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From Novel of Ideas to Pop Phenomenon: The Transmission of Atlas Shrugged into Popular Culture

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FROM NOVEL OF IDEAS TO POP PHENOMENON: THE TRANSMISSION OF *ATLAS SHRUGGED* INTO POPULAR CULTURE

BY

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This thesis is approved as a creditable and independent investigation by a candidate for the Master of Arts in English degree and is acceptable for meeting the thesis requirements for this degree. Acceptance of this does not imply that the conclusions reached by the candidates are necessarily the conclusions of the major department.

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To my parents, for their immeasurable support and love while I was working on this project.

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ABSTRACT

FROM NOVEL OF IDEAS TO POP PHENOMENON: THE TRANSMISSION OF *ATLAS SHRUGGED* INTO POPULAR CULTURE

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Ayn Rand published her most famous novel, *Atlas Shrugged*, in 1957. Since then, the novel has continued to grow in popularity, and today, *Atlas Shrugged* is purchased by hundreds of thousands of people each year, and the philosophy that the novel espouses, Objectivism, continues to influence our culture in a myriad of ways. *Atlas Shrugged* has not only greatly influenced American politics; it has become a popular culture phenomenon. Representations of her ideas show up in radio talk shows, on nightly Fox News programing, on popular television series, on YouTube clips, Twitter posts, and everywhere between. The influence of Rand and her ideas are not simply within the confines *Atlas Shrugged*; they surround us.

However, up to this point, scholars have simply pointed to Rand's presence in popular culture as an indicator of her growing influence. No one has considered asking by what process does a text such as *Atlas Shrugged*—a thousand-plus page novel of ideas that articulates a systematic philosophy—become a popular cultural phenomenon?

To address this question, and to fill this gap in the scholarship, this thesis will focus on the various means by which Rand's ideas are transmitted, how these means affect the consumption of these ideas, and how, ultimately, these means affect the currency, potency, and integrity of these ideas in the public sphere.

In short, this project will reveal three fundamental ideas concerning Ayn Rand and her most famous novel. First, she was, and continues to be, a highly influential

thinker. Second, Rand achieved great success in popularizing her ideas, as evidenced by the many attempts to represent her ideas in modern media. And third, because of Rand's popularity, her ideas are often misconstrued and changed by the technological media that represent them, and because of this, her ideas have often been used to widen various ideological divisions, rather than serve as a moment for an important conversation and an opportunity for serious discourse.

Introduction

Shortly after Ayn Rand turned thirty-one, in 1936, she began sketching notes toward a possible autobiography that would tell the tale of her contact with the Bolshevik revolution.[1] At this point in her career, Rand had lived in the United States for ten years and had established herself as a writer of screenplays in Hollywood, but it would still be several years before she published a novel. One night, while Rand was drafting her notes, she wrote the following passage as a possible introduction to her project: "If a life can have a theme song [. . .] mine is a religion, an obsession, or a mania or all of these expressed in one word: individualism. I was born with that obsession and have never seen and do not know now a cause more worthy, more misunderstood, more seemingly hopeless, and more tragically needed" (qtd. in Heller 1). Although the project would eventually change course and turn into a novel based on her experiences in Communist Russia, this passage prefigures the project that occupied Rand over the course of her career as both a novelist and a philosopher—to vindicate the value of the human individual within society.

Through her novels *We the Living*, *Anthem*, *The Fountainhead*, and *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand depicted the corrosive effects of collectivism and set forth characters who, in their insistence upon the rights of the individual, heroically combated these effects; and within these novels, Rand developed her philosophy of Objectivism, which holds as its founding principles the objective nature of human reason and its ability to know the universe. Among the general public, however, she is best known for her ethical

[1] During this time, the Communist party took over Rand's father's small pharmacy. As the revolution progressed, the family was forced to move into shanty housing and narrowly missed several purges of Jewish families.

scheme, which enthusiastically endorses *laissez-faire* capitalism and the "virtue of selfishness."[2]

Although Rand would also publish quite a bit of nonfiction on her philosophy, it is in her final novel, *Atlas Shrugged*, that most of her readers first encounter Objectivism. The novel tells the story of Dagny Taggart as she struggles to keep her grandfather's railroad company solvent in the midst of economic turmoil, government interventions, and the utter incompetence of her eldest brother. The basic questions the novel explores (according to Rand in the novel's introduction), are who or what are the prime movers within society, and what would happen if they went on strike?[3] Slightly past the novel's midway mark, the reader meets the story's hero, John Galt, who has orchestrated a national strike in which all of the nation's top minds in engineering, science, manufacturing, and art retreat from the failing nation and live together in a hidden valley known as "Galt's Gulch." For the majority of the novel, however, it is Dagny who struggles to survive and keep Taggart Transcontinental running, despite both the crumbling economy and the withdrawal of the captains of industry. The climax comes in a radio address by Galt, spanning over forty pages, in which he lays out the philosophy that will supposedly reverse the chaos the U.S. finds itself in. Galt's speech took Rand roughly two years to write, and it lays out the basic principles of Objectivism. To some,

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[2] Rand commonly used this phrasing when referring to her ethics, and it was also the title to one of her earliest nonfiction treatises—*The Virtue of Selfishness*. In Rand's view, capitalism was the only system of economics that allowed for "free, voluntary, unforced exchange" in which both the ethics of rational self-interest and the metaphysics of an objective universe could coincide (Rand, "Objectivist Ethics" 37).

[3] Rand is referring to Aristotle's "prime mover" here, although in a much different manner. Aristotle used this term to describe the conditions needed to make all movement possible (or, in other words, the necessary conditions for causality itself). Rand is applying this idea to the movements of the economy (i.e., who or what makes the movement of an economy possible).

this novel was a noxious tirade that, were its principles actually enacted, would subvert the moral fabric of the nation and replace it with selfishness. To others, it was a beautifully written and convincing defense of capitalism and of the rights of the individual.

By the 1960's, after the enormous commercial success of *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand's "mania" for individualism became infectious, and her ideas began to work their way into America's collective consciousness. As Jennifer Burns, a professor of history at the University of Virginia and author of *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right*, notes, Rand often spoke at college campuses during this decade to packed auditoriums filled with young students who came in droves because of "her provocative stance" which "electrified audiences and stood in contrast to the more prosaic, measured presentation of ideas" they were used to. (198). From here, Rand's popularity only continued to grow, and if one looks back today, it becomes abundantly clear that Rand influenced American culture in ways that few authors ever do. In fact, the Library of Congress, in conjunction with the Book of the Month Club, set out in the early nineties to find out which books have "influenced" readers the most. The results showed Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* as second in influence among Americans only to the Bible.

Over the past two decades, Rand's position in American culture has continued to grow and manifest itself in ways that never occurred while she was still living (she died in 1982). Rand has become a champion of the contemporary libertarian party, and although her influence in American politics is substantial (which we will see in the upcoming chapter), the most dramatic moment that portrayed her influence occurred with a simple photo taken in 1974. In the photo, Alan Greenspan posed next to President Ford

in the oval office; he had just been sworn in as chairman of the Council of Economic advisors (his first official position before eventually becoming our nation's longest sitting chairman of the Federal Reserve). Directly to the right of Greenspan, and a little in front of him, stood the small frame of an elderly woman with her famous dark eyes peering into the camera. Ayn Rand (along with Greenspan's mother) was in attendance as her most famous student was sworn in as chairman. This was the start of Greenspan's career as an influential economist within Washington—a career that would culminate just years later when President Reagan appointed him as chairman of the Federal Reserve.

Rand's influence extends beyond American politics. We also see the influences of Rand and Objectivism both in the background and foreground of American popular culture. As we will later see, Rand's ideas have been appropriated into popular culture in a myriad of ways—anywhere from rock lyrics to famous comic books, from televised series to segments of nightly news, references to Rand and her philosophy prove she is more popular today than any other time before. Case in point, in 2008, the total number of books of Rand's fiction and nonfiction sold exceeded 800,000; in 2009, *Atlas Shrugged* sold over 500,000 copies, which is double any other year since the book was first published in 1957 ("'Atlas Shrugged' Sets a New Record" par. 1). And if we still aren't convinced of Rand's growing influence, the Ayn Rand Institute released a press release in 2013 that demonstrates a huge growth in sales for *Atlas Shrugged*. In the 1980s, sales of the book averaged 74,300 per year; in the 1990s, the average jumps to 95,300, in the 2000s to 167,028, and in the last four years, sales have ballooned to an average of 303,523 per year ("Ayn Rand Hits a Million" par. 3).

Despite Rand's significant influence in both American politics and popular

culture, serious, academic discourse on the famous author has been largely lagging behind. It was not until nearly a decade after her death that Chris Matthew Sciabarra would publish the first full-length study of her and her work in *Ayn Rand: The Russian Radical*. In his introduction, Sciabarra notes: "The mere mention of Ayn Rand's name in academic circles can evoke smirks and a rolling of the eyes. Most often she is dismissed, without discussion, as a reactionary, a propagandist, or a pop-fiction writer with a cult following" (8). A survey of the scholarship confirms Sciabarra's point. In fact, until Sciabarra published his book, the vast majority of scholarship on Rand came from either proponents or opponents of Objectivism. But by and large, the academy mostly ignored her until Sciabarra's book appeared in 1995.

In the past decade, a discernible shift has occurred in Randian scholarship, as she is increasingly becoming a subject of serious study. For instance, in 2009, two book-length studies came out—both from esteemed publishers (Random House and Oxford). But because such scholarship is still relatively scarce, critics often find themselves trying to bridge the gap between a popular and scholarly conception of Rand. For instance, Anne C. Heller—a journalist and author of the latest Rand biography—notes in a recent interview that she was surprised by how many of her fellow biographers had the impression that Rand represented nothing more than a "greed is good philosophy" ("Anne Heller and Jennifer Burns"). Jennifer Burns makes a similar claim; she holds that because critics largely have ignored Rand, she has "passed into the lexicon of American popular culture" as a "signifier of ruthless selfishness" (282). Thus, to those who haven't studied her philosophy seriously, she is a modern-day Thomas Hobbes instead of a dialectical thinker in the classic tradition of Aristotle. For instance, Stephen Colbert

recently dedicated the popular segment "The Word" on *The Colbert Report* to lampoon the ideas found within *Atlas Shrugged*, which he called "the conservatives' bible." Through a clever show of sound-bites and images, Colbert equated Rand's philosophy with Fox News punditry and the Republican Party. Mimicking the voice of conservatives (which is the voice he uses throughout this show), he looked sternly into the camera and said, "The little guy needs to stop giving it to the man," and the side-text read, "latest example, giving him 787 billion." To be sure, this segment is meant to be light-hearted and humorous, but it still illustrates Burns's point that the references to Rand in pop culture often portray her philosophy as an embrace of the Hobbesian tradition of egotism—where individuals or corporations can and should do whatever benefits them the most (such as practice banking principles that lead to the collapse of the financial market), regardless of how it might affect others.[4]

But all of these references, allusions, and myriad forms of homage occasion a simple but crucial question: by what process does a text such as *Atlas Shrugged*—a thousand-plus page novel of ideas that articulates a systematic philosophy—become a popular cultural phenomenon? For although current scholarship often refers to the Ayn Rand phenomenon, both within popular culture and in more scholarly contexts, little attention has been paid to *how* this phenomenon has occurred and in what ways the popular media have prompted and shaped it.

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[4] While one could certainly challenge Rand's assumption that rational self-interest is the means to avoid coercive forces within the exchanges of an economy, it should be noted that Rand envisioned her ideas of rational self-interest to be advocating an ethics that was "applicable only in the context of a rational [. . .] and validated code of moral principles." She saw her ethics as the opposite of the more common form of selfishness where "any action," "regardless of its nature" is permissible (Introduction to *Virtue of Selfishness* x).

To address this question, and to fill this gap in the scholarship, this thesis will focus on the various means by which Rand's ideas are transmitted, how these means affect the consumption of these ideas,[5] and how, ultimately, these means affect the currency, potency, and integrity of these ideas in the public sphere. I will focus primarily on *Atlas Shrugged*, as this was Rand's latest and most philosophically ambitious novel,[6] and also the work of hers that has made the most conspicuous mark on popular culture. And in order to measure the effects of media transmission, I will compare popular representations of the ideas in *Atlas Shrugged* to their development in the novel. For example, I will compare the extensive, nuanced defense of capitalism that Rand offers in the novel to that of former Fox News pundit Glenn Beck, who had taken to citing Rand (in the early parts of Obama's first term) to corroborate the rather strident and simplistic views he expressed on his show. How such abbreviations and simplifications—repeated endlessly in film and on news media, television, and the Internet—affect an understanding of Rand's work as well as the position that work occupies in contemporary political debates constitutes the central concern of this study.

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[5] I will use the term "consumption" in the manner John Fiske does in *Understanding Popular Culture* to mean the process by which a reader consumes a text but is also capable of re-envisioning it with some amount of control, a view that differs from that of some other cultural theorists—the Frankfurt critics, for example—who see consumption as a far more passive act.

[6] The novel spans over 1100 pages and took her nearly a decade to write. It also includes the most explicit statements of her philosophy in John Galt's radio address—which lays out all the basic tenets of Objectivism's epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics.

Chapter 1: The Ayn Rand Phenomenon

Toward the beginning of the 1930s, Franklin D. Roosevelt was running a presidential campaign that promised a fundamental change in American politics. Gone would be the days in which the U.S. let the markets run free—including high-risk banking and investing practices—and increasingly government would abandon a *laissez-faire* approach to economics and increase direct spending to promote production and consumption (which are, of course, trademarks of a robust economy). This represented a sharp shift in American politics; later in his presidency, Roosevelt promised a *New Deal* that was going to implement a new progressive system of safety nets, regulations of the market, and government spending to alleviate the pains of the Great Depression. History would eventually see Roosevelt as one of the most popular presidents of all time (he rarely dipped below the fifty mark for job approval), and, indeed, in presidential rankings, he is often ranked as one of the top two presidents of all time (Baum and Kernell 204).

However, as Roosevelt's influence on American economic policy continued to increase throughout the decade and into the 1940s, a growing number of Americans were becoming increasingly alarmed by a president who was drastically changing the role of government in our republic, and it was within the context of this particular "culture war"—between the progressive desire to increase government's role in the markets and the conservative wish to limit it—that Ayn Rand wrote the novel that first made her famous, *The Fountainhead*.

Beginning in 1926, when Rand first emigrated to the U.S., she was slowly formulating her political convictions that would one day define her as a "radical for capitalism." Although Rand hadn't yet fully formulated her philosophy, Objectivism, at the point that FDR was implementing government programs to try to combat the Depression (the Three R's of the New Deal: relief, recovery, and reform), she was becoming a devoted voice of dissent; she argued that the policies of Roosevelt, and his basic philosophy, were eerily similar to those that prevailed in the country that most significantly shaped her political ideas—Russia. As Jennifer Burns notes, Rand continued to oppose Roosevelt's policies, which she saw as increasingly dangerous:

> What she wanted, more than anything else, was someone who would stand up and argue for the traditional American way of life as she understood it: individualism. She wanted the Republicans to attack Roosevelt's expansion of the federal government and to explain why it set such a dangerous precedent. The ideas and principles that Roosevelt invoked, she believed, were the very ones that had destroyed Russia. (57)

Rand would eventually grow completely dissatisfied with the Republican Party and its inability to provide a "philosophic defense for capitalism,"[1] but what's most important to realize is that this decade played a significant role in Rand's development of her philosophy—for she was now convinced that the rights of the *individual* would be the

[1] Rand once remarked in her book, *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal*, that liberals at least had somewhat of a handle on the political, cultural, and philosophic direction they advocated (although she also would say they rely on euphemism and won't accept the full reality of such a system), but it was the conservatives who most profoundly had failed in American politics. She argued that "Capitalism is perishing *for lack of a moral base* and of a full philosophical defense," and that it was conservatives who seemed unable to give a "philosophic" defense of capitalism (194-7)

focus of her literary efforts. And even though Rand was writing at a time when FDR and his New Deal seemed impossible to defeat in a general election, Rand's perspective can largely be understood as an *antithesis* to the thought that swept the nation in the Roosevelt revolution. Published in 1943, *The Fountainhead* garnered mixed reviews, although arguably the best review she ever received came from the *New York Times*, which said Rand possessed the ability to write "brilliantly, beautifully, bitterly," and heralded the novel as "the only novel of ideas written by an American woman that I can recall" (Lorine Pruette Par. 1).

