’s philosophy was “like Marxism turned upside down.”²⁰⁰ I would add that Rand’s exaltation of human reason, coupled with her scorn for tradition, made her a modern-day Jacobin.

Rand herself acknowledged that her system was contrary to Christian morals as well as opposed to Christian belief.

Rand said, “Pride is the recognition of the fact that you are your own highest value.”²⁰¹ She urged her followers to “Discard the protective rags of that vice which you call a virtue: humility – learn to value yourself, which means: to fight for your happiness – and when you learn that *pride* is the sum of all virtues, you will learn to live like a man.”²⁰² At the climax of his speech, John Galt urged his listeners to “Fight for the virtue of your pride.”²⁰³ Pride, the state of heart and mind which Christian tradition has named as the worst of the Seven Deadly Sins, becomes “the sum of all virtues” for Rand. This is the clearest possible inversion of morality, and it is closely linked to Rand’s denial of God.

Libertarian historian Brian Doherty acknowledged that “Rand was uncharitable. She didn’t believe that other people’s need or suffering constituted any claim on her life or anyone else’s – unless people chose to take on the bur-



den because the happiness of the helped person was specifically valuable to them.”²⁰⁴ As Rand said, speaking through her hero John Galt, “Do you ask if it’s ever proper to help another man? No – if he claims it as his right or as a moral duty which you owe him. Yes – if such is your desire based on your own selfish pleasure in the value of his person and his struggle. Suffering as such is not a value; only a man’s fight against suffering, is. If you choose to help a man who suffers, do it only on the ground of his virtues, of his fight to recover, of his rational record, or of the fact that he suffers unjustly; then your action is still a trade, and his virtue is the payment for your help. But to help a man who has no virtues, to help him on the ground of his suffering as such, to accept his faults, his *need*, as a claim – is to accept a mortgage of zero on your values. ... Be it only a penny you will not miss or a kindly smile he has not earned, a tribute to a zero is treason to life and to all those who struggle to maintain it.”²⁰⁵ Galt added, “What permits any insolent beggar to wave his sores in the face of his betters and to plead for help in the tone of a threat?”²⁰⁶ In her 1974 address to students at West Point, Rand said, “Today’s mawkish concern with and compassion for the

feeble, the flawed, the suffering, the guilty, is a cover for the profoundly Kantian hatred of the innocent, the strong, the able, the successful, the virtuous, the confident, the happy.”²⁰⁷

However, in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man (**Luke 16:19-31**), Christ places the beggar in Heaven – while consigning to everlasting damnation the rich man who failed to help him. Likewise, in His prophecy of the Final Judgment, Christ blesses those who feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, or visit the sick and imprisoned; those who fail to do these works of mercy are damned (**Matthew 25:31-46**). There is no evidence whatsoever that Christ wants us to apply a Galt-style worthiness test to the needy before we decide whether or not to help them. Instead, Christ calls to become perfect, “as your heavenly Father is perfect” (**Matthew 5:48**) – and the Father “makes his sun rise upon the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust.” (**Matthew 5:45**)

Christ said, “Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get.” (**Matthew 7:1-2**) We can judge actions, but not the intrinsic worth or eternal destiny of souls. Rand set herself directly against Christ’s teaching, and urged her followers to judge other people. She said that Christ’s “precept, in fact, is an abdication of moral responsibility: it is a moral blank check one gives to others in exchange for a moral blank check one expects for oneself. ... The moral principle to adopt in this issue is, ‘*Judge, and be prepared to be judged.*’ ... To judge means: to evaluate a given concrete by reference to an abstract principle or standard. ... The policy of always pronouncing moral judgment does not mean that one must regard oneself as a missionary charged with the responsibility of ‘saving everyone’s soul’ – nor that one must give unsolicited moral appraisals to all those one meets. It means (a) that one must know clearly, in full, verbally identified form, one’s own moral evaluation of every person, issue, and event with which one deals, and act accordingly; (b) that one must make one’s moral evaluation known to others, when it is rationally appropriate to do so.”²⁰⁸ In *The Virtue of Selfishness*, Rand made clear that the judgment she called upon her fol-

lowers to exercise was a judgment of others’ souls: “a rational man regards strangers as innocent until proved guilty, and grants them that initial good will in the name of their human potential. After that, he judges them according to the moral character they have actualized. If he finds them guilty of major evils, his good will is replaced by contempt and moral condemnation.”²⁰⁹ Rand’s own increasingly self-isolated life, and the faction-ridden history of Objectivism, showed how well her principle worked in practice.

