

***Atlas Shrugged* by Ayn Rand: A Comparative and
Epistemological Philosophical Perspective Based on the
Theoretical Framework of the *Ways of Knowing Through the
Realms of Meaning* by William Allan Kritsonis, PhD**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to show how the writings of Ayn Rand can be understood and developed through the work of Dr. William A. Kritsonis utilizing the *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning*. In the literary masterpiece of *Atlas Shrugged*, Ms. Rand brings her philosophical views alive through the narrative of her story and the lives and dramatic events faced by each of her fictional characters. Her views on objectivism, capitalism, and man's inherent sexuality are only a few of the controversial topics discussed in her book and revealed poignantly through the themes and motifs of her stimulating and challenging novel, *Atlas Shrugged*.

The First Realm: Symbolics

The first realm of meaning is *symbolics*. "These meanings are contained in arbitrary symbolic structures, with socially accepted rules of formation and transformation, created as instruments for the expression and communication of any meaning whatsoever. These symbolic

systems in one respect constitute the most fundamental of all the realms of meaning in that they must be employed to express the meanings in each of the other realms” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 11).

Atlas Shrugged is rife with symbolic communication. Themes, symbols, and motifs add intrigue, interest and mystery to the writing style of Ayn Rand and lend credence to her literary expertise and philosophical ideas and beliefs. The symbolism in *Atlas Shrugged* adds depth and complexity to her overall meaning constructs and analytical observations.

One of the first and most obvious symbols of her novel is found in the title, *Atlas Shrugged*. Atlas, in Greek mythology, held the burden of the heavens on his shoulder. To John Galt, and the other societal producers, the weight of the world was placed on their shoulders as they bore the responsibilities of producing for a world deplete of reason, strength, and appreciation.

The dollar sign becomes the symbol of a strike of the mind led by John Galt. By each striker symbolically associating himself with the sign of the dollar, the strikers intuitively illustrate their belief in capitalism and the reward of the capitalists. In *Atlas Shrugged*, there is no shame weighted with the possession of money. Instead, it is seen as just compensation for productivity and creativity.

Another symbol inherent to the understanding of *Atlas Shrugged* is the bracelet Rearden created using his new metallurgical discovery. The bracelet is symbolic of Rearden’s entire life work and accomplishments. The bracelet is beautiful, but unappreciated by his wife, just as the development of the new metal Rearden has created is seen as a threat to those who do not care for or appreciate ingenuity, creativity, and invention. Despite the resistance that Rearden faced with his new discovery, the metal he conceived and developed is a beautiful representation of the practical beauty that can be found from one’s individual life work and commitment.

Motors were also symbolic throughout the novel *Atlas Shrugged*. The motor designed by John Galt had the power to harness energy and provide power to the world. Without the motor, the world’s production would come to a halt. It is symbolic of the power of the mind and how producers are needed in the world to power the creative thoughts and abilities of the true thinkers in order for the world to survive and become productively active and successful.

The Second Realm: Empirics

“The second realm empirics, includes the sciences of the physical world, of living things, and of man. These sciences provide factual descriptions, generalizations, and theoretical formulations and explanations that are based upon observation and experimentation in the world of matter, life, mind, and society” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 12).

John Galt: The Physicist

In *Atlas Shrugged*, “one of the producers, John Galt, a titan among physicists, decides it is time for ‘the Atlases,’ the men who have carried the world on their shoulders to stop supporting [their] destroyers – to shrug” (Moritz, 1982, p. 234). His science has benefited the looters, those

who live off of his own creativity and expertise. In a decision to proliferate a strike of the mind, “he retreats with other ‘producers’ to a secret mountain citadel in Colorado. There they remain until, in their absence, industry and trade grind to a halt and the collectivist social system collapses” (Moritz, 1982, p. 234). With the collapse of the society that once was known, Galt gives a lengthy speech to tell the word that the fight is over. “The road is cleared. We are going back to the world,” says Galt, as the elite band re-emerges and he, raising “his hand over the desolate earth....trace[s] in space the sign of the dollar” (Moritz, 1982, p. 234).