At a time when many were convinced that ideas of unconstrained individualism and *laissez-faire* capitalism would likely wane,[2] Rand somehow found a way to not only espouse these ideas, but make them popular with a large group of ardent readers who see in her novels not just a good story, but an inspiration to serious thought about politics, economics, and philosophy. And with each passing decade, Rand's influence would continue to grow—solidifying her role as a cultural phenomenon.

When one looks at the Ayn Rand phenomenon, perhaps the most obvious example of her influence resides in the political sphere. Although Rand influenced American politics during her lifetime,[3] it was actually after her death and several decades after the publication of *Atlas Shrugged* that she began to make her strongest mark in American politics. Perhaps the strongest testament to this is one of her longtime students and acolytes, Alan Greenspan, being named Chairman of the Federal Reserve in 1987 during the Reagan presidency; he held this position for nearly two decades until he retired

[2] As Burns notes, "By 1940 Keynes's ideas had triumphed in both academia and government, making supporters of laissez-faire seem like relics from a bygone era" (73).

[3] In *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right*, Burns, more than any author to date, lays out quite masterfully the full range of Rand's political influence.

in 2006. Certainly much can be said about how much of Rand's libertarian philosophy might have influenced Greenspan's decisions. Although he was long heralded as the "wizard" of the financial system (by both major parties), and he did help engineer part of the 90s boom that saw unprecedented economic growth during the Clinton Administration, he also became a major focus of controversy and received a substantial portion of the blame for the financial and housing-market meltdown of 2007-08. In fact, in 2010, Jake Tapper of *ABC News* started his interview with Mr. Greenspan with: "Isn't it [the current recession] an indictment of Ayn Rand and the view that laissez-faire capitalism can be expected to function properly?" Greenspan would answer that nothing had diminished his conviction that Rand's basic premises were still sound, but Tapper's question alone reveals that Rand's philosophy significantly influenced American politics and policy, as Mr. Greenspan has long espoused the virtues of free and open markets. At one point, he even notes that meeting Rand made him want to influence American economics and policy from *within*, which prompted him to begin his work with President Nixon as an economic advisor (Greenspan 52). We can only assume that the thinking of his one-time mentor might have influenced his own decisions on economic matters while in the White House, and later, as head of the Federal Reserve. But beyond the influence of Rand's defense of capitalism, Greenspan testifies to a *calling* of sorts to enter the political realm, to broaden his thinking process, and ultimately to achieve some lofty goals—all of which he attributes, at least in part, to Rand's influence. If anyone should ever doubt the clear influence that Rand had on one of our nation's most notable Federal Reserve Chairmen, consider the following passage at the end of Greenspan's first chapter in his recent memoir, *The Age of Turbulence*:

> Rand persuaded me to look at human beings, 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 I'd learned. I began to study how societies form and how cultures behave, and to realize that economics and forecasting depend on such knowledge [. . .]. All of this started for me with Ayn Rand. She introduced me to a vast realm from which I'd shut myself off. (53)

This sense of calling or inspiration that prompted Alan Greenspan to enter a career of politics isn't atypical. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, Hilary Clinton, and political commentators Chris Matthews and Suze Oreman (just to name a few) all have mentioned Rand as being an inspiration at some point in their political lives. Justice Thomas goes so far as to claim that Rand's literature prompted him to see beyond his racial circumstance (growing up in the era of segregation and racial injustice) and to embrace the concept of the "individual" as Rand saw it; such a perspective, according to Justice Thomas, was far more empowering than what he was used to from his "left wing friends" (62). And even in the most recent election cycle of 2012, we saw front and center the political influence of Ayn Rand. Ron Paul, the libertarian congressman, launched his second bid for the Republican presidential nomination, and Paul has frequently acknowledged the influence that Ayn Rand has had on his own political thinking. And then there is Congressman Paul Ryan, currently one of the Republican party's most influential thinkers on economics (he serves as chair of the House Budget Committee and was presidential nominee Mitt Romney's running mate), who requires every senior staffer who works for him to read *Atlas Shrugged*. In the now infamous

2010 budget that he proposed, the young congressman looked to overhaul Medicare and Social Security, and many of these initiatives were meant to withdraw money from government entitlement programs and direct it into free-market bonds, savings, and investments (an idea that caused massive outrage from the left, although certainly it was a notion Rand would likely have agreed with). And then there was the Tea Party movement that arose after the election of President Obama in 2008. On television, one could often see angry citizens denouncing the welfare state and what they presumed to be the growing influence of government, holding signs inquiring, "Who is John Galt?"[4]

But it's not just the political figures such as Thomas, Greenspan, Paul, and Ryan who claim that reading Ayn Rand's novels was a pivotal moment in their lives. Wikipedia founder Jimmy Whales considers himself an Objectivist and points to Rand's philosophy as a major source of inspiration. Frank Miller (creator of Batman) also expressed that Rand was a source of inspiration, and another famous artist in the arena of comics, Steve Ditko (Amazing Spider-Man and Mr. A), has actually created characters that embody some of the ideas of Rand's characters.[5] In addition, a large number of major entrepreneurs have credited Ayn Rand as the one who inspired them to go into their respective fields. Individuals such as former BB&T (short for Branch Banking and Trust, BB&T is one of the nation's largest banks) CEO John Allison, owner of the Philadelphia Fliers Ed Snider, and Apple founder Steve Jobs have all acknowledged that

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[4] The novel opens with this phrase, and it recurs throughout the story. In the novel, no one realizes that John Galt is a real person, but rather the commonplace phrase is often uttered when someone doesn't know the answer to a particular question. In effect, the expression of not understanding what's happening is symbolic of the state the country is in, where the national economy is decaying, individuals of great talent are disappearing, and no one seems to know why either is occurring.

[5] For example, the character "Mr. A" acquired his name from Rand's propensity to quote Aristotle's axiomatic proclamation that "A is A."

Ayn Rand's novels had a significant influence on their lives. While this is just a sampling of those who credit Rand, the point is that she is often a force of influence "behind the scenes" with prominent politicians and business people, and a common feature of many of their testimonies is to speak of Rand's ideas as a major influence, not just in how they view the world, but actively influencing their ideas, shaping their careers, and motivating their aspirations.

While Rand's influence on individuals such as Steve Jobs and Alan Greenspan is certainly evidence of the Rand phenomenon, what becomes even more important for this project is to look at the Ayn Rand phenomenon within popular media. After all, it's through her growing influence within popular culture that she reaches a much larger audience than just prominent political and business figures (a major point to remember as this study continues). Therefore, we will now turn our attention to the full extent to which Rand has permeated and shaped popular culture. Because Rand's influence is quite broad and within the context of many different forms of media, I will discuss Rand's growing influence in the following three categories: Television Series and Sitcoms, Television Punditry, and Other. This final category will serve as a broad treatment of Rand's presence in social media, rock lyrics, and several other surprising areas of popular culture.

References to Ayn Rand, and specifically to *Atlas Shrugged*, often come across in television series and sitcoms in abbreviated form. A strong testament to Rand's growing influence, nearly all of the references we will be discussing have occurred in the last twenty years. For example, in an episode of *LOST*, the character Sawyer is seen lying on the beach reading a copy of *The Fountainhead* (fittingly, Sawyer is the character most

prone to "march to the beat of his own drum" and not follow the other characters stranded on the island). Or take, for example, an episode from the first season of *Mad Men*, in which the CEO of the advertising agency (which is the central focus of the entire series) recommends *Atlas Shrugged* to the protagonist Don Draper. In this particular scene, Bertram Cooper turns to Don Draper—all the while pointing at a close-up view of the novel—and says, "Have you read her? Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*? THAT's the one." Afterwards, Cooper explains to Draper that he's giving him such a large bonus because the two of them are so much alike—they are both "self-interested," strong, and capable. And then there's *Gilmore Girls*, which features the awkward but well-read and brilliant teenage girl Rory Gilmore, who in an episode titled "A-Tisket, A-Tasket" tries to convince her love interest, Jess, to read *The Fountainhead*.[6] Rory, while sitting on a scenic bridge, confesses to trying to read the novel when she was ten years old but not understanding it. She goes on to say that she reread it when she turned fifteen, and asks Jess to "give it another try." Jess rebukes her by stating, "Yeah, but Ayn Rand is a political nut," to which she replies, "Yeah, but nobody could write a forty-page monologue the way that she could." Later, in the very last scene of the episode, the two are once again talking and Jess comments, "Maybe you can explain what the hell this crazy woman is talking about." Although light in theme, this episode does reveal two common reactions in those who read her: whether in fictional television or reality, her fiction was able to garnish equal measures of admiration and disdain from the general public.

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[6] In 2004, *Slate* published an article entitled "Literary Lionesses" in which Dana Stevens argues that *Gilmore Girls* is the most "bookish television show" on TV based on its number of literary allusions.

Rand has even made a mark in the world of animation. *South Park* has made several references to her works. In an episode titled "Chickenlover," for example, the character Officer Barbrady is given *Atlas Shrugged* so that he will finally learn to read. At the end of the episode, he is forced to give a speech, in which he declares that reading the novel has convinced him that reading "totally sucks ass." Another animated show, *The Simpsons*, offers an episode with a bit more substance. In "A Streetcar Named Marge"—which parodies *The Fountainhead* throughout—Maggie is put into the "Ayn Rand School for Tots," where a harsh, masculine daycare director takes away Maggie's pacifier, asserting that the "tots" should learn to be self-reliant and don't need such devices. The rest of the episode shows how little Maggie, through ingenious means, steals back her pacifier by outsmarting the director. The episode culminates with Maggie—who is usually mute—giving a speech to convince everyone at the daycare center of their rights to choose a pacifier (mimicking the courtroom speech at the climax of *The Fountainhead* by protagonist Howard Roark).

Chris Matthew Sciabarra, a visiting scholar at NYU and the chief editor of the *Journal of Ayn Rand Studies*, reports that *One Tree Hill* "showcased her work" in an episode titled "Are You True?" ("Cultural Ascendancy" par. 8). During this episode, main character Lucas Scott receives a copy of *Atlas Shrugged* from a fellow classmate shortly after Lucas is unjustly dismissed from playing basketball. As his classmate hands him the book, he says, "Don't let them take it—your talent. It's all yours." At the end of the episode, the protagonist's voice-over reads an excerpt from John Galt's famous speech towards the end of *Atlas Shrugged*: "Do not let your fire go out, spark by irreplaceable spark. Do not let the hero in your soul perish." It's certainly clear why

such a passage would appeal to this show's demographic of young people, as this piece of the speech is one of the most quoted lines from all of Ayn Rand's fiction, and fans often find it especially inspiring. But what's more, the writers actually incorporated the theme of *Atlas Shrugged* into the episode: Lukas, much like John Galt, must battle through the adversity of those who disagree with his convictions in order to do what he most desires (which for Lukas is to play basketball, and for Galt is to invent his motor without the confines of collectivism and bureaucratic opposition).

This is just a sampling of the references to Ayn Rand on television,[7] but it establishes for us a trend of series and sitcoms that appropriate her work in both serious and lighthearted ways.

Now we will turn our attention to the second category of popular culture representations of Rand—pundits and political commentators—and the many ways they refer to Rand, and in particular, *Atlas Shrugged*. Once again, we can go back in history and see an abundance of references to this novel on various talk shows, news segments, and other programs that address American politics. Of course, we must remember that in many ways, Rand herself began this process by appearing on a host of television shows while she was living.[8] Starting in the 1950s, and especially after the sales of *Atlas*

[7] Sciabarra gives a rather extensive list of the various ways Rand crops up in popular culture in his essay, "The Illustrated Rand." He names *Jeopardy*, *Undeclared*, *Colombo*, *Frasier*, *Judging Amy*, *Andromeda*, *Queer as Folk*, and *Home Improvement* as additional shows on television that have referred to Rand (4).

[8] Although Rand was willing to engage with popular television shows in order to discuss her ideas, one should note though there is a major difference between Rand herself appearing on a show and discussing her ideas for an audience versus others appropriating her ideas on such programs.

Shrugged launched her into the realm as a public philosopher,[9] Rand appeared numerous times on the shows of Johnny Carson, Phil Donahue, and Tom Snyder during the 60s and 70s. And then there is the famous Mike Wallace interview (which was the first, lengthy television appearance by the author), which since being uploaded to YouTube in 2008, has been viewed by nearly a million viewers[10]—despite the interview being very dated with its low resolution in black and white. In an 1998 interview, Mike Wallace described Rand as "the perfect guest" for his late night show because she "got the people who were up at eleven o'clock at night thinking" (*100 Voices* 156).

Since the time of her death, it seems that an increasing number of pundits have taken to referring to *Atlas Shrugged* in some fashion. However, since the election of President Obama and the fever created by the Tea Party movement (which I will address in more detail in later chapters), there has been a noticeable increase in the number of references. And Rand's ideas, and especially her novel *Atlas Shrugged*, have become even more popular in recent years. *The Economist* claimed in 2009 that sales of Rand's novel seem to spike whenever the public perceives massive government intervention, such as the creation of TARP in 2007 or the passage of Obama's stimulus bill in 2009. Although we might quibble with some of the details in such a claim, the basic fact—that

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[9] Susan Love Brown argues that Rand achieved the role of "public intellectual,"—where the thinker focuses on the "cultural currency" of ideas, and often seeks a much larger audience—rather than the more abstract and narrow discourses that occur within academia. The key difference here though is the audience: the public philosopher seeks to engage with the populace at large, rather than a select readership (180-3).

[10] Throughout this project, statistics I report on the number of viewings of YouTube clips appear on YouTube's own viewer tracking that's part of each video. However, it should be noted that if we took all of the users who uploaded the same Mike Wallace interview, the number of times that this interview has been viewed greatly surpasses one million. In other words, the most-viewed video has been viewed by nearly a million people, but there are multiple uploads that have received hundreds of thousands of views.

sales of *Atlas Shrugged* have surged in recent years—is indisputable; in 2009, the novel sold over 500,000 copies, more than doubling the prior year's total sales (Ayn Rand Institute "*Atlas Shrugged* Sets New Record" par. 1).