Rand spat upon pity and mercy. Her *alter ego* John Galt said, “A morality that holds *need* as a claim, holds emptiness – non-existence – as its standard of value; it rewards an *absence*, a defect: weakness, inability, incompetence, suffering, disease, disaster, the lack, the fault, the flaw – the *zero*. ... Your code declares that the rational man must sacrifice himself to the irrational, the independent man to parasites, the honest man to the dishonest, the man of justice to the unjust, the productive man to thieving loafers, the man of integrity to compromising knaves, the man of self-esteem to sniveling neurotics.”²¹⁰

By contrast, Christ – the Holy and Perfect One, the One Whom the Father has appointed as our Judge, and the only Man who has the right to judge us – “saw the crowds” and “had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” (**Matthew 9:36**) He told us all, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.” (**Matthew 5:7**) Christ explicitly refused to say that disaster victims had brought their suffering on themselves by their own sin: “Or those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.” (**Luke 13:4-5**) St. Paul urged the faithful to act “as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved,” and to put on “compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, forbearing one another.” (**Colossians 3:12**) Paul also said, “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” (**Galatians 6:2**)

In Rand’s world, the superior – those who are rational in her terms – will rule. In *Atlas Shrugged*, as the collectivist regime collapses

into penury and chaos, her hero John Galt describes the coming New (rational) Jerusalem: “When the looters’ state collapses, deprived of the best of its slaves ... when the advocates of the morality of sacrifice perish with their final ideal – then and on that day we will return. We will open the gates of our city to those who deserve to enter, a city of smokestacks, pipe lines, orchards, markets, and inviolate homes. ... With the sign of the dollar as our symbol – the sign of free trade and free minds – we will move to reclaim this country once more from the impotent savages who never discovered its nature, its meaning, its splendor. ... Then this country will once more become a sanctuary for a vanishing species: the rational being. The political system we will build is contained in a single moral premise: no man may obtain any values from others by resorting to physical force. Every man will stand or fall, live or die by his rational judgment. If he fails to use it and falls, he will be his only victim. ... If he chooses to correct his errors in time, he will have the unobstructed example of his betters, for guidance in learning to think; but an end will be put to the infamy of paying with one life for the errors of another.”²¹¹

This view dismisses the Passion, Crucifixion, and Resurrection of Christ as “the infamy of paying with one life for the errors of another.” Rand’s model of leadership – and the relationship between superiors and inferiors that she proposed – is the inverse of what Christ said His followers should do: “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For which is the greater, one who sits at table, or one who serves? Is it not the one who sits at table? But I am among you as one who serves.” (Luke 22:25-27)

Follow the Gospel, not Objectivism

Anything that is true or beneficial in Objectivism, or in the rest of Rand’s teachings, may be found in the Scriptures. A critical – and soul-saving – difference is that the Scriptural teachings lead us to God, rather than leading us

into rebellion against God.

- ***The creation of mankind in the image and likeness of God:*** “God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’” (Genesis 1:26) Here is the basis of human freedom and dignity, as granted by the Creator Himself. For such an affirmation, there is no need to peruse *The Fountainhead*.
- ***Believers as temples of the Holy Spirit, and destined for glory:*** St. Paul said, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God?” (1 Corinthians 6:19) Here is another affirmation of the dignity of mankind, a dignity conferred by the indwelling of God within us. St. Paul adds that present trials have eternal value: “Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.” (2 Corinthians 4:16-18) No atheistic system could make equivalent promises.
- ***The injunctions against murder, theft, deception, envy, and idleness:*** “And God spoke all these words, saying ... You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his manservant, or his maidservant, or his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor’s.” (Exodus 20:1, 13-17) These commands were given to us by God for our own benefit, and not to limit our freedom. They encompass, and go beyond, the libertarian virtues that Rand set forth.

St. Paul read the riot act to thieves, idlers, gossips, and moochers in his letters: "Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his hands, so that he may be able to give to those in need." (**Ephesians 4:28**) "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is living in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you, we did not eat any one's bread without paying, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not burden any of you. It was not because we have not that right, but to give you in our conduct an example to imitate. For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: If any one will not work, let him not eat. For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work in quietness and to earn their own living. Brethren, do not be weary in well-doing. If any one refuses to obey what we say in this letter, note that man, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. Do not look on him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother." (**2 Thessalonians 3:6-15**)

- **Warnings against tyrannical human government:** When the people of ancient Israel asked the prophet Samuel to anoint a king for them, he relayed this warning from God to them: "And the LORD said to Samuel, 'Hearken to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. According to all the deeds which they have done to me, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are also doing to you. Now then, hearken to their voice; only, you shall solemnly warn them, and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them. So Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the people who

were asking a king from him. He said, 'These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots; and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his servants. He will take the tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and to his servants. He will take your menservants and maidservants, and the best of your cattle and your asses, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the LORD will not answer you in that day.'" (**1 Samuel 8:7-18**) There was never any need to read *Atlas Shrugged* to know of the danger of trusting in the State rather than God; this warning was given to the people of God three millennia ago.

- **Praise for diligence, courage, and excellence in human endeavor, and the inequality of Divine rewards, based on our conduct:** St. Paul urged the faithful to train as zealously as an athlete – but to do so for an eternal reward, not for a transitory honor: "Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable." (**1 Corinthians 9:24-25**) Jesus offered this prophecy of His judgment of mankind: "For it will be as when a man going on a journey called his servants and entrusted to them his property; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded

with them; and he made five talents more. So also, he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master.' And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master.' He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not winnow; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sowed, and gather where I have not winnowed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to every one who has will more be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth.'" (Matthew 25:14-30)

All of these Scriptural teachings are the authentic promises and precepts of God. Shun the tawdry counterfeit of these truths that Rand and her system offer; worship and obey God instead.

Lee Penn, a convert out of atheistic Marxism, attended Harvard university, was inducted into Phi Beta Kappa in 1974 and graduated cum laude 1976. Lee is one of SCP's premier allies and associate writers.

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