Biology

Biology is the science of life. For those who believe that man is nothing more than just a physical being without a soul or spirit, their conclusions are in-line with Dr. Pritchett, one of the characters in *Atlas Shrugged*. “Man? What is man? He’s just a collection of chemicals with delusions of grandeur” (Rand, 1999, p. 131). Those who espouse that man is nothing more than a metaphysical creation are less likely to believe in the supremacy of the soul and the virtue of spirituality that requires accountability and surrender to a life goal and pattern higher than one’s own self and being. Dr. Pritchett’s comments continue, “once he [man] realizes that he is of no importance whatever in the vast scheme of the universe, he will realize that no possible significance can be attached to his activities” (Rand, 1999, p. 132).

In *Atlas Shrugged*, abortion is mentioned as a right of the state. The People’s State of Mexico wants to “raise everybody’s standard of living and provide a roast of pork every Sunday for every man, woman, child and abortion in the People’s State of Mexico” (Rand, 1999, p. 123). At the first publication of *Atlas Shrugged*, abortion was illegal in the United States. The debate for a “woman’s right” did not fully ensue in this country until the ruling of *Roe vs. Wade* in 1973. This is another example of how controversial social issues were ingrained in the writings of Ayn Rand even before the issues reached a national level forum of discussion and debate.

Socialism

Socialism is an “economic system in which government owns some factors of production and has a role in determining what and how goods are produced” (Clayton, 1995, p. 567). In *Atlas Shrugged*, socialistic ideas began to emerge that threatened the capitalistic way of life. Those who bought into the socialist way of life included those who supported a new government initiative entitled the “Equalization of Opportunity Bill.” This bill’s purpose was to put limits on capitalistic production, therefore limiting creative capitalists and entrepreneurs from becoming too powerful or wealthy.

The “Equalization of Opportunity Bill” also sought to put limits on the output of the creative, literary mind. Ralph Eubank, a literary leader of his time, was in favor of the “Equalization of Opportunity Bill”. “Certainly, I approve of it. Our culture has sunk into a bog of materialism. Men have lost all spiritual values in their pursuit of material production and

technological trickery...so we ought to place a limit on their material greed” (Rand, 1999, p. 133). Eubank was willing to surrender his creative mind to the state. “It would work very simply,” said Eubank. “There should be a law limiting the sale of any book to ten thousand copies...If people were forbidden to buy a million copies of the same piece of trash, they would be forced to buy better books” (Rand, 1999, p. 134).

In the United States, citizens are encouraged to improve upon inventions, create new horizons, and develop new services and products that will benefit mankind. Without the motive of profit, many of our greatest inventions and accomplishments would likely not have been achieved. Rand is against socialistic societies that take away the rights of the individual for the watered down benefit of the masses who choose not to produce or create to their highest and fullest potential.

Communism

Karl Marx authored *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848. He divided society into two groups. The first group was the proletariat. These were the people with no means of production who owed their livelihood to the second group in society, the bourgeoisie, better known as the capitalists. His division of society is analogous to the two major groups “at war” in *Atlas Shrugged*, the looters and the strikers.

The looters were people who did not use their own creativity or power to create wealth. They were totally dependent upon the creative thinkers in the world, which later became known as the “strikers of the mind.” The strikers were those who created, built, and engineered the framework for modern society. In *Atlas Shrugged* when the “strikers of the mind” left society, society as it was known previously collapsed.

Theoretical communism states that if everyone were equal, “everyone would produce to the best of their abilities, and everyone would consume to the extent of their needs” (Clayton, 1995, p. 476). However, in today’s society, communism has proven itself to be a dismal failure. In a pure Communist state, a man or woman’s career is chosen for that particular individual at a young age. Regardless of their ability or ambition, there is “equality” in pay for all. Educators, doctors, lawyers, garbage men, and street sweepers are all equal. When a person is not challenged according to their own individual talents and creative potential, production will decrease. Without hope of achieving any significance in one’s life work, society itself would be reduced to a mindless, wondering proletariat under a repressive and dictatorial form of government.