Political pundits have followed the public at large and seem to be paying renewed attention to the novel since Obama's election. Sometimes the references can be small and in passing. Glenn Beck, the one-time host of an hour long show on Fox News, was prone to refer to Rand often. In one particular episode, he was decrying the decay of contemporary society, along with the demise of government in its totality (accompanied with the melodramatic arm waving that his fans love), and he declared, "I feel like Hank Rearden."[11] In another episode dated June 27, 2009, Mr. Beck held up, in direct view of the camera, a copy of *Atlas Shrugged*, and told the viewers that Congress was voting on a climate bill that exceeds the novel by two-hundred pages, and yet they will be voting on the bill shortly (which, he suggests, isn't enough time for each congressperson to fully read and comprehend the bill in its entirety). Additionally, Yaron Brook, the President of the Ayn Rand Institute, was a frequent guest of Beck's, and at times the two would discuss Rand's novel in passing. Judge Napolitano, Bill O'Reilly, and Chris Matthews (all famous pundits) also have discussed *Atlas Shrugged* in short segments. Chris Matthews is conventionally considered a more liberal commentator than many of the other pundits who discuss Rand (he broadcasts on MSNBC rather than on FOX, after all),

[11] In the novel, Rearden has the patent to his metal alloy seized by the federal government. In this particular episode, Beck seems to be suggesting that he—like the character in the novel—is watching society (and in particular, the economy) crumble around him. However, Beck doesn't provide any clear argument as to why he feels like the character, save the parallel (according to Beck) that both he and the fictional character are watching a government slowly intrude into individual rights (such as the right to patent protection).

although he doesn't necessarily condemn the book. Rather, he simply asserts that Rand's novel is "idealistic," and therefore, the world it depicts is unreachable in the confines of an organic, real society (although he still gushes "I love her, I love *The Fountainhead*" in an episode of *Hardball* in 2005).

Then there are the more involved and lengthy treatments the novel has received since Obama's election. Although Sean Hannity—the conservative pundit who is also ardently religious— has referred to *Atlas Shrugged* many times before, in a 2011 episode of *Hannity* (which is part of FOX News' primetime lineup), he interviewed John Stossel—the long-time libertarian reporter for ABC News who came to Fox News in 2009—about the possibility of the upcoming film of *Atlas Shrugged* possibly having a huge impact on the nation. Hannity started this interview with the famous tagline "Who is John Galt?" and then went on to say, "Certain writers just had [a] vision of the future"[12] (as he said this, the words "Atlas Shrugged" popped onto the screen in rather large lettering). Much of the conversation then turned to how Rand's novel, at least in their view, closely reflects contemporary America. Throughout the conversation, the episode turned to actual clips of the film. At one point, Hannity asked Stossel, "Movies can touch you deeply. . . . Do you think this can have an impact on people's understanding of government and dangers of uncontrolled government?" Stossel affirmed that he believed this can be the case; he argued that "to see it [governmental policy] in a story" has a way of opening people's eyes in ways that other forms of media might not accomplish.

John Stossel offered perhaps the most in-depth discussion of *Atlas Shrugged* out of any the pundits mentioned so far. In fact, the third episode of his brand new show on the Fox

[12] Hannity likens Rand to authors such as George Orwell, who he argues were able to predict and accurately envision the political landscape of their future.

Business Network *Stossel* (which debuted on December 10, 2009), was a sixty minute discussion of Ayn Rand's novel and its impact on America. This episode represented one of the most pointed attempts to *seriously* discuss this novel on national television. Stossel's guests included John Allison (former CEO of the tenth largest bank in America, BB&T), Yaron Brook (Objectivist and President of the Ayn Rand Institute), Professor C. Thompson (director of the Clemson Institute for the Study of Capitalism),[13] and Nick Gillespie (libertarian commentator and executive editor of *Reason* magazine).

Stossel opened this particular episode of his weekly show in front of New York's famous sculpture of Atlas—the giant who holds up the world on his sculpted and muscular shoulders—and asked his national viewers, "What would happen if Atlas…Shrugged?" After a clever play of graphics and the opening music, the episode showed Stossel in front of a live audience, and right at the beginning of the show, he discussed the famous "a-ha" moment that many ardent Rand fans testify to, where they read Rand's novel and feel as if the author has forced their eyes open to a world of ideas they have never seen before. He goes on to tell how he reread the novel "after becoming a consumer reporting and seeing again and again how government fails to make life better for consumers" and was "blown away" by the reality of her message. The format of the show then goes on to allow Stossel time to interview each of his guests separately, until at the end he leaves time for an open question and answer session between the guests and the studio audience.

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[13] Professor Thompson is also the BB&T Research Professor. John Allison set up a charity organization meant to foster serious study of Rand's idea via panel discussions, symposia, and even direct subsidies for professors who specialize in studies of Objectivism, capitalism, and other related areas. This practice has been severely criticized by some as essentially selling academic positions; however, quite a few universities have taken advantage of the program as it offers cash-strapped departments much-needed funds to offer more courses, hold conferences, and so on.

He started his interviews with John Allison, who discussed the practical ways in which Rand's message in the novel allowed him to better run one of the nation's largest banks, and the CEO certainly seems to have *some* knowledge of Rand—his very first answer consisted of him reminding the audience that Rand is an Aristotelian thinker. Then Stossel engaged Yaron Brook and Professor Thompson on topics ranging from "Who is the Wesley Mouch of Today?"[14] to how Rand can claim a "virtue in selfishness." From there, Stossel did a side segment of sorts and interviewed Nick Gillespie about various ludicrous restrictions by federal agencies, and then he ended this segment with all four guests taking questions from the studio audience. Then to wrap up the episode, Stossel spent an additional three minutes discussing the influence of *Atlas Shrugged* by bringing up a study that showed how much *Atlas Shrugged* continues to sell (the study is the *The Economist* article I mentioned earlier), and how often interest in the book seems to peak whenever the country senses massive government intervention (one example being the passage of the 2009 stimulus bill). He then made a few vague assertions about how "elites don't like *Atlas Shrugged* because elites don't like individualism, and they definitely don't like capitalism." In his very final remarks, he looked directly into the camera and declared, "when free people act in their own self-interest, society prospers." So whether it's a quick reference to a character in *Atlas Shrugged* or a sixty-minute segment dedicated to exploring the book's relevance to modern society, it is clear that political pundits on television—especially those who espouse a more conservative or

[14] Wesley Mouch is the character who, throughout the novel, acts as a liaison between Washington and the "titans of industry." Rand characterizes him as a man who is instrumental in shaping American public policy, and yet holds no tangible skills—in fact, no one in the novel ever actually understands exactly *what* he does. In short, Stossel is pushing his viewers to see many of the political figures of today as reminiscent of Mouch (they are influential, but they shouldn't be).

libertarian perspective—are quite fond of appropriating Rand's influential text in order to buttress their perspective by referring to an author who is extremely popular among their viewers. But what makes the Ayn Rand phenomenon interesting is not just the depth and scope to which the novelist has influenced both politics and television, but the ways her ideas sprout up in a number of other media—some of which are unexpected for a novelist and philosopher.

In the article "Rand, Rock, and Radicalism," Sciabarra notes that Rand exerted strong influence in the counter-culture movement of the 1960's (233-36), and this is perhaps best illustrated by her influence on the popular band *Rush*. In *Mystic Rhythms*, Carol and Robert Price hold that despite the evidence that Neil Peart was influenced by a variety of philosophers—Plato, Sartre, and Heidegger just to name a few—it is Rand who seems to fascinate him the most (77). Now to be sure, Neil Peart was a self-professed fan of Ayn Rand, and during an interview with *Creem* magazine, he even claimed to always be "writing for Howard Roark" (qtd. in "Rand, Rush, and Rock" par. 34). But even a glance at some of Peart's most famous lyrics can reveal strains of Randian thought: take for example one of *Rush*'s earlier albums *2112*—a series of songs about a futuristic totalitarian society. In the album's title song, the lyrics implore its listeners to "Look around at this world we've made/Equality our stock in trade." Later in the song, the narrator discovers a guitar "covered in dust;" however the ruling "priests" forbid him to discover music or play it, to which the narrator replies:

Just think of what my life might be
In a world like I have seen!

I don't think I can carry on

Carry on this cold and empty life.

Peart is quite clearly retelling another one of Rand's novels, *Anthem*, here. In the novel, the protagonist named Equality 7-2521 discovers electricity, only to see the council (which acts as the governing body of this futuristic society) outlaw such technology and forbid him from seeking such technology again. Although this is just one such reference, many of Peart's lyrics refer to Rand's work directly (even naming another track *Anthem*), as well as indirectly.

Perhaps a bit more bizarre is Rand's presence in the realm of virtual reality, animated characters, and dark basements where eager gamers play the popular video game *Bioshock*. Within the very storyline of this game, a fictional Objectivist decides to build an underworld Atlantis for others like him to live in (much in the spirit of John Galt's building "Galt's Gulch" in *Atlas Shrugged* for other individualists, who agree with his philosophy). Throughout the map, gamers are forced to wander the underworld to try to survive the great rapture—caused by a series of actions by the thug Frank Fontaine—and at times must even "sacrifice their humanity" by altering their genes in order to combat some enemy creature.[15] Numerous anecdotes and visuals within the game pay homage to Rand's famous novel.[16]

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[15] Rand often used the term "sacrifice" to describe what she perceived to be the evils of altruism—the need for human sacrifice (i.e., one must sacrifice for the other) in order to live. In *Atlas Shrugged*, John Galt declares at the end of his speech the much-quoted line: "In the name of the best within you, do not sacrifice this world to those who are its worst" (979). For Rand, to sacrifice was to act without self-interest, and to act without self-interest was to act outside the confines of the "rational ego." Chapter 2 will more fully develop this idea.

[16] For example, while traveling through the game's map, one encounters numerous posters that say "Who is Atlas?"—clearly alluding to the catchphrase "Who is

Still more references to Rand would include the U.S. Post Office released a stamp with her face as the portrait, and online clothing stores often sell T-shirts with the popular catchphrase "Who Is John Galt?"—a question that has experienced a renaissance since its appropriation by the Tea Party movement. Or perhaps we could look at the sheer number of YouTube videos that try to dramatize John Galt's speech in *Atlas Shrugged*—often with a relatively clever mixture of contemporary footage and music, and a voice-over reading the entirety of the Galt's forty-page speech. The point is, hate her or love her, one is increasingly likely to stumble upon a reference to Rand or her most famous novel.

It wasn't until 2011, however, that the most serious appropriation of the novel—a feature length film—finally came to fruition. The long, arduous journey of failed attempts to adapt the novel into a major film is a fascinating story in itself. As Jeff Britting tells us in his essay "Adapting *Atlas Shrugged* to Film, "Reports in the media of failed efforts to develop a filmable screenplay and to secure production funding now fill a thick clipping file" (195). Britting also admits that many began to see *Atlas Shrugged* as Rand's "unfilmable novel." However, in 2011, a businessman best known for his role as CEO of the exercise equipment company Cybex International made *Atlas Shrugged Part One*. John Aglialoro, who in prior years had seemed to work out a movie deal to star A-list actresses such as Angelina Jolie and Charlize Theron, ended up filming the movie with a cast of relative unknowns, and a director, Paul Johansson, whose only creative achievement was work on television. Despite such hurdles, the film's opening week did relatively well in spite of premiering to a limited number of screens and very little

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John Galt?" There is even a character who chooses to burn his fields rather than let others take them over, much like Ellis Wyatt does to his oil fields, in the novel, before the federal government can nationalize his product.

advertising.[17] Aglialoro acted as an executive producer (despite no previous experience doing so), and essentially funded the entire film with his own fortune and without any backing from major studios. The film, however, was pummeled by critics almost unanimously (save for those who already agreed with Rand's politics). The famous movie critic Roger Ebert labeled the film "the most anticlimactic non-event since Geraldo Rivera broke into Al Capone's vault." Despite its strong opening week, the revenue numbers dropped dramatically in the following weeks, and the film performed poorly as far as box office goes ("'Atlas Shrugged' producer" par. 3). And yet Aglialoro continued working on the film, finding a major studio to distribute the DVD nationwide. In 2012, Aglialoro went ahead with the second installment, which performed even worse than the first film. Despite this, filming is currently underway for the final film of the planned trilogy.

Because I will discuss the films at length later, I will, at present, forgo any further treatment of their content. For now, the most important thing to consider is that Rand's novel has been assimilated into contemporary culture now in both television shows and motion pictures. An angst-filled television show geared towards teenagers, famous comic book artists, a rock band, a major economist, multiple politicians, plenty of acolytes, and millions of readers have all felt the influence of Rand's ideas and novel, and because of this, so have we. The question that we must pose, though, is how has the cultural ascendancy of Ayn Rand's work altered its message? For a woman who consistently asked those around her to seek the philosophic roots of any cultural

[17] Paul Bond of Suntimes.com reveals that the film earned over 5,000 dollars per week per theater in its first week of release (par. 1). To be sure, this is an extremely high average for a film with a rather small budget.

phenomenon (“what’s your premise?” she would inquire), it seems only fitting that we investigate how Rand’s appropriation into popular media might have altered or lessened or intensified the potency of the ideas she cared so deeply about.

Chapter Two: Novelist as Philosopher: Objectivism in *Atlas Shrugged*

From the time she arrived in America in 1926, until the publication of her final novel, *Atlas Shrugged*, in 1957, Ayn Rand focused primarily on writing fiction rather than lengthy philosophic treatises. It was only in the last twenty years of her life that she started to write the nonfiction that detailed the philosophy of Objectivism and gave an expository account of how one might apply this radical body of ideas to one's own life.

The forthcoming chapters will examine how *Atlas Shrugged*'s dissemination into popular culture transforms not just the form of the message, but the content itself as television, film, and other forms of media—and the individuals featured within them—appropriate the novel in various ways. But before we can understand the particulars of this transformation, we first need to understand the basic concepts of Objectivism as they are manifest within the novel. By doing so, we will be able to better track how the ideas change from the novel to subsequent appropriations within popular culture.

To some, it might seem strange that Rand chose a *novel* in which to formulate and express her rather complex philosophic theory. Later in her life, Rand wrote nonfiction treatises and essays that directly explained Objectivism, but as James Baker and a host of other critics tell us, Rand, even though she wrote nonfiction, is most widely read for her fiction (29). Ultimately, this means that the majority of individuals gain their understanding of her philosophy from her novels. Yet it seems only logical that some might wonder why Rand—who was clearly interested in expounding a particular philosophy—wouldn't opt to express her ideas in a philosophic treatise. So before we attempt to digest the content of her novel, we must first address the basic question of why Rand chose to express her ideas through a novel, and in order to understand this, we must

explore her understanding of how philosophy functions in the world (and thus the role of the philosopher in society) and her theory of fiction and how it re-creates reality. Doing so will make clear why Rand chose fiction to express her philosophic principles and why she considered it necessary to incorporate philosophy into every novel she wrote.

According to Rand, philosophy offers the individual the proper means of living in the world, and the key term here is the verb *living*. She disparaged "arm chair" philosophy that was nothing more than mental exercise and verbal hoopla; for Rand, a rational philosophy gave man the proper means to live life.[1] It was for this reason that she informally called Objectivism "a philosophy for living on this earth"[2]—to stress that her concept of both the study of philosophy in general and her particular brand of it were not just speculative endeavor, but very much connected to everyday life. For this reason, Rand held that philosophy was not a subject of study for just a few academics clustered within aging buildings, but rather it was a subject that every individual should and could study. In her seminal essay, "Philosophy: Who Needs It?" Rand argues for this very notion. According to the essay, even mundane phrases such as "It's only human" or "This may be good in theory, but it doesn't work in practice" have axiomatic premises that are derived from various thinkers and philosophers throughout history (5-6). Such

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[1] In her address at West Point (which became the essay "Philosophy: Who Needs It?"), Rand proclaims, "As a human being, you have no choice about the fact that you need a philosophy. Your only choice is whether you define your philosophy by a conscious, rational, disciplined process of thought and scrupulously logical deliberation—or let your subconscious accumulate a junk heap of unwarranted conclusions, false generalizations, undefined contradictions, undigested slogans. . . .The men who are not interested in philosophy need it most urgently: they are most helplessly in its power" (7-8).

