

Celebrated Author, Maligned Philosopher: Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* and Objectivist Philosophy

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Why Ayn Rand?

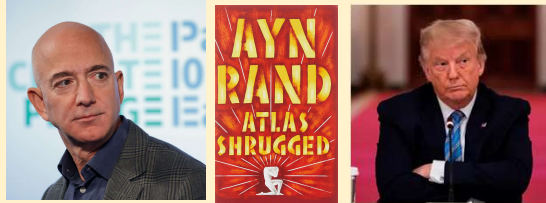
Despite the dearth of credible scholarship surrounding Ayn Rand's fiction and philosophy, Rand remains stubbornly influential in politics and popular culture.

-Rand is a darling of the American conservative movement, with Ron Paul, Paul Ryan, Mike Pompeo, Rush Limbaugh, Ted Cruz, Donald Trump, and Ronald Reagan all proclaiming their admiration or Rand at one point or another.

-Technocrats like Steve Jobs, Elon Musk and Jeffery Bezos along with many professionals in Silicon Valley support and promote Rand's fiction.

-Objectivist Alan Greenspan was appointed as chairman of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System from 1987–2006. His Randian policies helped shape the American economy towards the 2008 recession

-Sales of Rand's fiction have continued to be strong, despite their having been published 50+ years ago, and have seen an increase in prominence since 2008.



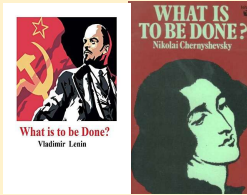
Entering the Conversation

Discussion of Rand's work at an academic level has been dominated by Objectivists- that is to say the people who subscribe to Rand's philosophy. There has been little critical scholarship surrounding Rand's ideas. My project is an intensive exploration of the endurance of Rand's appeal which contrasts the philosophical merit of Objectivism with its presentation in Rand's most celebrated work, *Atlas Shrugged*, while providing context with which to understand both of these phenomena.

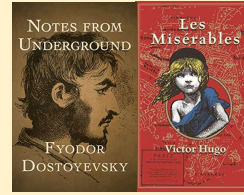
The conclusion of this study is that *Atlas Shrugged* is an effective vehicle for Objectivist philosophy because the fictional narrative and the science fiction universe Rand creates are able to mask the short-comings of Objectivist philosophy. Rand achieves this by leading the reader towards a metaphysical confusion of her fiction as evidence of trends which are paralleled in the real world.



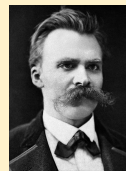
The Ideological Formation of *Atlas Shrugged*



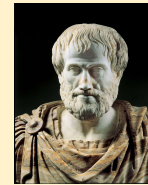
Rand's formative years during Russian Revolution 1905-1925



Initiation into Romantic Literary style



Adoption and subsequent rejection of Nietzsche's Philosophy



Enduring influence of Aristotle's metaphysics

Objectivist Philosophy

Metaphysics and Epistemology

Rand's metaphysics and epistemology are based on her reading of Aristotle. She assumes that the existence of reality can be proved through on the Law of Identity, and from that foundation one can learn anything. Objectivism gets its name from this; since reality is "objective". Rand's epistemology based from the ability to reach a truth which will be universal to all who put in the work towards being "non-contradictory" in their thinking.

The Benevolent Universe Premise

Rand takes up the metaphysical assumption that the world is inherently generous, and that all one must do in order to succeed is to apply oneself sufficiently to self-betterment.

Ethics

Objectivist ethics embraces rational self-interest as the mode of ethical behavior. Rand justifies this through a defense of axiomatic concepts which reveal the values of rationality, productiveness, and pride. These values are irreducible, and are the incarnations of the "good" that Rand identifies.

The Trader Principle

Rand's ethics are applied through The Trader Principle, which dictates interpersonal interactions ought to be based solely on the exchange of value. This is crucial in Rand's famous defense of Capitalism and of markets.

Atlas Shrugged as Literary Philosophy

There are three main ways in which *Atlas Shrugged* functions as a persuasive device meant to convince the reader of Objectivist Philosophy:

Science Fiction and Metaphysics

It is relatively uncontroversial to argue that *Atlas Shrugged* is a work of science fiction. The world Rand manufactures is a key element in convincing the reader of the metaphysical premises she proposes, because they are able to be exemplified in *Atlas Shrugged*. The world Rand creates is indeed benevolent, and the Law of Identity illustrated faithfully. The trouble here is that *Atlas Shrugged* cannot actually evidence claims that Rand forwards, because of its nature as a work of fiction.



Illustrations © Anna and Elena Balbussa 2018 from The Fallo Society edition of Ayn Rand's Atlas Shrugged

Plot and Epistemology

The story of *Atlas Shrugged* is meant to communicate the "non contradiction" her epistemology espouses. The conflict of the strike is uncovered systematically and logically in way that is supposed to mirror a real-world orderliness to cognition and the unfolding of life.



Ethics and Character

Rand's characters, and particularly John Galt, are egoist moral prototypes which instruct the reader towards the proper implementation of rational self-interest. The characters confer their charisma to Rand's ethics, and gracefully address the functional concerns which come with Rand's complete departure from ethics as they are understood in extant culture. They also avoid having to deal with the antisocial and undesirable consequences of egoism.