When the government owns the means of production, there is no incentive for creativity. Everything is done in the name of progress. The government leadership, which holds power with an iron hand, prohibits success to anyone who wants to succeed or profit outside of the veil of government interventions and legalities.

Capitalism

Capitalism could be considered one of the most fundamental disciplines in the realm of the social sciences. Capitalism is considered a virtuous pursuit by Rand and many of her primary characters in the novel. *Atlas Shrugged* espouses the virtues and benefits of a pure capitalistic society and seeks to enunciate and pronounce these values succinctly throughout the novel, espousing the virtues of capitalism and the power of the mind.

Paramount to the perfect society John Galt believed would exist when the producers were in charge is the concept of “free trade and free minds” (Rand, 1999, p. 1067). Rand defines capitalism as “a social system based on the recognition of individual rights, including property rights, in which all property is privately owned” (Uyl and Rasmussen, 1986, p. 173).

“One of the unique features of Rand’s defense of capitalism is that she neither considers capitalism a necessary evil (as do many conservatives) nor tries to defend it simply in terms of the benefits it produces, as do many economists” (Uyl and Rasmussen, 1986, p. 173). Rand sees capitalism from a moral perspective that supersedes capitalism for purely monetary reasons and then becomes a mantra for a philosophical way of life that focuses on intelligence, rationality, and reason.

“The moral justification of capitalism does not lie in the altruist claim that it represents the best way to achieve ‘the common good’...The moral justification of capitalism lies in the fact that it is the only system consonant with man’s rational nature, that it protects man’s survival *qua* man, and that its ruling principle is justice” (Uyl and Rasmussen, 1986, p. 173).

In *Atlas Shrugged*, John Galt believes that a collective society will include those who are willing to work and enjoy the fruits of their own labors. He predicts the demise of a system led by looters. In its place he sees a society that believes in the individual and the contributions that individuals can make to their world and society. Not willing to let looters into this new world who are not committed to his goals and philosophical bent, John Galt opens the door of invitation and hospitality only to those who would choose to espouse the virtues of an individualistic, capitalistic society.

To those who were willing to commit to a renouncement of their looting mentality, Galt states, “when the looters’ state collapses, deprived of the best of its slaves....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. Those who choose to join us will join us; those who don’t will not have the power to stop us; hordes of savages have been an obstacle to men who carried the banner of the mind” (Rand, 1999, p. 1067).

“The conduct of the market may be greatly facilitated by the use of money, that provides a convenient medium of exchange...From the standpoint of understanding and control, the use of money is of far-reaching importance, for it permits economic activity to be measured mathematically. Because of the money system, qualitative preferences can be quantitatively assessed, and the powerful resources of mathematical computation can be brought to bear on the study and management of economic processes” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 266).

John Galt’s symbol of the dollar was a rallying cry for the producers to produce and to fall in line with the pseudo-religion of wealth and prosperity based on one’s individualistic ability to

produce and his or her enjoyment of such activities. For Galt and his followers, this was success and the true essence of life.

To reiterate the value of a thinking society, John Galt speaks to the looters in regards to what the retreat of reason, thought, and creativity had brought to the world through the strikers of the mind. “If you want to know what you lost when I quit and when my strikers deserted your world—stand on any empty stretch of soil in a wilderness unexplored by men and ask yourself what manner of survival you would achieve and how long you would last if you refused to think, with no one around to teach you the motions, or, if you chose to think, how much your mind would be able to discover....ask yourself whether you would be able to discover how to till the soil and grow your food...then decide whether men of ability are exploiters” (Rand, 1999, pp. 1048-1049).