[2] Rand regularly cited this phrase as the informal name of Objectivism. By using this name, Rand is once again trying to reaffirm her strong belief that philosophy has real, concrete use in *earthly* human life.

premises, Rand argues, can greatly shape how one views the world, for better or worse. She goes on to posit that man's only "defense" against the onslaught of ideas that permeates the world is for each individual to act as a philosopher who seeks to better understand the world (even something as simple as the origins of a common phrase) (6-7). In other words, Rand's answer to the title of her essay is that everyone needs philosophy (i.e., everyone should study it) because even the act of uttering common phrases is directly tied to philosophy, whether one is aware of it or not.

Rand's theory of philosophy mirrors her theory of how fiction operates. In the introduction to her first work of nonfiction, *For The New Intellectual*, Rand argues: "In a certain sense, every novelist is a philosopher, because one cannot present a picture of human existence without a philosophical framework; the novelist's only choice is whether that framework is present explicitly or implicitly, whether he is aware of it or not, whether he holds his philosophical convictions consciously or subconsciously" (vii). As Sciabarra notes, Rand's philosophy and literature are interdependent as she attempts to "transcend the dualism between art and philosophy" (97).[3] Rand's notion that "all novelists are philosophers" is of paramount importance to her theory of literature.

In the *Romantic Manifesto*—Rand's treatise on the value of Romanticism in art—Rand argues that all humans carry what she calls a "sense of life" (15). This sense arises at an early age, far before an individual is mature enough to grasp concepts in metaphysics, and comes from the "value judgments" he or she makes while experiencing

[3] Sciabarra, throughout *The Russian Radical*, reveals that Rand is a dialectic thinker, as evidenced by her relentless desire to transcend the problem of dualism. In this particular passage, Sciabarra refers to the dualism of art and philosophy, where art is considered the preferred means of expressing serious philosophy. He notes, though, that for Rand, one needs both art and philosophy to create a novel.

the world. These "value judgments" eventually have a cumulative effect: "What began as a series of single, discrete conclusions (or evasions) about his own particular problems, becomes a generalized feeling about existence, an implicit metaphysics" (15). Inherent in Rand's concept of a "sense of life" is the basic assumption that humans will naturally try to formulate some kind of understanding about the world around them, and within this attempt to understand the world, each person will formulate his or her "sense of life." Note, however, that Rand calls it both "a generalized feeling" and an "implicit metaphysics"—"a sense of life" isn't a formulated and thought out concept of how one comes to view existence. In other words, at least for Rand, this "sense of life" doesn't come from the rigorous process of the philosophy that she calls for.

It should come as no surprise, then, that Rand assumes all artists will in some way recreate "a sense of life" when they paint a portrait, compose a song, or write a novel. It's because of this that Rand believes that "every novelist is a philosopher" of sorts because ultimately every novel will create some philosophic interpretation of the world. Sciabarra's point that Rand's philosophy and literature are interdependent is made clearer with a deeper understanding of Rand's concept of "the sense of life": if every writer will create a philosophy in the process of writing a novel, then every writer must ask him or herself what that philosophy is. Rand's journal entries while writing *Atlas Shrugged* further reveals that she considered philosophy and literature inseparable:

I seem to be both a theoretical philosopher and a fiction writer. But it is the last that interests me most; the first is only the means to the last; the absolutely necessary means, but only the means; the fiction story is the end. Without an understanding and statement

of the right philosophical principle, I cannot create the right story (qtd. in Peikoff "Introduction" 6).

This may at least begin to explain why *Atlas Shrugged* contains such a clear philosophic message, as the author believes that she needs to be both a philosopher and novelist, that philosophy is the "necessary means" to the fiction.

While this begins to explain why Rand includes philosophy within her fiction, the question still remains why Rand chose literature in the first place (rather than writing a expository treatise on Objectivism). The obvious response would be simple: as the passage above illustrates, Rand was quite clear that writing fiction interested her most. However, if we turn to Rand's use of Romantic literature, there appears to be another, less obvious reason why Rand made this choice.

Rand describes her brand of fiction as "Romantic Realism" because she writes fiction that "takes place in the real world;" however, the world which Rand creates is in an "ideal" state—it creates characters that properly live out her concept of Objectivism. In the following passage, Rand describes the process by which the Romantic artist will stylize his or her art with a sense of the ideal world: an artist does not fake reality—he stylizes it. He selects those aspects of existence that he regards as metaphysically significant—and by isolating and stressing them, by omitting the insignificant and accidental, he presents his view of existence (*Romantic Manifesto* 36). It is through this process of selecting "those aspects" that the novelist finds "metaphysically significant" that the novel's philosophy develops.

To be sure, Rand isn't the first philosopher to choose fiction as a means of expressing her ideas. One of western philosophy's most prominent philosophers, Plato, chose the form

of allegories to formulate and express his views. Also, the philosopher who most influenced Rand, Aristotle, held a view quite similar to Rand's on the overall merits of fiction— even though he didn't write fiction to develop his ideas. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle remarks, "It is clear. . .that it is not the poet's function to describe what actually happened. He has to describe what can happen, that is, what is possible because it is either likely or necessary" (475). A few lines later, Aristotle argues that "poetry is more philosophical and serious than history" because of its ability to select information according to what is "necessary." Aristotle seems to be implying that because poetry (and fiction by extension) isn't tied to recounting strictly factual information, it frees itself to be the more philosophical mode of expressing ideas.

The goal here isn't to debate the validity of Aristotle's claim, but rather to understand Rand's choice of mode in two ways. First, Aristotle's distinction between poetry and history establishes the tradition Rand was operating in when she chose to use fiction to formulate her most influential text on Objectivism (and in the process, this distinction further reveals the deep ties between Aristotelian and Randian thought). Second, Aristotle's distinction further explains why Rand might prefer writing fiction over traditional philosophy: in a philosophy that glorifies the ideal in mankind, and seeks to reveal what Rand considered "the bankruptcy of modern philosophy," it makes sense why she would chose a form that, at least in Aristotle's estimation, allows the writer the freedom to better probe the realm of the ideal world. Rand admits that though the novel formulates "abstract philosophy," she's less interested in expressing her ideas in "abstract, general form" than in "using" and "applying" her philosophy "in the form of fiction" (7). In a treatise, the philosopher states how he or she conceives the world to

operate; in fiction, however, the philosopher can *show* the reader what this world might look like.

Now that we've spent some time exploring why Rand chose writing a novel to express her philosophy, we can take a closer look at the basic tenets of Objectivism that one receives from the novel. Our goal here, though, isn't to enter into political or philosophical debates about her ideas, but rather, to simply better understand Objectivism. Once again, the primary focus of this project is to trace the development of Rand's ideas from the novel into the realm of mass media, and many of these representations are created by individuals who can either defend or be critical of her ideas. But rather than make an argument on the validity of Rand's many claims, this project will focus on how these representations transform the ideas, reshape the philosophy, and possibly diminish the novel's potential to elicit serious discourse (as discussed in chapters three and four). For example, this project will not debate whether capitalism promotes prosperity for all classes more than any other economic system due to its inherent rationality; however, it will try to reveal a much more nuanced understanding of Rand's position on laissez-faire capitalism in order to compare and contrast the argument she makes within the novel to that of, perhaps, a pundit, who appropriates her ideas rather selectively (and often simplistically).

In order to understand the fundamental theme of *Atlas Shrugged*, we can simply turn to Rand's own writing. An avid keeper of journals, Rand would often write extensively to help herself organize her thoughts prior to writing each novel. In one of these entries, Rand writes that the theme of the novel will be "what happens to the world

when the Prime Movers[4] go on strike" (Introduction 1). In *The Fountainhead*, Rand began to formulate a sense of the ideal man; in *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand was formulating a much more nuanced concept to justify her notions of the ideal man. While Rand was conversing with fellow writer and friend, Isabel Paterson, Rand told Paterson that she had "realized the book must be much, much more than merely a restatement of my theme in *The Fountainhead.* It has to start further back—with the first axioms of existence" (qtd. in Burns 111-12). As Burns notes, Rand's decision to take a more philosophic approach in her next novel was largely connected to Rand's returning to the philosopher who influenced her most—Aristotle (112). Rand didn't wish to simply write about the heroes and heroines that she imagined possible; she wanted to create a philosophy that would finally vindicate the virtues of individualism and capitalism she had long espoused. And in order to create this more nuanced understanding of why the ideal man lived, acted, and thought as he did, Rand would turn to Aristotle to create the basic theme of her novel.

The novel approaches 1100 pages, and Rand divided it into three parts, each of which corresponds to Aristotle's laws of logic (Non-Contradiction, Either-Or, A is A).[5] Onkar Ghate, a visiting scholar at the Ayn Rand Institute, notes in a recent article that Rand's use of Aristotle's law is more than a mere nod to her mentor; instead, each heading is meant to serve as a type of metacommentary to reflect upon the

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[4] Rand is referring to Aristotle's "prime mover" here, although in a much different manner. Aristotle used this term to describe the necessary conditions needed to make all movement possible (or in other words, the necessary conditions for causality itself). Rand is applying this idea to the movements of the economy (that is, who or what makes the movement of an economy possible).

[5] For Rand, Aristotle's laws of logic assert the objectivity of existence, which serves as a foundation to modern science. For example, we expect, once we understand the physical laws of a single cell, we expect that those laws won't change the next day. In short, the material "things" in the universe are both *knowable* and *objective*.

"contradiction" that each section tries to reconcile (1).[6] In Rand's view, modernity began an assault on human reason (with many theorists focusing on the limits of reason and logic), and therefore, *Atlas Shrugged* was a chance for her both to reveal the apparent contradictions within the modern temper and to attempt to reconcile them through her philosophy of Objectivism. It was Rand's strong desire to dismantle the commonplaces of the modern intelligentsia that prompted Anne C. Heller to label her "a deconstructionist of liberal American economic and political assumptions" (xiii).

With a basic understanding of Rand's theme and her use of Aristotle, we can now turn to the climax of the novel—John Galt's speech—as a means of exploring Rand's notions of metaphysics, physics, epistemology, and ethics. But before we do so, it is important that we remember that Objectivism is an integrated system of thought, and, as such, one that can only be separated into the branches of philosophy (for instance, metaphysics and ethics) for the sake of analysis. For a fuller understanding of Rand's thought, the reader must always keep an understanding of *integrated* philosophy in mind. As Chris Sciabarra notes, Objectivism is a "coherent, integrated system of thought, such that each branch [of philosophy] cannot be taken in isolation from the others" (18). In other words, we will discuss Rand's ideas in each of the main subjects in philosophy (metaphysics, physics, epistemology, ethics), but a more nuanced understanding of Objectivism will always keep in mind the connections that Rand continuously builds

[6] For instance, the third section of the novel, titled "A is A," is the conclusion to Aristotle's formula to the law of identity. Ghate notes, "In part III, all the contradictions and mysteries, small and large, are resolved. A world of identity is restored" (34). Ghate seems to imply that Rand is purposely using the most explicit statement on the law of identity (A is A) for the final section of her novel because it is at this point that the author allows John Galt to essentially "identify" the problems that plague the fictional U.S. and move the country toward a philosophy of *logical* reason.

between the various subjects of philosophy. As Jennifer Burns notes, one of the strengths of Rand's thought was her ability "to grasp interrelated underlying principles and weave them into an impenetrable logical edifice" (3).

The speech itself comes at a point in the novel where essentially every major industry is crumbling. With terrible unemployment, horrid inflation, and massive rioting overcoming the nation, the U.S. President (Mr. Thompson) prepares to address the whole country. In a scene reminiscent of *1984*, loudspeakers across the country, in conjunction with regular public broadcasts via radio and television, continuously implore all citizens to tune in for an upcoming presidential address. In each of these various announcements, the speaker says Mr. Thompson will "address the country" and will finally "bring light to the dark" by rectifying the chaos that faces the U.S. (919). However, minutes before Mr. Thompson goes onto live television and radio, the technicians lose all control of their signal, and a voice comes over the radio and announces, "This is John Galt speaking" (923).

In his essay, "Galt's Speech in Five Sentences (and Forty Questions)," Allan Gotthelf argues that Galt's speech serves an "integral role in understanding the novel" (376), and thus his essay tries to break down the basic structure of the speech. In short, Galt's speech attempts to address three questions: Why have men and women across the country gone on strike? What are the philosophic and sociological reasons that the world has become the way it has become? What type of philosophy will not only allow the country to once again flourish, but will also allow each human individual to "live on this earth"? Galt's speech provides us with the most explicit statement of Objectivism within the novel. As G. Stolyarov II notes, "[Galt's speech] presents Rand with an opportunity to

employ the story of *Atlas Shrugged* as a means to convey not only an implicit worldview, which can be found in every description and dialogue in the book, but also a systematic, thorough, unambiguous [statement of her philosophy] (99). Indeed, the speech itself provides readers with a rather explicit and detailed argument for Objectivism. Rand—never one to shy away from didacticism—wasn't going to leave it to chance that her reader might not fully understand the tenets of her philosophy.

Rand began all philosophic inquiries with metaphysics (as most *integrated* systems of thought do) so it is only fitting that we do the same.[7] Sciabarra notes that Rand's insistence that "A is A" is the cornerstone of her metaphysical perspective because much as Aristotle did, Rand held that "logic and reality" are inherently connected (*Russian Radical* 139). Indeed, beneath the very fabric of the law of identity is the notion that not only do things exist, but that human beings have a valid means of perceiving their existence. In Galt's radio address, he claims the axiom that "existence exists" as the paramount truth to his (and others like him) living; he then goes on to further breakdown this axiom: "Existence exists—and the act of grasping that statement implies two corollary axioms: that something exists which one perceives and that one exists possessing consciousness, consciousness being the faculty of that which exists" (929). To some, this axiom might seem nothing more than a rather elementary tautology: to exist, in its very definition, implies existence. However, Rand would likely see this tautology, not as problematic, but rather as the starting point of all philosophy. The

[7] As I discussed earlier, an *integrated philosophy* is where all the branches of that particular philosophy are interdependent (such as ethics and metaphysics). Metaphysics, in short, is the study of *being* and the basic axioms that help us understand a particular philosophy. The philosophers of an integrated system of thought must start all inquiries and thought with metaphysics because their metaphysics will render basic axiomatic truths that bleed into every other branch of their philosophy.

statement "existence exists" is tautological in its truest sense—it is inherently true—and that is ultimately Rand's aim in her metaphysics: to remind us of what should be a *prima facie* understanding of the world around us. The fact that the world exists, proves existence, and the fact that we perceive it, proves our existence within its existence.[8] What's most important to realize here, though, is that Rand often argued that contemporary philosophy strayed away from not only the objective nature of the universe, but also our ability to perceive it. In Rand's essay, "The Metaphysical Vs. the Man-Made," Rand argues that the scientific revolution and increase in human survival and happiness (such as longer life-expectancy) came largely from a shift in which mankind began to think of the universe not as a mysterious magical show, but rather as a nature whose existence was objective (33-8).[9] From Rand's perspective, our ability to perceive the reality of the universe is what allows mankind to survive.[10]

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[8] Objectivist philosopher Leonard Peikoff further explains this tautological axiom: "We start with the irreducible fact and concept of existence—that which is is simply: it is . . . . This axiom must be the foundation of everything else. Before one can consider any other issue, before one can ask what things there are or what problems men face in learning about them, before one can discuss what one knows or how one knows it—first, there must *be* something, and one must grasp that there is. If not, there is nothing to consider or to know" (4-5).

[9] The character Galt makes a similar assertion in the novel: "So long as men, in the era of savagery, had no concept of objective reality and believed that physical nature was rule by the whim of unknowable demons—no thought, no science, no production were possible. Only when men discovered that nature was a firm, predictable absolute were they able to rely on their knowledge, to choose their course, to plan their future and, slowly, to rise from the cave" (974).

[10] Rand was especially critical of the philosopher Immanuel Kant whom she saw as the founding thinker of much of modernism. According to Rand, the problem with Kant and modernism was that it denied the human's mind ability to apprehend reality. Rand was extremely critical of most twentieth century philosophers, as she argued they continuously downgrade human reason or show its shortcomings, rather than highlight its importance to human survival.

From this perspective on reality, Rand dismisses any notion of a God or energy in the universe outside of the purely naturalistic. At one point in Galt's speech, he argues that all of religion is dependent on a theory of negation. So, for instance, believers cannot tell you what exactly they are talking about when referring to "God;" instead, they will assert that God is "non-man" (947). If we return to the tautological truth that, for Rand, confirms existence, the same principle in effect dismisses any concept of God, for if we are talking about something existing, we are talking about something that we can perceive. For example, the debate on whether or not black holes exist is both observable and testable. A physicist, with a large telescope, can find evidence of areas in space where light doesn't travel, and with mathematical equations of how gravity works and rather sophisticated calculations, he or she can discern empirical proof that a black hole exists. Rand was a stringent atheist because God is often defined as beyond reality, and thus cannot be either proved or disproved. At this point, some might want to challenge Rand's concept of metaphysics; after all, there are many things about the universe that we still don't understand. Why was Rand so critical of the idea of God because of the lack of scientific evidence, and yet so adamant that everything in the universe is objectively knowable, especially when there are still so many unanswered questions in science? In short, Rand argues that metaphysics only tells us that there is an answer, but it doesn't reveal the answer itself. We must remember that for Rand, metaphysics is the realm of philosophy that simply explains the essence of reality and our relationship to it. It is through science, however, that we start to understand the particulars of the universe (or in other terms, the "physics"). Sciabarra notes that it is for this reason that Rand can assert that the universe is objective, despite the many "particulars" that science hasn't explored

yet. When she asserts that existence exists, she is asserting a philosophical generality regarding knowledge and the universe, but the given particulars can only be revealed by science (*Russian Radical* 133). In other words, the aspects of the universe we do not yet comprehend don't disprove that the universe is objective, but, rather, that we have yet to discover an objective understanding of that particular.

Implicit within Rand's metaphysics are the basic concepts of her epistemology. The world is objective, Rand holds, and our primary proof of this comes from the empirical sense-perception that allows us to first become aware of the primary axiom.

Galt's speech highlights two terms that are especially important in understanding Rand's theory of knowledge—volition and reason—and like almost all components of an integrated philosophy, the terms are directly linked. In the following passage, Galt explores these two terms:

But to think is an act of choice. The key to what you so recklessly call 'human nature,' the open secret you live with, yet dread to name, is the fact that *man is a being of volitional consciousness*. Reason does not work automatically; thinking is not a mechanical process; the connections of logic are not made by instinct. The function of your stomach, lungs or heart is automatic; the function of your mind is not. (926)

Later in the speech, Galt defines "reason" as the "faculty that perceives, identifies and integrates the material provided by his senses" (930). But these notions may cause some confusion that require a little working out; after all, surely not all thinking is volitional, so how can Rand (through Galt) claim "reason does not work automatically?" To explain this in full, we would need to break down the layers of awareness and thinking that Rand formulates in her epistemology. The key point, though, is that while Rand does contend

that the simple act of being aware of a particular stimulation, or even the assimilation of stimuli into the recognition of an entity, may be an automatic process of sorts, she ultimately holds that the final component of thinking is always volitional.[11]

Perhaps an example might prove helpful in explaining what Rand is exactly positing here, and to provide one, I will turn to a section of *Atlas Shrugged*. When Dagny first comes across a motor unlike any other motor she's seen before, she is at the very early stage of cognition which simply integrates sense-perception (she would see a color, smell an aroma, distinguish a shape, etc.). Another individual might have looked at this motor, and not even taken the time to realize and decipher the fact that the motor was something original (someone with even less desire to understand it might not even recognize it as a motor, but rather as a "heap of metal"). However, because she researches the motor's origins, interviews the best experts in the field to learn its mechanical process, and studies the science behind the motor, she eventually learns that the motor is able to run on energy from static electricity (which, of course, leads her to her original quest to find John Galt, the engineer capable of such an invention). Dagny's mind provided the raw data of material, but it was the act of volitional thinking that allowed her to trace all of the data back to its source, and ultimately, to understand the

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[11] One can find a detailed account of the exact process of Objectivist epistemology in Sciabarra's *Russian Radical* (especially in the chapter "Knowing"). In short, Sciabarra argues, drawing upon Rand's own writing, that consciousness includes three levels of awareness: sensation, perception, and conception. Unlike many other philosophers, Rand considered perception the base level of human thought (instead of sensation) because "the mind cannot retain sensations in memory," and therefore the first level of awareness within human consciousness is always perception—which is the process by which the mind processes stimulation and "integrates" it into an "entity" (160-1). However, it is the third level of awareness—conception—where human beings are different from other animals as they exhibit a volitional process of "self-conscious, and conceptual awareness" (164). In short, at this phase of human cognition, one can choose the *extent* or *focus* of one's thinking.

workings of her mysterious find. This is the type of *reason* that Rand is pointing to here and why she calls it volitional: it isn't an automatic response to sense-perception, but the *faculty* to make sense of the data we receive from the world; it's our means of tapping into the *nature* of the universe and understanding its *reality*.

And just as Rand's metaphysics is directly related to her epistemology, so too is her epistemology directly related to her ethics. Within Rand's epistemology is a necessary call for a type of individualism; reason, according to Rand, is the internal process that occurs in the human brain. "There is no such thing as a group mind," Rand would often say. Because the process by which we apprehend the world is always individual (for instance, three people don't share the same sense-perception of a sunset; each will experience it on his or her own), then it's only logical, at least for Rand, that ethics be primarily focused on how the human individual acts.

As Sciabarra notes, Rand may have crafted an "integrated" philosophy, but it is probably her theories on ethics that she is most famous or notorious for, depending on one's point of view. After unleashing her philosophy of rugged individualism through her fiction, Rand would later pen her most famous nonfiction piece—*The Virtue of Selfishness*. Rand often enjoyed shocking her readers by using terms that seemed rather negative to help support her ideas. Indeed, Sciabarra notes, "Rand was always suspicious of linguistic biases in social dialogue. She challenged the distorted cultural constructions of such concepts as 'selfishness' and 'capitalism'" (*Russian Radical* 312). Rand was largely influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche, especially earlier in her life, so it comes as no surprise that Rand understood that "linguistic biases in social dialogue" are derived from the institutions and individuals that hold power within a society. Nietzsche saw that those

who control language ultimately control a culture's attitude and beliefs toward the topics that each word represents, and it's for this reason that Rand attempts to shift how individuals evaluate terms such as *selfishness* and *capitalism*.

But what exactly does it mean to act "selfishly" in Rand's ethical scheme? This question arguably causes the largest divide between her proponents and critics.[12] For Rand, it meant that the individual's primary goal in life is to achieve virtue by achieving one's values. Within the speech, Galt defines a "value" as anything "one acts to keep or gain" and virtue as "the action by which one gains and keeps it" (926). Once again, Rand is showing her Aristotelian influence: the Greek philosopher saw the moral man as he whose potential has been actualized.[13] If each human individual has a number of given values, then each can achieve virtue by *recognizing* and *actualizing* that value, according to Rand. This could include the essential values for living, such as food and water, to the more complicated values, such as the type of love one seeks to find in a spouse.

It might prove helpful, though, to reflect upon what Rand *didn't* mean when she defined her ethics of selfishness. Foremost, she didn't imply a type of Hobbesian egoism

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[12] I will further examine this schism in the subsequent chapters. In general, though, those who defend Rand's ethical scheme will point to the fact that she advocated a form of egoism that was also tied to *virtue* and was ultimately about achieving one's values in an ethical and honest manner. Her detractors, however, argue that a philosophy that advocates one follow only his or her values will inevitably lead to "selfish" behavior in its commonly accepted meaning.

[13] Much how Rand created an integrated system of thought (where each branch of study relates to the others), Aristotle tied his ethics to his metaphysics. According to W.T. Jones, Aristotle's ethics mirror his "metaphysic position" that a form will decide its ultimate ends (for example, a seed for an oak tree has the potential to become an actual oak tree—eventually the potential is actualized). For ethics then, man must come to understand his potential, and actualize it. But unlike the Sophists (who tended toward a more hedonistic concept of happiness), Aristotle believed that the goal of "long term happiness" often meant embracing a life of moderation, along with actualizing one's potential (261-5).

where one does whatever it takes to achieve his or her own happiness. Indeed, all of the captains of industry in Rand's novels are a far cry from the Enron executives (such as Kenneth Lay) who have come to epitomize selfish, corporate America.[14] At one point, Galt asserts, "Just as I support my life, neither by robbery nor alms, but by my own effort, so I do not seek to derive my happiness from the injury of or the favor of others" (935). This isn't to say, though, that one can't argue against Rand's point. Certainly, one criticism might be that such a perspective is too idealistic to assume that those with wealth and power will fairly reimburse those who help them achieve their values. The point I'm trying to make here, though, is that Rand isn't advocating that each person follow whatever means necessary to achieve his or her values; rather, Objectivist ethics, much like Aristotelian ethics, is based on *virtue*.

Finally, with this perspective on rational egoism, it should come as no surprise that, as part of her ethics, Rand argued for the merits of laissez-faire capitalism. Because capitalism is inherently individualistic (for the modes of production are privately owned, rather than collectively owned by government), it became, at least for Rand, the only economic system that would allow the freedom for each human individual to pursue his or her values. As Jennifer Burns notes, "[Rand's] elevation of the trader echoed the older libertarian idea of the contract society, in which individuals were finally liberated from feudal hierarchies" (211). Any other system of economics—such as socialism and communism—would lead to the individual being subservient to society (a regression to

[14] In 2001, it was discovered that a number of executives at Enron had lied to shareholders and the board of directors and kept hidden a number of unsuccessful business ventures and risky investments, which, in turn, lead to massive debt within the company and its eventual collapse.

the feudal order that provided centralized power), and for Rand, this meant a type of irrationality (how can the masses achieve *the one's* values?).

Even more interesting, Rand also broke with most proponents of capitalism in one area: she made it a *moral* issue. Rand was writing *Atlas Shrugged* just a decade after Friedrich Hayek was publishing *The Road to Serfdom*, and the grandfather of the Austrian-economists, Ludwig Von Mises, was publishing *Socialism* and *Human Action*—both of which were methodical and harsh indictments of economic theories that strayed from classical liberalism. And later, Milton Friedman (arguably one of the most read and influential economist of the late twentieth century[15]) was publishing works such as *Capitalism and Freedom* and *Free to Choose*. All of these treatises defend capitalism as the most viable form of economics to create wealth and prosperity for the greatest number of people. In general, the Austrian economists tried to show that the efficiency of free markets allowed for the most innovation and that individual property rights allowed the economy to expand more than did any other system. For Rand, this wasn't enough, because critics of capitalism most often levy moral charges against it (it creates unequal distribution of wealth, encourages a materialistic society, neglects a sense of community). Brian Doherty tells us in his history of the libertarian movement, *A Freewheeling History*, that Rand was much more interested in being "a system builder," and wasn't content, as many others were, with "the idea that laissez-faire capitalism was the most efficient social system or created the most wealth" (12). If Rand could prove

[15] William Davis, Bob Figgins, et al., published an article in 2011 that included a survey of professors of economics across the U.S. Their study found that Friedman ranked in the top three as a favorite thinker among contemporary economists (127). In addition to being a favorite of other economists, Friedman was a regular contributor to many popular magazines, his books were New York Times bestsellers, and he was even the recipient of a Nobel Prize in economics.

that the only means by which to bring to fruition human virtue was through rational egoism, then she could finally meet the critics of capitalism on their own ground; she could give a *moral* case for capitalism and its ability to let human individuals deal with each other by means of reason. Ultimately, this is the part of the reason that Rand wanted to build an integrated system of thought. For Rand, if she could trace her moral defense through metaphysics and epistemology, then Objectivism could become the quintessential philosophy of reason that she hoped it would become.

So far we have been considering the basic formula of Rand's thought as it comes to us through Galt's speech as a means of understanding her metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. We also have tried to show that with an integrated system of thought, each field of philosophy is intrinsically connected to the others. We concentrated on Galt's speech because it is the most explicit statement of Objectivism, but it is important to remember that Rand attempts to portray these ideas throughout the entire novel. After all, Rand wanted her philosophy to be more than "armchair philosophy"; she wanted it to be something tangible and real for the human individual, and if we consider the reasons why she chose to write fiction instead of nonfiction (she wanted characters who embodied her ideals), it becomes all the more important for Rand to reveal her ideals, not just in Galt's expositional speech, but throughout the rest of the novel as well.

With this in mind, a scene such as that in which Hank and Dagny first ride the John Galt line (built entirely with Rearden's revolutionary new metal alloy) isn't simply a thrilling description of a train ride. Rather, it's a more demonstrable portrayal of Randian epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics. Hank's value was the creation of a new metal that would change industry forever, and Dagny's value was to keep her grandfather's

historical railroad solvent and functional. Both characters achieve the virtue of accomplishing this: Rearden by spending nearly ten years and huge amounts of financial resources to formulate the metal, and Dagny by risking her entire business and capital on Rearden's invention. Furthermore, Rearden is able to build his metal alloy by mastering the laws of nature that allow for objective knowledge. And Dagny and Rearden, together, are able to build a railroad that will improve train transportation (Rearden Metal is much cheaper than traditional steel), and most important, abide by the ethics of rational egoism. In a later scene, when Rearden is on trial for being unwilling to nationalize his invention of metal, he addresses the court and says that he "could say I have done more for my fellow man than you can ever hope to accomplish"; however, he won't, because that would be the only type of justification the court would understand, and it's a justification that enslaves the individual to the collective (445). This passage is especially interesting because it once again shows that although Rand believed capitalism was ultimately the system of economics that allowed the most number of people to flourish (in the story, Rearden metal was providing an economic lift for workers at every level and position), she still wasn't willing to make the "capitalism improves the lot of all classes" argument (as most Austrian economists did).

In the course of some 1100 pages, there are numerous examples of other passages that reflect the "integration" Sciabarra describes—where the theme, setting, characterization, and plot are all used to create an integrated system of thought (27). The examples I list above are just a sampling of the type of scenes in which Rand tries to craft a story that embodies the tenets of Objectivism. The main point here, though, is that *Atlas Shrugged*

attempts to give both explicit explanations of its philosophy and to create characters and scenes that will embody and reveal this philosophy at work.