Feminism

To those who were led to believe that a capitalistic society was an evil commodity, Dagny Taggart was a symbol of everything that was wrong with a society based on capitalism and productivity. She was a woman, who for some, had overstepped the bounds of societal acceptability in the fact that she had not chosen to marry or to establish a traditional home, which was such a prevalent mainstay of most homes during the time of the initial writing of *Atlas Shrugged*. Balph Eubank looked upon Dagny as “a symptom of the illness of our century....Machines have destroyed man’s humanity...There’s an example of it—a woman who runs a railroad, instead of practicing the beautiful craft of the handloom and bearing children” (Rand, 1999, p. 138).

In Rand’s writing, marriage is not a value that is esteemed, as evidenced in the marriage of Hank and Lillian Rearden. Lillian despises her husband and his work. Hank merely tolerates his wife. It is not until he meets Dagny, that he finds someone who will share his love and appreciation for his work and life goals and accomplishments.

Affairs are not considered inappropriate in Rand’s writings. Fidelity is not considered a virtue. There is not a long term, committal approach to marriage and sexual activity. In addition, children were never mentioned in the text of *Atlas Shrugged*. In Rand’s world, if literature truly reflects life, children would have been a burden and therefore something that she would not have chosen to have or to commit to.

The Third Realm: Esthetics

“The third realm, esthetics, contains the various arts, such as music, the visual arts, the arts of movement, and literature” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 12). By seeing the artistic qualities of a literary work, meaning and understanding can be enhanced and deepened for a more intuitive and firmer grasp of the specific meanings and nuances of a particular work of literary genius and artistic quality.

Art

“Ayn Rand held that art is a “re-creation of reality according to an artist’s metaphysical value judgments. By its nature, therefore, a novel (like a statue or a symphony) does not require or tolerate an explanatory preface; it is a self-contained universe, aloof from commentary, beckoning the reader to enter, perceive, [and] respond” (Rand, 1999, p. ix).

When Rand talks about a self-created universe, she is mirroring her philosophical view of writing. Rand was able to create a reality of her own choosing through her penned imaginations and her creative expressive abilities and expertise. She was able to create images through the written word and convey meanings and philosophical content through her own literary artistic talents and skills.

Music

Richard Halley is Dagny Taggart’s favorite composer. He is a masterful musician with a bent toward writing beautiful concertos and operas. At the age of 24, Halley’s first opera “Phaethon” was performed. He met with wide spread humiliation and professional disfranchisement by the critics when his opera was booed and heckled by patrons of his first musical debut.

On his second debut, years later, he met with the success he had longed for since his youth. However, shortly after receiving a rave review of his musical composition’s performance, Halley disappeared. It was another example of a producer leaving the “world” to go to the “perfect world” of the intellectual elitists who retreated to a distant place which came to be known as John Galt’s gulch, a place where men could be productive using their own talents and gifts, whatever they may be, for their own personal pleasure, development, and reward.

Literature

Atlas Shrugged is a mixture of genres and literary devices that combine a fluid story of romance and love based on Ayn Rand’s most basic philosophical beliefs. “*Atlas Shrugged* is more myth than novel. Miss Rand’s heroes and heroines are godlike creatures who, in their leviathan strength, resist the wickedness of the pernicious weaklings around them and achieve their ends at will” (Riley, 1975, p. 423).

Reason and rationality were together the basis for the novel *Atlas Shrugged*. Before ever starting a novel, “Ayn Rand wrote voluminously in her journals about its theme, plot, and characters” (Rand, 1999, ix). In her journal writing for *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand demonstrated “her mind in action, confident even when groping, purposeful even when stymied, luminously eloquent even though wholly unedited. These journals are also a fascinating record of the step-by-step birth of an immortal work of art” (Rand, 1999, p. ix).

“Ayn Rand’s basic purpose as a novelist was to present not villains or even heroes with errors, but the ideal man—the consistent, the fully integrated, the perfect” (Rand, 1999, p. xii). The perfect man in *Atlas Shrugged* is John Galt. He is heroic in nature and a “towering figure who moves the world and the novel” (Rand, 1999, p. xii). Galt is truly a man for all seasons and times and is pivotal to the story and philosophical views found in *Atlas Shrugged*.

Rand relates to each of the characters in the book in different and distinguishing ways and presupposes characteristics for each figure involved in the novel. Ideas personified are “for Dagny—the ideal; for Rearden—the friend, and for Francisco d’Anconia—the aristocrat; to James Taggart—the eternal threat; and to the Professor – his conscience” (Rand, 1999, p. xiii).

Rand’s writings have given impetus to philosophies and objectives that have inspired many to take a new look at different opportunities and options to personal fulfillment and success. Rand herself concedes that she seems “to be both a theoretical philosopher and a fiction writer” (Rand, 1999, xiv). Rand wrote for discovery. “For my purpose, the non-fiction form of abstract knowledge doesn’t interest me; the final, applied form of fiction does. I wonder to what extent I represent a peculiar phenomenon in this respect” (Rand, 1999, xiv). Rand also believed that she was much like her character, John Galt. “He is a combination of an abstract philosopher and a practical inventor; the thinker and the man of action together” (Rand, 1999, xiv).

For Rand, her writing was romantic. In writing, Rand chose to make characters either “black or white” from the context of their commitment to their own moray of values, ethics, and lifestyles. Therefore, characters became a mirrored version of her own reality and of society as she perceived it to be.

The Fourth Realm: Synnoetics

The fourth realm is synnoetics. “Meanings in the synnoetics realms are subjective (and inter-subjective), concrete and existential” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 430). Synnoetics is relational. There are two fundamental concepts within this realm that provide a deeper understanding of man and his interaction with his world and those individuals who become a relational part of that world. The “I-It” relationship is how we respond to inanimate and worldly manifestations and structures. The “I-Thou” relationship is how we interact and re-act to those around us. Sexuality can be classified as an “I-Thou” phenomenon in the form of proper relationships and attributes.

From a Freudian perspective, “the source of instinctual energy (particularly the sexual energy or libido) is the id. The id is regarded as part of the *unconscious*, an aspect of the personality below the level of the conscious mind” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 413). Relationships between Dagny and those she chose to commit herself to were below the level of the conscious mind. Where reason stopped, passionate relationships began.

In *Atlas Shrugged*, there are several love interests with the main female character of the novel, Dagny Taggart. These relationships are each viewed from a different perspective based on Dagny’s work and relationship to each man she committed herself to, even if only for a brief period of time.

Lifetime commitments were never a conditional part of Dagny’s intimate relationships. For the most part, her relationships were based first on common interests and goals, then on romantic passion and desire. Her love interests included Hank Rearden, John Galt, and Francisco d’Anconia.

The Fifth Realm: Ethics

Ethics, according to Dr. William A. Kritsonis, is that which “includes moral meanings that express obligation rather than fact, perceptual form, or awareness of relation” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 13). Morality, according to Dr. Kritsonis, is simply that “which reflects inter-subjective understanding. Morality has to do with personal conduct that is based on free, responsible, deliberate decision” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 13).

Rand’s view of morality is exonerated by her impressive portrayal of John Galt’s impassioned views about morality expressed during his long and elaborate discourse on morality and objectivism. “A rational process is a moral process. You may make an error at any step of it, with nothing to protect you but your own severity, or you may try to cheat, to fake the evidence and evade the effort of the quest—but if devotion to truth is the hallmark of morality, then there is no greater, nobler, more heroic form of devotion than the act of a man who assumes the responsibility of thinking” (Rand, 1999, p. 1017).

For John Galt, reason was the moral basis of all life. “My morality, the morality of reason, is contained in a single axiom: existence exists-and in a single choice: to live. To live, man must hold three things as the supreme and ruling value of his life: Reason-Purpose-Self-esteem. These three values imply and require all of man’s virtues, and all his virtues pertain to the relation of existence and consciousness: rationality, independence, integrity, honesty, justice, productiveness, and pride” (Rand, 1999, p. 1018).