Because Rand wanted to create a world for her philosophy, she wrote fiction; and it was this decision that perhaps forever changed the fate of Objectivism to become a prominent philosophy in the larger marketplace of ideas. The story of the heroic John Galt, who invented a new motor, or the industrialist Hank Rearden, who invented a new metal alloy, or the courageous Dagny Taggart, who meticulously worked to keep her railroad solvent is a story that has influenced millions of readers across the globe. Indeed, Rand's novel established for her a position as an influential thinker that few authors achieve. Brian Doherty notes that Rand is likely the "most influential libertarian of the twentieth century to the public at large" (11). Jenny A. Heyl, who wrote an article on Ayn Rand in *Contemporary Women Philosophers*, holds that not only did *Atlas Shrugged* exemplify Objectivism for "non-academicians," it also propelled Rand to be the woman philosopher who "garnered [more] adulation and scorn" than any other woman in the twentieth century (207). The influence that both Heyl and Doherty describe is undeniable, and at the core of their claims is the fact that Rand wrote *fiction* to describe her ideas. It's for this reason that Susan Brown argues that Rand was a "public intellectual" who tried to speak directly to the American public rather than to a select academic audience—which is the type of audience formal philosophy would typically garner.[16]

[16] Brown provides the following distinction: "As opposed to scholars, whose efforts result in formal theory and methodology often at a high level of abstraction for a specialized audience, the public intellectual focuses more on the general social currency of such ideas" (181). It is important to remember that these aren't exclusive categories. Certainly one can go through the rigorous vetting and research required of academics,

A question that's interesting to consider is how Rand's choice to write fiction instead of nonfiction in order to express her philosophy might have altered her eventual impact. As stated earlier in this chapter, Rand far outsells any of the Austrian economists who were writing nonfiction at a similar time, often about similar ideas (the virtues of capitalism and dangers of collectivism), and what's more, Rand's fiction greatly outsells her own nonfiction.[17] It's clear that the power of her dramatization worked at both further spreading her ideas and allowing those ideas to influence our culture in ways that a work by Hayek or von Mises simply can't compete with. But it came with a price. In the process of becoming a bestseller, Rand's dramatized philosophy gained currency within popular culture, and consequently, has been appropriated, diluted, and ultimately, transformed.

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and then present one's ideas in a way to accommodate a more general audience. The key component to a "public intellectual" is that he or she attempts to present ideas, not mostly to academics, but rather to the general public. In doing so, he or she reaches a much wider audience, but the public intellectual also must present his or her ideas to an audience with a wide variety of expertise, knowledge, and education. This will, of course, require that the public intellectual present his or her ideas in a way that a larger audience can understand them.

[17] In 2008, the Ayn Rand Institute released a press release showing that Rand's top-selling novels, *Atlas Shrugged* and *The Fountainhead*, had each sold over four times more books than her bestselling nonfiction piece *The Virtue of Selfishness* (par. 2).

Chapter 3: Misreading Rand: Problems of Transmitting a Text

In 2009, shortly after the release of two major biographies of Ayn Rand (by Anne C. Heller and Jennifer Burns), C-SPAN broadcasted on *BookTV* a conference where the two authors discussed both Rand's ideas and their cultural relevance. These two books marked an important moment for Randian scholarship, for both were written by neither Rand acolytes nor anti-Objectivist ideologues (the two camps that dominated much of what was written on Rand in the latter part of the twentieth century), and thus they offered a more nuanced and fair approach to Rand and her philosophy. Toward the end of this conference, the moderator allowed for questions from the audience, and one gentleman referred to a recent book review of Heller's and Burns's biographies in the *New York Times*, in which the writer, Adam Kirsch, notes that while Rand took to wearing a dollar-sign pin to advertise her love of capitalism, Heller makes clear that the author had no real affection for dollars themselves. Giving up her royalties to preserve her vision is something that no genuine capitalist, and few popular novelists, would have done (par. 9). The questioner then continued to ask the biographers if Kirsch's point here is an example of a critic who is wildly "not understanding" Rand's ideas in the novel, to which Anne C. Heller quickly quipped, "It's a rare book reviewer who actually understands Rand."

And at the very least, we can certainly see some flaws in Kirsch's reasoning. In the previous passage, Kirsch is referring to the fact that Rand actually took a pay cut (of seven cents per copy sold) in order to pay for the extra paper needed to publish the lengthy and now famous John Galt speech. This was a compromise after the editor had asked her to compress and edit the speech to make it much shorter, and Kirsch's point

here is that Rand tried to advocate the virtues of capitalism, and yet, was willing to give up money for the sake of the ideas that she wished to express, as if this were evidence that not even Rand chose to live by her ideas about the virtues of capitalism. With a closer look at Rand's ideas both on money and the larger topic of economics, we can easily see that Hirsch's reading of Rand is, at the very least, problematic.

Rand actually lays out her views on money directly in the novel itself with the famous speech by the character Francisco, in which he asserts, "When money ceases to be the tool by which men deal with one another, then men become the tools of men. Blood, whips and guns—or dollars. Take your choice" (385). There are several items of importance we can glean from this key scene. The first is that Rand believes the real value in money isn't in the acquisition of it, but rather in that it allows for exchange without coercion. In his essay "Francisco d'Anconia on Money: A Socio-Economic Analysis," Steve Horwitz traces this line of thought in the history of economics as a key pillar in the thought of other free-market economists, most notably Adam Smith and Friedrich Hayek. This line of reasoning holds that one positive outcome of the creation of currencies is that it made the exchange of goods and services more fluid and peaceful than did older economic orders (230-4).

But the second point we can make concerning Rand's view on money is the one that Mr. Kirsch seems to miss altogether. Rand never argues that the main goal of one's life was the acquisition of money, but rather the production and acquisition of value.[1]

[1] Sciabarra defines "value" in Randian terms as "that which one acts to gain and/or keep" (237). For example, one individual might value a certain type of painting by a particular artist. Money would have no value in itself, but it would allow such an individual to trade, peacefully, for that value. For a more detailed discussion of Rand's

Rand's ideas on this come extremely close to Aristotle's ideas concerning the actualization of the potential—man is most moral when he attempts to actualize whatever potential resides in his particular character, set of abilities, and circumstances. In his speech, Francisco notes that money doesn't create a person's "values" or "desires," but rather is merely a medium by which we can exchange our values with each other. So Rand's choice to earn less for the sake of including Galt's speech, in many ways, actually coincides with the way the novel explores the topic of money and value. Rand's value was to have a lengthy, detailed speech that lays out the fundamentals of Objectivism, and she was willing to trade some of her income for the sake of this happening. Hirsch might have wanted to consider that the two most prominent heroes in Rand's fiction—John Galt and Howard Roark—both turn down opportunities to pursue extreme wealth (Roark continuously turns down commissions if he can't keep his artistic integrity; Galt chooses to not sell the motor but rather spend his life trying to "correct" what he considers the ills of society) for a life of meager means, but in keeping with their sense of values. If we take this line of thought further, the wealthiest characters in *Atlas Shrugged* are often portrayed as villains because they obtained their wealth by dealing dishonestly (think of James Taggart, who cuts deals with government officials in order to maintain a monopoly in the railroad industry). To be fair, Hirsch was also suggesting that most promoters of capitalism today would never make the decision Rand did (and he may be right in many cases), but Rand embraced in her novels a form of capitalism that differs significantly from Hobbesian egoism (as discussed in Chapter Two).

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concept concerning value, see the chapter "Ethics and Human Survival" in Sciabarra's book *Ayn Rand: The Russian Radical*.

This now brings us to the crux of the matter: if Heller is correct that many people often misunderstand Rand, what is the reason? After all, Rand dedicated her entire life to trying to make clear her philosophy. This is where the novel's dissemination into popular culture becomes vital. Perhaps one of the key reasons Rand is so often misunderstood is because we often encounter representations of her ideas outside of the novel itself, and as this chapter will show, those representations often misrepresent Objectivism. With the sheer glut of references to *Atlas Shrugged*—in political commentary, cartoons, television shows, newspapers, social media, and the like—we must consider how these representations transform both our understanding of Ayn Rand and her philosophy.

But before we can understand how the representations of *Atlas Shrugged* have impacted our understanding of Rand's ideas, we must first examine how such representations compare to the ideas we receive from the novel itself (as laid out in Chapter Two).

Rand's presence on television—specifically in sitcoms and dramatic series—often comprises references and allusions to her work, and sometimes these references are significant to the audience's understanding of the storyline. For example, in an episode of *One Tree Hill*, the character Lucas Scott receives a copy of *Atlas Shrugged* after he has sworn off playing basketball for the school, and is ready to do exactly what his estranged father wants: go back into hiding. However, after receiving a copy of the novel, Scott finds the inner strength to continue playing basketball. Sciabarra reminds us in Chapter One that this particular episode practically "showcases Rand's work," but one must remember that "showcasing" Rand's novel does not equate to showcasing, at least in detail, Rand's philosophy. Although the theme of the episode correlates with the novel's

theme in a very general sense (Rand's constant theme of individualism in which a character must overcome great adversity in order to succeed), the details are very different. This is important to remember because the details were most important to Rand when writing *Atlas Shrugged*. This was, after all, a woman who personally paid for Galt's speech because she wanted her readers to receive an extended and explicit dialogue on the various axioms of Objectivism.

This isn't to say that the episode only refers to the novel through its theme of an individual overcoming obstacles; the episode does give its audience two direct references to the novel itself. The first occurs, at the beginning of the episode, when the audience sees Lucas receive a copy of *Atlas Shrugged*, and the camera zooms in on the novel, clearly showing both the title and the author's name. The second reference occurs in the very last scene of the episode, which shows Lucas overcoming his fear of playing basketball in front of his estranged father, and rather confidently running out onto the court (he even utters a romantic sentiment to his love interest). While this is happening, a voice over (in Lucas's voice), recites the famous lines from Galt's speech:

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

The writers chose to give Lucas a rather lengthy passage to read (compared to other literary quotes used in the series), and the only editing they did was to remove the phrase "Check the road and the nature of your battle," which occurs right before the last sentence.

To say that *One Tree Hill* misrepresents Rand's ideas because the episode lacks the philosophic details and more nuanced explanation that one gets from *Atlas Shrugged* would be to state the obvious. After all, a single episode from a television show, which simply refers to a piece of fiction, cannot be expected to offer the same intellectual substance that a nearly 1100 page book does. What we can look at, however, is why the creators of *One Tree Hill* chose to include this particular passage from *Atlas Shrugged*. After all, Galt's speech is nearly forty pages long—why choose this section? The answer is rather obvious: it is readily understood, it expresses a rather endearing sentiment (you have a hero in your soul, if you only let it out!), and it fits nicely with the plot in the episode—Lucas finds his inner "hero" and triumphs over his doubts of playing basketball for his high school. And as we've already suggested, this basic idea of the stoic individual overcoming adversity is present in both the novel and this particular episode. But what's most interesting about the writers choosing this section of Galt's speech is the fact that it differs in tone very much from the rest of the speech. In his essay "The Role of Galt's Speech in *Atlas Shrugged*," Onkar Ghate argues that Rand needs Galt to articulate three points: why "the men of the mind" are on strike, what philosophic premises have led to society's downturn, and what philosophic axioms can help remedy the economic collapse (364-66). The reason Galt needed to articulate these ideas, according to Ghate, is reminiscent of why the founding fathers needed to write the Declaration of Independence: "The Declaration then goes on to name the political principles that guide the rebels and the reason for their rebellion . . . so does John Galt. He names to the world the principles—this time moral and philosophic—that govern the strikers and caused them to strike" (365). In other words, according to Ghate, the

Declaration of Independence and Galt's speech are prompted by a similar desire, to make their ideas explicit to the public. As I've demonstrated in Chapter Two, *Atlas Shrugged* presents an integrated philosophy, and it serves as a treatise on Objectivism's ethics, metaphysics, and epistemology. Many sections of Galt's speech do exactly that: explicitly state Objectivism's tenets. Compare the section that the episode quotes to some of the more technical passages in Galt's speech, such as the following where he begins to describe a Objectivist epistemology: "Existence exists—and the act of grasping that statement implies two corollary axioms: that something exists which one perceives and that one exists possessing consciousness, consciousness being the faculty of perceiving that which exists" (929). Whereas the passage in the episode relies solely on an emotional appeal, this passage is much more in the realm of *logos* and tries to set forth some of the basic axioms within Objectivism.

It's not confounding why a television show would want to focus on an emotional appeal from the novel rather than a more philosophic appeal; after all, this television show's primary goal is to entertain, not to educate. But what we can say with certainty is that without reading the novel itself, one would watch this episode and learn nearly nothing about Objectivism's metaphysic, ethics, and epistemology—a trend that we'll see in nearly all representations viewers encounter via television. *Gilmore Girls, Lost, Home Improvement*, and a host of other sitcoms and drama series refer to the famous novel without diving into any of the philosophic content.

A more astute representation of the novel comes from the critically acclaimed hit series *Mad Men*. Although it doesn't dive deeply into Rand's epistemology, the show does refer to the novel with a little more depth and nuance. More specifically, the show

directly likens the character Don Draper to a Randian hero, while also implicitly defending the capitalistic system that Draper is part of.

We can see how Draper is a Randian hero by looking at his development as a character throughout the show. Although creator Matthew Wiener made sure to write in characters who are dynamic, flawed, and real, he still manages to make Draper the hero of this show. According to Nicky Falkof—a media studies professor at the University of the Witwatersrand—Draper resembles "the self-made man" and heroic character that is an archetype in American culture: "The brave man facing a harsh world alone is an enduring image in American popular culture, and the construction of Don as a character leans heavily on it" (35). The archetype that Falkof describes here could just as easily be used to describe the heroes in Ayn Rand's fiction—be it John Galt, Howard Roark, or Hank Rearden. They are often self-made, self-reliant men who aspire toward greatness.

In the eighth episode of the first season, creator and writer Wiener makes this reference between Draper and the Randian hero explicit. At the beginning of the episode, Bertram Cooper, one of the partners at the ad agency, gives Don a 2,500 dollar bonus check for his "great achievement." After asking Draper if he's read *Atlas Shrugged*, he explains to Don that both he and Don are similar: "You are a productive and reasonable man, and in the end, completely self-interested. It's strength. We are different, unsentimental about all the people that depend on all our hard work." Clearly the idea of Don being a "productive" man of "reason," who has others that "depend" on his "hard work" is a direct parallel to the Randian heroes of *Atlas Shrugged*. This particular episode further establishes the "self-made man image" of Donald Draper by including flashbacks to his childhood, where images of a poor farmhouse and a meager meal

contrast sharply with the current image of Draper in a finely pressed suit and casually pocketing a 2,500 dollar bonus check.

What's more, this particular episode doesn't just refer to the novel in detail: it also offers a brief defense of the capitalistic system that Draper is part of. In another scene, we see Draper visit a woman he's having an affair with, only to be surprised that she has several of her friends over. Draper's clean-cut image contrasts sharply with these other characters, all of whom resemble the typical hippie character made popular by 1960's counter-culture. In this telling scene, the episode tries to show the clash between mainstream corporate consumerism (represented by Don) and anti-corporate, Marxist ideologies (represented by the hippies). One of the male characters with long flowing hair rants about how Draper stands for everything that's wrong with this country and yells, "I wipe my ass with the *Wall Street Journal*;" to which Draper coolly replies, "My god, stop talking, make something of yourself." After this comment, the other male hippie in the room chimes in that Draper tries to create desire with advertising, and finally, that Draper isn't "one of us, but one of them." Once again, in this scene, Draper contrasts sharply with the emotional hippies, as he coolly replies that there is "no big lie, no system; the universe is indifferent." As he gets ready to leave the party, one of the men (who quarreled with him) tries stopping him and says, "You can't go out there. There's cops," to which Draper replies, "No, *you* can't," (my italics) and the camera zooms out to show a cop moving out of the way to let the well-dressed Draper pass on by.