Rand does not believe man has a moral responsibility to his or her neighbor. This tenet of Rand’s ethical theory appears at first glance to be harsh and uncaring. John Galt restated Rand’s theory of isolation and moralism and held that such attributes were proper and appropriate in his own world view. “Do not say that my morality is too hard for you to practice and that you fear it as you fear the unknown. You kept sacrificing your virtues to your vices, and the best among men to the worst. This dismal wreckage, which is now your world, is the physical form of the treason you committed to your values, to your friends, to your defenders, to your future, to your country, to yourself” (Rand, 1999, p. 1060).

The question might be raised, “When do the needs of others supersede one’s own needs and desires?” According to Rand in her book, *The Virtue of Selfishness*, there are times when she believes that it is acceptable to help others. “Any action that a man undertakes for the benefit of those he loves is not a sacrifice if, in the hierarchy of his values, in the total context of the choices open to him, it achieves that which is of greatest personal (and rational) importance to him” (Rand, 1964, p. 51).

Ethical and moral decisions each have their own consequences. Rand also believes that in all ethical decisions, the ultimate choice of what is right or wrong lies with the individual. She believes that “the moral purpose of a man’s life is the achievement of his own happiness” (Rand, 1999, p. 55). Selfishness, therefore, remains a strong foundational principle of Rand’s ethical and moral philosophical basis for her idyllic view of society and life.

The Sixth Realm: Synoptics

Synoptics refers “to meanings that are comprehensively integrative” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 13). Synoptics covers the realms of “history, philosophy, and religion” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 13). Understanding the synoptic realm of meaning in these fields allows a continuity of understanding that helps to develop a deeper meaning and understanding of the specific work studied.

History

Historical parallelisms can be found in the story of *Atlas Shrugged* and important events in our own country’s history. In 1939, Albert Einstein informed President Franklin D. Roosevelt that the Germans had the makings of an atomic bomb. The first country to develop this method of mass destruction would be at a decisive advantage in the framework of global dominance and power.

Einstein in some way parallels the strikers of the mind when he decides to leave Germany and begin his new work in the United States. Just as John Galt did not want unthinking men to reap the benefits or responsibilities of his own creative genius, Einstein did not want the Germans, who he considered a danger and threat to the known world, to have the power of the atomic bomb.

Unthinking men with this unpredictable form of new power could cause grave destruction and chaos to the known world. Einstein knew this and made the decision to join forces with the United States in order to give his power and creative genius to a country that would be responsible and prudent in its dealing with this new form of power and technology.

Another historical parallel can be noted when the People’s State of Mexico promises a “roast of pork every Sunday” (Rand, 1999, p. 123). This is analogous to the campaign promises of Franklin D. Roosevelt when he advocated that lack and poverty would soon be a thing of the past. He promised a “chicken in every pot” to every American who would believe in and support his bid for the presidency of the United States of America.

Philosophy

“Philosophy provides analytic clarification, evaluation, and synthetic coordination of all the other realms through a reflective conceptual interpretation of all possible kinds of meaning in their distinctiveness and in their interrelationships” (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 13). Ayn Rand believed that righteous self-interest superseded all morality and goodness. She “challenged the prevalent philosophies of our time with objectivism, a ‘morality of rational self-interest’ repudiating all forms of altruism, including religion, as ‘collectivist’ traps incompatible with a free society” (Moritz, 1982, p. 331).

When writing *Atlas Shrugged*, “Ayn Rand had to go beyond ethics: she had to originate a new system of philosophy, identifying the nature of man’s means of knowledge and of the universe he seeks to know” (Hull and Peikoff, 1999, p. 290). Ms. Rand’s philosophical bias lies with her

theory of objectivism. Her philosophy of objectivism is mirrored in the pages of the novel *Atlas Shrugged*. Her philosophy is based essentially on the selfishness and individuality of the person who chooses to take responsibility for his or her actions and be responsible for their own view of personal happiness and success.