Although this scene isn't a Galt speech on the merits of capitalism, and to be fair, *Mad Men* often shows the shortcomings of a capitalistic ethos, this particular episode

shows the clash of these two ideologies (capitalism/consumerism and Marxism), and most discerning viewers would have to say that Draper wins. He doesn't defend his job of advertising or consumerism, but he shows that the hippies' lifestyle is no viable alternative. After the one character chides him that buying toothpaste won't bring back dead children in a poverty-stricken district, Draper replies, "Neither will buying some tokay wine, leaning up against a wall in Grand Central, pretending you're a vagrant." In this sentiment, Draper echoes Rand herself, who was once asked why she was so harsh on the political activism of the 1960's, to which she replied, "You do not solve serious issues by demonstration. If you want to contribute something, think, argue, spread ideas. You teach; you don't sit on the street, obstruct traffic, and look sloppy" (*Ayn Rand Answers* 93-4). Obviously in an episode such as this, as was the same with the episode of *One Tree Hill*, the viewer isn't receiving a full understanding of Objectivist epistemology and metaphysics (which Rand espouses explicitly in the novel). But unlike *One Tree Hill*, *Mad Men* offers a more nuanced and sophisticated reference to the novel, and for those who are already familiar with Rand's ideas, it's quite interesting and provocative. Perhaps that is the most problematic issue with this episode: to understand it fully, the viewer needs to be discerning and already familiar with the novel.

This idea—that the success of references to Rand's philosophy will depend on the prior knowledge of the viewer—is supported by William Irwin and J.R. Lobardo, authors of *The Simpsons and Philosophy*. In Chapter One, we spent some time looking at a particular episode of *The Simpsons* in which the toddler Maggie is put into an "Ayn Rand school for tots." According to Irwin and Labardo, "To understand why pacifiers are taken away from Maggie and the other children, one has to catch the allusion to the

radical libertarian philosophy of Ayn Rand" (85). What's more, the authors go on to note that those who understand Rand's philosophy, and therefore understand the reference, will experience much more "pleasure" in watching the show (presumably because such viewers can enjoy both the basic plot and also the depth of such philosophical references within such shows). But even if one doesn't agree with these authors, we can certainly agree that viewers who aren't familiar with Ayn Rand's ideas are going to understand such references much less. For instance, in ignorance, some viewers watching such an episode might assume that Rand's ideas must be extremely harsh to advocate not allowing babies to have pacifiers (in other words, not realizing that the program uses hyperbole for humorous effect). What is key to understand here, though, is that the viewer must come with an understanding of Rand (such as having read *Atlas Shrugged*) prior to viewing the episode in order to accurately and clearly understand the reference. At this point, some might want to protest: it's just a cartoon. So maybe a few casual viewers don't understand the Rand reference, and an even smaller percentage of those viewers now think that Rand advocated, along with the supreme power of reason, to deny pacifiers to newborns. After all, many viewers are watching *The Simpson* for comic relief and nothing else. The problem, however, arises when such viewers come across the many other representations of, and references to, Rand's work in other sitcoms, television series, and movies. With such a strong presence in popular culture, it is unlikely that the episode of *The Simpsons* will be the only occasion they encounter a reference to Rand. Unlike the *Mad Men* and *The Simpsons* references, which were generally unbiased and were done with some degree of fairness to the actual ideas in the novel, other references use Rand's ideas as a drive-by quick shot at the controversial philosopher. For example,

in the popular film *Dirty Dancing*, moral degenerate Robbie Gould impregnates a young girl and then refuses to have anything to do with her. When the girl's sister confronts him about it, he simply replies "some people matter, and some people don't;" he then pulls out a copy of *The Fountainhead* and tells the girl's sister to read it, but that she has to give it back because he's written so many notes in the margin (again implying that his harsh and ugly ideas came from the novel).

This idea—that Rand's philosophy essentially argues that each individual can act as selfishly as he or she wants, without thinking of any other individual—seems to be a common representation that we see of Rand in popular culture. Chapter Two established why such a reading of Rand's "selfish" philosophy is, at the very least, disingenuous. And in the following chapter, we'll look at why scenes from such films ultimately damage the novel's ability to engage a larger public. But before we do so, it is time to switch to our second category under investigation: punditry and televised news.

In a 2009 episode of *The Colbert Report*, Stephen Colbert used his recurring segment "The Word" to lampoon *Atlas Shrugged* and its rising popularity during the first year of the Obama administration. Through a clever show of sound-bites and images, Colbert equated Rand's philosophy with Fox News punditry and the Republican Party; at one point, he flashes images of six different Fox News personalities decrying redistribution of wealth and Obama's proposal to raise taxes on high-income earners. Mimicking the voice of conservatives (which is the voice Colbert uses throughout his show), he looks sternly into the camera and says, "The little guy needs to stop giving it to the man," while a side-text reads "latest example, giving him [the man] 787 billion." To be sure, Colbert's relating Rand's philosophy to the bailout of the banking industry is wildly out

of sync with everything we know about Rand's political beliefs: she would have been the first one to deem such action as an unnecessary and unwelcome use of government.

But perhaps what's more damaging to the original ideas of the novel, as played out in this particular segment, is how Colbert describes the novel itself in the segment. He starts off by noting that the book calls for all of us to be selfish, and that the hero of the novel, John Galt, even "tells the poor, you have nothing to offer us, we do not need you." We see two basic ideas here: that Rand's philosophy requires one to be wholly selfish; and two, that the novel seems to take an extremely negative perspective on the poor. However, as the previous chapter reveals, Rand's concept of "selfishness" is radically different from the commonplace use of the term, and Colbert's segment doesn't show the much more nuanced perspective of Rand's concept of rational self-interest. As for the second issue, Colbert's representation of Rand despising the poor, one only needs to look at the original passage that Colbert refers to here to see the problem. The line that he misquotes comes at the very beginning of Galt's speech. Galt does, indeed, utter the phrase "you have nothing to offer us, we do not need you"; however, he never uses the term *poor*, and a closer look at the context of the speech reveals that he isn't addressing any particular *social* class, but rather a class of *philosophic* thought. As I mentioned in Chapter Two, Rand's concept of selfishness derives from the rich Aristotelian tradition of ethics, in which a man is moral not because of how much he produces, but rather for producing his potential. This is why the character James Taggart is a villain in the story. Instead of actualizing what he's capable of (his potential), he dishonestly acquires his wealth. For Aristotle (and Rand), a man is virtuous only if he produces his own potential in an honest way.

It is quite clear, when we look at the passage that Colbert is citing, that Galt isn't telling the poor he doesn't need them; rather, he is addressing those who fail to follow the ethics that Rand advocates. Shortly after that passage, Galt argues that "it was against man's mind" that moralists of his time had stood against (and it was such moralists that "we don't need"). In fact, in the four paragraphs after the passage in question, Galt spends his time defining why human beings must follow reason, why they must understand the volitional nature of thought, and why such an epistemology is necessary for one to live in this world (925-26). Galt isn't addressing those he deems poor in wealth, but rather those he sees as bankrupt in philosophic thought. After all, all of the "men of the mind" who went on strike ended up living a more pared down, simpler existence once they left society;[2] they did so, though, so that they could live by the code of values that Objectivism advocates. So although Colbert tries to align *Atlas Shrugged* with the political right, with a traditional understanding of the term *selfishness*, and with a rather simplistic version of class warfare between the wealthy and poor (Rand likes the rich, despises the poor), a more detailed look at the novel clearly complicates this picture, and shows very clearly that Colbert misrepresents what John Galt means when he argues "we don't need you."

Part of the reason Colbert associates Rand's ideas with the political right, however, is because many who do sympathize with her ideas, especially from the political right, work

[2] When Dagny first crash lands and discovers John Galt, she realizes that Galt's old professor had been wrong about him being a "second assistant bookkeeper." Galt observes, "I'm much lower than that by the scale of his standards and of his world" (650). In other words, according to Galt, because he and his old professor hold such different philosophic views, they have very different opinions of what constitutes success. Galt might live by "meager means" compared to the likes of James Taggart, but of course, he lives according to the philosophy he believes in.

for Fox News—a news channel known for its political bias. The Fox News personalities that have taken a liking to Rand of late include Glenn Beck (while he was with Fox), Sean Hannity, Judge Napolitano, and libertarian journalist John Stossel. It requires little research, beyond watching Fox's nightly programming, to realize that the ratings-leader in cable news is slanted heavily towards the Republican Party.[3] In their extensive research, Shanto Iyengar and Kyu Hahn proved in 2009 that not only does Fox present information in a biased (favorable to conservatives) manner, but the consumers of this biased information are largely self-identified conservatives (33). Iyengar and Hahn go on to argue that "competitive markets" of cable networks have laid the breeding ground for news programming that is largely "slanted" and chooses an ideological "niche" to cater to (33). In other words, when news is simply part of a larger marketplace, then networks such as Fox are going away from the traditional views of televised news as a balanced delivery of information (where one ideology isn't given priority) toward a type of news that delivers a certain commodity: news which simply reiterates the viewer's political ideas. Iyengar and Hahn's study also revealed that liberal viewers were much more likely to receive their news from NPR or CNN.

So it's no wonder that Colbert was ready to align Rand with the political views of the modern-day Republican Party and the pundits Fox News's. But once again, we must look at not just the political ideas of those pundits who represent Rand, but also how such representations might differ from claims that appear in the novel itself. For example, in the episode of Glenn Beck's program where he proclaims, "I feel like Hank Rearden,"

[3] In July of 2013, Christopher Zara notes that "Fox is not just the most-watched channel in cable news; it's the third most-watched network on primetime cable television" (par. 4).

Beck compares himself to the fictional metallurgist and industrialist in *Atlas Shrugged*. Beck's program was known for its hyperactive host who often painted extremely paranoid and horrific views of the current political landscape. Of course, Beck isn't the first host to spout incendiary comments (and certainly not the first Fox political personality to do so). In his essay "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," Richard Hofstadter observes that America has long fostered groups that express rather paranoid and sensational views that they levy against their perceived political opponents. Such paranoia often holds that "the old national security and independence have been destroyed by treasonous plots, having as their most powerful agents not merely outsiders and foreigners as of old but major statesmen who are at the very centers of American power" (par. 21). For Beck, the "major statesm[a]n" who is slowly trying to turn the "good ole' U.S.A" into a totalitarian regime that Stalin would envy is none other than President Obama,[4] and Beck used his inflamed doomsday scenarios to fuel the majority of his programming.

Beck's appropriation of Rand brings up two important points: first, viewers who see Beck referring to Rand might want to equate the two as having similar ideas. Second, when Beck says he "feels like Hank Rearden," the host is comparing two vastly different political and economic realities. In Rand's fictional America, Rearden was living during a time when patents were outlawed, government was allowed to take over the stocks of private companies, and very little private ownership was left. Surely Beck can't mean that the economy Rearden operated in is identical to the current U.S. economy?

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[4] Beck also used countless episodes to try to trace the communist roots of Obama's intellectual landscape, as seen by various individuals he's had contact with over his lifetime.

But this wasn't the only time that Beck referred to Rand's piece of fiction; it became a constant point of discussion for him during his tenure on Fox television. Beck also referred to Rand quite often in his daily radio program, *The Glenn Beck Program*. In one particular segment, which aired September 30th, 2010, the host opened his talk show by directing that his millions of viewers "go John Galt." The segment is extremely disorienting as Beck relies on rather clichéd and vague wording without much clear exposition. He describes the book as follows: "In the book, which is agonizingly long, John Galt just disappears and everybody says, 'Where is John Galt?' He's a big industrialist and a leader, if you will, but not in a position of power. He just disappears."[5] He then goes on to say that "no Utopia" exists as in the book, while simultaneously saying that the United States was that very utopia when first colonized. He then ends his discussion of *Atlas Shrugged* with an increasingly disorienting train of thought: "Here is the way to go all John Galt: it's stop playing the game. Stop playing the game that everybody has set up. That's the first thing."

Now would Rand agree with Beck and his criticisms of a federal government that intruded on individual rights? Certainly. But the agreement would likely stop there. As mentioned earlier, the reason Rand had no patience for the Republican party of her day was because it lacked any philosophical defense of capitalism, and Beck is providing none here in this segment. Even more interestingly, Beck starts this segment on *Atlas*

[5] Beck's description here has two clear errors. First, the book repeats the phrase "Who is John Galt," not "where," and most characters don't believe Galt to be an actual person. Second, Galt was never a "big industrialist," such as the characters Rearden and Dagny as he quit working shortly after inventing his motor.

Shrugged by saying that he has been changed by his "8-28" event.[6] Chapter Two clearly established that Rand's philosophy argues that reason alone (the function of a single mind integrating data from the world) can guide one's life, and therefore, she argues as adamantly against religion as she did against a bloated federal government. Beck, who spent nearly every segment discussing his faith in God, was selective in what parts of *Atlas Shrugged* he wanted to discuss. The character John Galt makes quite clear Rand's views on religion:

What is the nature of the guilt that your teachers call [man's] Original Sin? What are the evils man acquired when he fell from a state they consider perfection? Their [Christian teachers'] 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 of 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 in the Garden of Eden, who existed without mind, without values, without labor, without love—he was not man. (939)

Rand, in essence, inverts the creation story and argues that eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil should be a point of celebration. She even argues that Adam

[6] Beck held a rally on August 28th, 2010, which was billed as an "honor rally" to take back America's founding principles. For the majority of the speech, Beck urges listeners to turn to God, regardless of which religion they are from.

and Eve, as they were originally created, don't deserve the title "man." Quite clearly, Beck is selective in what parts of Rand's ideas he endorses by focusing on her libertarian politics, but even when he does endorse that part of her ideas, he doesn't give the epistemological and ethical reasons that Rand argues for capitalism and free markets. Rand's favorite term when describing the foundation to her ethical, political, and epistemological ideas was *reason*—a term that Beck doesn't use once during these programs.

References to Rand are used Sean Hannity and Judge Napolitano are similar to Beck's: rather quick references, mostly lacking any real depth, and primarily used to make a political argument against the federal government (and often President Obama, specifically). But even on Stossel's program, one segment of which devoted an entire hour to discussing *Atlas Shrugged*, the references largely draw from Rand's politics. Sure, the guest John Allison notes that Rand is an Aristotelian and that her concept of selfishness is different than many assume. Most of the discussion steers completely clear of Objectivism's metaphysics and epistemology, however, and because of this, any casual viewer of Fox's usual programming (who hasn't read the novel) could easily assume that Rand's ideas closely align with both the Republican party and the usual platform of Fox News.

In our final area of investigation, we come across the most ambitious means of representing *Atlas Shrugged*: the films adapted from the novels. To begin, we should note some obvious differences between this final category and the previous two. Whereas punditry and television shows might have referred to *Atlas Shrugged*, these references were automatically going to be limited to highlighting some particular aspect

of novel as they weren't attempts to recreate the story in full, but attempts to take a certain plot device, a character, a theme, and incorporate it into a larger show. The main storyline in the episode of *One Tree Hill* centers on the characters in that show, not the characters in *Atlas Shrugged*. Likewise, John Stossel is playing primarily to the audience of his television show, not just to readers of *Atlas Shrugged*. In the film version of the novel, however, we have producers trying to develop much more fully a representation that encompasses Rand's characters, plot, and philosophic themes.