“My philosophy in essence,” Miss Rand has said, “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 guide” (Moritz, 1999, p. 332). Ayn Rand’s philosophy of objectivism states that “reality exists as an objective absolute, reason is man’s only means of perceiving reality, man is an end in himself, and the ideal political-economic system is a laissez-faire capitalism” (Ayn Rand Institute, 1996). John Galt’s speech in *Atlas Shrugged* reflects Rand’s philosophical bent toward her reasoned stance on objectivism and its value to a coherent and productive society.

Rand’s Objectivist Philosophies

In the novel, *Atlas Shrugged*, John Galt’s perception of the world around him conceptualizes Ayn Rand’s objectivist’s views and philosophies. Therefore, it is important to see how her actual stated philosophical views are reflected in the fictional writings of *Atlas Shrugged*. Each axiom can be seen through the eyes of her created, heroic character, John Galt.

Objectivist Axiom #1: “Reality exists as an objective absolute—facts are facts, independent of man’s feelings, wishes, hopes or fears” (Ayn Rand Institute, 1996). In *Atlas Shrugged*, John Galt states, “Reality is that which exists; the unreal does not exist; the unreal is merely that negation of existence which is the content of a human consciousness when it attempts to abandon reason. Truth is the recognition of reality; reason, man’s only means of knowledge, is his only standard of truth” (Rand, 1999, p. 1017).

Objectivist Axiom #2: “Man—every man—is an end in himself, not the means to the ends of others. He must exist for his own sake, neither sacrificing himself to others nor sacrificing others to himself. The pursuit of his own rational self-interest and of his own happiness is the highest moral purpose of his life” (Ayn Rand Institute, 1996). Happiness, therefore, as explained through the words of John Galt “is the successful state of life. Happiness is that state of consciousness which proceeds from the achievement of one’s values” (Rand, 1999, p. 1014).

Objectivist Axiom #3: “The ideal political-economic system is laissez-faire capitalism. It is a system where men deal with one another, not as victims and executioners, nor as masters and slaves, but as traders, by free, voluntary exchange to mutual benefit. In a system of full capitalism, there should be (but, historically, has not yet been) a complete separation of state and economics, in the same way and for the same reasons as the separation of state and church” (Ayn Rand Institute, 1996).

John Galt’s perception of the ideal political-economic system saw the ultimate view of man as one who was totally in control of his life and work. He believed that “every man is free to rise as

far as he's able or willing, but it's only the degree to which he thinks that determines the degree to which he'll rise" (Rand, 1999, p. 1064). However, Galt holds disdain for those who benefit from the contributions of those who have reached their potential and exist at the top of the intellectual and creative pyramid of intellect and creative knowledge and power, and yet do not produce themselves.

"In proportion to the mental energy he spent, the man who creates a new invention receives but a small percentage of his value in terms of material payment, no matter what fortune he makes, no matter what millions he earns" (Rand, 1999, p. 1066). Therefore, in Galt's mind, as well as Rand's, there is a disproportionate reward for those who create and for those who simply partake of the intellectual creativity of others.

The motto for Galt's objectivist theory is found at the end of his infamous and revealing speech which epitomized his views on society, life, objectivism, and the reasons for his departure from the world, even if only for a short time. "You will win when you are ready to pronounce the oath I have taken at the start of my battle—and for those who wish to know the day of my return, I shall now repeat it to the hearing of the world: "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" (Rand, 1999, p. 1069).

Galt's speech is totally aligned with Rand's basic philosophy of the nature and purpose of selfishness in one's personal, as well as corporate life. "Since selfishness is 'concern with one's own interests', the objectivist ethics uses that concept in its exact and purest sense. It is not a concept that one can surrender to man's enemies, nor to the unthinking misconceptions, distortions, prejudices and fears of the ignorant and the irrational. The attack on selfishness is an attack on man's self-esteem" (Rand, 1964, p. xi). This attack on one's self-esteem was not an attack that John Galt chose to let emerge in his own personal life. Therefore, he retreated in order to gain supremacy over his own life, creative thoughts and abilities.

Selfishness to Rand and to Galt was not something to be avoided. Selfishness was to be embraced and celebrated. Rand's views were that the attack on selfishness was "an attack on man's self-esteem; to surrender one, is to surrender the other" (Rand, 1964, p. xi). As Galt's final self-interest led him to retreat from a society he believed was comprised of moochers and looters, he demonstrates fully his philosophical and moral agreement with Rand that the idea and practice of selfishness as a virtue should be lauded and held high in the realms of intellectual honor and esteem.

Galt, although not a philosopher by trade, influenced his generation through his own philosophic thought and commitment to his ideas. His contributions thereby exceeded those that only a scientist could bring forth. "Perhaps the greatest contribution of the analytic philosophers is their personal witness to the importance of meaning and their faith in the possibility of making meanings clear" (Kritsonis, 2007, p. 73). Galt contributed, in essence, new meaning and life through his innovative leadership and objective philosophies and intellectual premises and pursuits.

Religion

Ayn Rand was a self-proclaimed atheist. Her "god" was the capitalistic society where each man produced from his own individualism and creativity. Worshiping a god, such as the Christian God, was to Miss Rand a representation of naïveté and a misunderstanding of the essential purpose of life.

In the Christian gospel, the value of the individual is paramount. Whether rich or poor, well-known or hidden from the vastness of society and its existence, Christianity presupposes the value of the individual. God, as Creator, values the individual and provides a way of redemption for his creation to ensure their eternal happiness, reward, and eternal longevity which are ensured to those who believe in Him and trust in His providence and guidance throughout life with the hope of securing a future and destiny in-line with God's purposes and design.

For Rand, the individual who does not conform to her romantic idealized version of life is potentially unworthy of respect or consideration. This view could have influenced her view of abortion and the rights of the unborn, who at birth are truly "non-producers" and who are totally dependent on someone else's care, generosity, and commitment. To Rand, "an embryo has no rights. Rights do not pertain to a potential, only to an actual being. A child cannot acquire any rights until it is born" (Hull and Peikoff, 1999, p. 337). Rand's view of abortion is that it is a "moral right which should be left to the sole discretion of the woman involved" (Hull and Peikoff, 1999, p. 337).

It is interesting to note, that in *Atlas Shrugged*, sexuality is not mentioned as a form of pro-creation, but simply as an act of encounter that does not require continual commitment or a dedication to a relationship that has the ability to transcend time and become an integral party of one's entire being and ultimate life legacy.

Rand's ideology is in many ways in direct contrast to Christian values and virtues. Christianity espouses the centrality of a triune God who is benevolent and caring to the population of mankind. In contrast, Rand's god was materialistic. Rand's heroic characters were those who lived for themselves. Dagny Taggart's sexuality was in direct contrast to the Christian teachings of morality and purity. Where Christians are admonished to "die to one's self", Rand encourages the "self-life." However, Rand's writings do give the astute student of philosophy a chance to compare and contrast the values of the world and therefore choose for oneself their own vision of morality and justice.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, *Atlas Shrugged* is a novel based on the importance of rationality and man's own individuality and freedom of choice. There are ten major issues which are discussed in the novel and that lend credence to Rand's philosophical views which include the purpose of life and man's destiny and responsibilities for individualized happiness and success. Ten prominent themes outlined in *Atlas Shrugged* include, but are not exclusive of: (1) Rand's theory of objectivism (2) capitalism (3) socialism (4) communism (as seen through the division of labor (i.e., the looters and the strikers of the mind) (5) feminism (6) a woman's right to choose (7) man's spirituality (8) man's sexuality (9) art in literature and life and (10) the historical parallels of *Atlas Shrugged* with actual historical events. By reading Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*, readers can gain a new appreciation of her philosophical and literary contributions to our society and how their applications to everyday life and academic study can enhance one's search for knowledge utilizing the comprehensive framework of the *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning*.

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