According to Jeff Britting in "Adopting *Atlas Shrugged* to Film," Rand, while contemplating how to adapt her most famous novel into a film, was most concerned with how the screenplay would develop the plot of the story and that the novel's main themes would not be altered (198-99). According to Rand's own literary theory, plot is one common denominator which can be understood and enjoyed by everyone "from the dullest to the most intelligent" (qtd. in Britting 199). Rand would go on to suggest that plot offers the movement of story that everyone can enjoy, but also the philosophic depth that more astute individuals can dive into headfirst. However, Rand seems also to have realized that this formula changes when writing a screenplay rather than a novel. In 1980, when an individual asked her if her goal for writing a mini-series for television of *Atlas Shrugged* was the same goal that she set out with when writing the novel, she said it wasn't, as the novel had already accomplished her main goal in writing the story. According to Rand, while the novel can give a fuller philosophic discussion of her ideas,

a film would only be able to convey a "sense of life"[7] or "basic abstraction" of the book (199).

Despite the hardships of adopting a lengthy novel, filled with rather abstract and philosophical musings, Rand was still determined to see a film version of her novel come to life. Even the last month of her life, she spent the little energy she had trying to work on the screenplay (Heller 409). Unfortunately, Rand died before the project could ever come to fruition, and it would end up taking until 2011 (2013 for the sequel) for the 1957 novel to finally be turned into a movie.

Atlas Shrugged, Part One and *Atlas Shrugged, Part Two* found their ways to the big screen in a rather unusual way. John Aglialoro, a wealthy CEO and businessman, decided to make the film independently after failing to secure a large studio's backing. As mentioned earlier, the critics largely lambasted both of these films as sophomoric and dull. Rotten Tomatoes, which gives a composite average of major film critics, gave the first film's average an eleven percent rating (out of 100) and the second film a five percent rating. Despite this, Aglialoro is releasing part three in 2014. Either the first two films did financially better in their DVD release than they did in their theatrical release or else Aglialoro is simply determined to see the project through regardless of the films' earnings.

Our goal here isn't to comment on whether or not the films make for good movies, but rather to evaluate how transmitting the message of the novel in the medium of film might have changed or altered the message. After all, it's one thing to simply refer to *Atlas*

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[7] As discussed in Chapter Two, Rand uses the term "sense of life" as an intuitive and basic philosophy that every individual has when living life. Not all have a clear, detailed philosophy that they live by, but all have a "basic sense of life," according to Rand.

Shrugged on a television show, or have a pundit comment upon it, but to create a full-length film should promise to be the most ambitious representation of the novel in popular culture.

The filmmakers for *Atlas Shrugged, Part One* and *Atlas Shrugged, Part Two* earnestly attempted to create films that were close to the message of the original novel. They even went so far as to hire a "philosophic consultant," David Kelley, to supervise the writing of the script. Arguably one of the most prominent Objectivist philosophers today,[8] Kelley describes his role as a philosophic consultant as follows:

My chief role on this script—as on scripts from previous projects—was to review the script before it was finalized and flag anything incompatible with the philosophy embodied in the novel. Those inconsistencies could arise in dialogue, in the actions of the characters, or in the overall structure of the narrative. I also looked for omissions of essential elements of theme, characterization, and plot. (qtd. in Thomas par. 2)

Kelley himself wrote in his review of the film that script writer Brian Patrick O'Toole had done a marvelous job of capturing Rand's philosophy (par. 2).

In many regards, Kelley's appraisal of the script holds mostly true. Neither of the films made major changes to the basic plot and storyline of the novel, and all the major characters in the book appear in the film. Of course, some changes were necessary in the process of trying to adapt such a long novel into a film. For instance, Eddie Willers—Dagny's most faithful employee—plays a much smaller role in the films than he does in the book. And although quite a bit of the dialogue is used from the novel itself, the

[8] David Kelley, who was a close friend of Rand while she was living, went to Brown University for his M.A. and Princeton for his Ph.D. Along with Leonard Peikoff, Kelly was one of the Objectivists who brought Rand's philosophy into the folds of traditional academic discourse.

writers greatly condensed those rather long speeches that Rand often gives her heroines and heroes to explicitly explain her philosophy.

But beyond plot, our focus is on how the ideas play out over the course of the film. Much like some of the representations previously discussed in the realm of punditry, these films seem to focus especially on Rand's political thought. In a telling scene from *Atlas Shrugged, Part One*, Rearden is having a conversation with Philip (an old family friend whose business failed), who urges Rearden to work on his public image. According to Philip, people "say that you're ruthless…that your only goal is to make money," to which Rearden replies, "my only goal *is* to make money" (my italics). Such scenes convey Rand's pro-capitalistic stance, though they do so rather crudely. In fact, much of the movie makes her political ideas quite clear as we see the film's villains working in close relations with governmental officials, and the heroic characters as the self-made, individualistic businessmen such as Rearden and Dagny. But once again, what's missing is a more complex, nuanced understanding of Rand's deeper thought, such as Rand's epistemology or metaphysics.

Take, for instance, the scene just discussed: much of the dialogue used in this scene is lifted directly from the novel itself. However, there was one key change: in the novel, Philip mentions that everyone assumes Rearden only wants to "make steel and money," to which he replies, "But that is my goal" (44). This small change significantly alters the meaning of the passage. In the novel, we understand Rearden's main goal is to make "steel and money," whereas in the film, it's simply "money."

The film's scene suggests that one should live one's life mainly to obtain money, whereas in the novel, the focus is on productive achievement (which for Rearden is to

make his steel alloy). Clearly the novel's passage makes this more apparent, but it is also in closer keeping with a later passage where Francisco gives his famous speech about money. In this speech, Francisco argues that money "is simply a tool," and that the mere acquisition of wealth cannot "purchase happiness" (382). He goes on to argue that only the achievement of the mind, which created the material good that allows the individual to make money, is the source of happiness. In other words, Rearden is motivated primarily by his desire to achieve and to make his metal, and money is simply the means that allows him to trade that particular product.

The second film does include a scene in which Francisco explains the virtues of money. But there are two problems with this. First, viewers who only see the first film (and thus Rearden's claim, "my only goal is to make money") won't realize Rand's fuller perspective on money given by Francisco in the second film. Second, even those who view the second film will still receive a much less detailed and nuanced understanding of Rand's perspective on money and its relationship to the rest of her philosophy. In *Atlas Shrugged, Part Two*, Francisco's speech on money lasts a little under a minute; in the novel, it is over five pages long.

According to Steven Horwitz, an Economist at George Mason University, Francisco's speech puts forth fundamental economic principals of the Austrian tradition, which includes the idea that capitalism and the creation of monetary exchange allows for human beings to more peacefully trade with each other (he also traces this line of thought back to Adam Smith and Frederick Hayek) (230-33). According to Sciabarra, Francisco's speech isn't meant to deny "that money can be used in distorted or corrupted fashion," but rather to act as an "ideal" that Rand wishes to advocate (290). He also goes on to note that

Rand's ideas concerning money are closely related to her epistemology, as she equates both money and reason as means of survival.[9] Our goal here, though, isn't to fully and adequately explore the depths of Rand's economic thought, but rather to prove that Rand's ideas concerning money are rather complex, and naturally require a bit of time and length to fully unpack. The second film might address the bare essence of the ideas, but it doesn't develop their complexities, and the first film seems to miss the mark altogether.

It might prove helpful to end this chapter with a deeper understanding of what I mean when I say Rand is "misrepresented" in popular culture. At times, it's something as simple as Colbert making a caricature of Rand's ideas concerning selfishness, and clearly misrepresenting her actual ideas as they play out within her novel. But one of the recurring problems we saw in this chapter was the problem of simplification or giving a *prima facia* representation of Rand's philosophy. In the next chapter, we will explore the ways in which technology and different forms of media have caused such simplification, but for now, it's important to remember that such simplifications can, even if they appear to be a somewhat accurate representation of Rand's ideas, distort them.

Return once more to Glenn Beck turning to the camera and declaring that he feels like Hank Rearden. Beck, along with many of the other Fox News contributors who refer to Rand, certainly understand her ideas concerning government intruding upon free markets and private ownership, which is ultimately the major clash for Hank Rearden: the federal government's desire to nationalize his metal-making concern. But in the process

[9] By "survival," Rand is suggesting that money is the more peaceful way for individuals to exchange with each other: "When money ceases to be the tool by which men deal with one another, then men become the tools of men" (385).

of Beck selecting just that small piece of information, he makes Rand's ideas simply mirror his own. Context, detail, and nuance all go out the window. In essence, what we're left with is a simplified and abbreviated understanding of Rand's embrace of free markets and capitalism. For example, many conservatives might be surprised to know that Rand's philosophy leads her to argue that unions (as long as individuals are freely entering into the agreed contract of the union) should be a natural by-product of a free society. Beck chose Rearden's insistence that government not intrude upon his business because it matches the narrative he wants to use. Several hundred pages later, Rearden is also depicted as not being able to answer his workers' call to unionize because such decisions can now only be made by the Unification Board (881). In short, the workers are becoming underpaid because of a federal freeze which dictates their wages (instead of a market valuation). I don't wish to dive into the economics here, but rather to point out that Rand suggests that labor unions should be allowed to exist and enter into agreements with private businesses, so long as they are negotiating with the employers, and not a separate federal board. Beck might have one small aspect of Rand correct, but the picture he gives us is devoid of a fuller context, which is especially important when discussing even moderately complex political philosophy.

Toward the end of his study on Rand, Sciabarra recalls the story of four travelers who come across an elephant's trunk in the dark: "The moral of the story is not the inevitability of subjectivism. Rather, it is a lesson in the fallacy of reification. Each traveler abstracted a part of the whole and reified that part into a separate entity, which was identified as the totality" (380). The problem of reification is a major part of why Rand is so often misrepresented in popular culture. If an individual takes a small piece

from the larger set of all her ideas, without context, and presents it as a new text (such as Beck discussing a brief moments from one of her novels), then readers of that new text receive a condensed and simplified understanding of Rand. When we argue that such representations fail to put Rand's ideas into context, we are not suggesting that some absolute, unalterable understanding of Rand can ever be achieved. We, as humans, are always stuck in our particular epistemological vantage points, and if post-modern theory has taught us anything, it's that truth is always somewhat contingent. But at the same time, we can strive to keep context, to embrace complexity and nuance, and to try to understand the Ayn Rand phenomenon as best we can. And yet many of those who draw upon her ideas in popular culture don't abide by such lofty goals, whether by design or because they've succumbed to the limitation of the medium.

Chapter 4: Causes and Effects: The Role of Media and Technology in Misrepresenting *Atlas Shrugged* and Objectivism

As the previous chapters have established, Ayn Rand's ideas are, indeed, popular, and yet often these ideas are misrepresented. There are some instances in which a given representation might get an aspect of her philosophy correct, but if the viewer is unfamiliar with Rand, such representations can be disorienting. And then there are those representations that miss the mark altogether. This final chapter will try to bring a fuller understanding to the process by which these misrepresentations occur. In particular, it will examine why Rand's ideas seem to be so easily misrepresented by mass media, and how these representations affect the currency, potency, and integrity of these ideas in the public sphere. This chapter also will consider how the forces of modern technology and media have altered Rand's ability to engage the public with a novel.

We've already established a consistent trend of individuals either misrepresenting Rand, or at other times, representing her in a way that makes likely that the viewers will have a rather superficial understanding of Objectivism or the novel's ideas. Indeed, if viewers had only seen the clip from *Dirty Dancing* or the clip from the *Colbert Report*, they might assume that Rand promotes ruthless selfishness, condones rape, and wants the federal government to rob the poor to give to the rich. But if modern literary criticism has taught us anything, it's that reading and writing our not the clearly defined, distinct practices we once assumed they were. As Robert Scholes reminds us in *Textual Power*, even when an individual is reading a text, he or she is also rewriting it (8). What this means is that the process of reading engages both the author and the reader, and with this subjective experience, an individual's culture will influence how he or she engages with

the text. If we consider this concept, it means that even if readers take the time to sit down and read one of Rand's essays or novels, those readers cannot help but let their culture and personal histories affect the experience of reading the text. Because the Ayn Rand phenomenon is so large and pervasive, it is likely that such readers will have many preconceived notions about Rand and her philosophy, and if Scholes is right—that an individual's personal history and culture will change how he or she rewrite the text while reading it—then it's possible that these misrepresentations in popular culture will affect both those who haven't read Rand and those who have. It affects those who haven't in an obvious way: they don't know any better what Rand's ideas actually are. But even for those who have read Rand, because they have likely come in contact with numerous misrepresentations of Rand and her work in popular media, it is likely that these misrepresentations will affect those who sit down to read *Atlas Shrugged*.

Of course, the dangers of representation aren't something new. Long before the era of radio, television, or the Internet, Plato was concerned about the problem of representation. Although he discussed virtues of some poetry in earlier books, by "Book X" in *The Republic*, his character Socrates is convinced that art is merely a representation of a representation, and, thus, can never bring man closer to knowledge of the truth. Indeed, a poet's knowledge of the topic he discusses (say a couch) will always be inferior to that of someone who actually made it. The problem with art, for Plato, is that it puts a medium between man and reality, a lens by which to view the world, and with this lens comes the power to redefine, alter, and potentially skew our perception of reality. It is for this reason that Plato ultimately casts out artists from his ideal state (save for those who sing praises to the gods).

Today, we might be more inclined to value art for the new perspective or "truth" it discovers, but modern critics continue to address the problem of representation. In *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Neil Postman reminds us that the medium through which a text is transmitted alters our understanding of the text (17). In other words, the medium, at least in part, constitutes the content. Postman describes his project in his book as follows: "I want to show that definitions of truth are derived, at least in part, from the character of the media of communication through which information is conveyed" (17). What this ultimately means—if we hold that the medium does, in fact, actively shape the message—is that any text that comes to us from a different medium will inherently change and potentially distort the original message. Because of this process, even a well-intentioned effort to represent Rand's philosophy on television will alter the original text simply because we experience it in a different medium.

Let us look at an example that will illustrate this process. Several times now we've considered the importance and substance of John Galt's speech in the *Atlas Shrugged*. Although someone could technically skip this speech and still understand the basic plot of the story, the speech remains the most detailed and explicit statement of Rand's philosophy. Several years ago, a young man made a YouTube video that couples a voice reading Galt's entire speech with hundreds of videos and images from contemporary society: short clips from famous films, still images taken directly out of news media, famous historical moments (footage from World War II), and various other visuals. At the beginning of the video, the voice reads from Galt's speech: "We are evil, according to your morality, we have chosen not to harm you any longer. We are useless

according to your economics; we have chosen not to exploit you any longer."[1] While the voice reads this excerpt, the video flashes images of a prototypical evangelical mega-church where a large crowd appears enthralled with the worship service. The video then cuts to a montage image of Newt Gingrich, FDR, Castro, and a larger picture that shows a protestor holding a sign that reads "capitalism must be destroyed." If we consider what Postman tells us, then even though both the novel and the video use the exact same words, the content the reader/viewer receives from these two media is very different. In fact, according to Postman, the inherit bias of television is to entertain, largely because the medium relies on the visual, which is naturally sensational (374-76). So although those watching the video have the opportunity to hear the exact words read in the novel, the experience is different. Viewers also have to take in the images (sometimes even reading additional texts within the images themselves) and listen to the background music that accompanies them. At the very least, we can see how viewers of the video will be much more likely to be distracted and pay less attention to the speech itself.

What's more, the process of reading a text in print versus viewing texts through digital media creates a much different dynamic between the reader and the text. According to Sven Birkerts in *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age*, one needs to recognize that print is "linear, and is bound to logic by the imperatives of syntax," as well as being much more private, and, of course, static—for

[1] In the original context, this early passage from John Galt needs to be read as somewhat satirical. Clearly Rand (through Galt) isn't actually positing that the characters who have been disappearing throughout the novel were actually causing "harm" or exploiting the masses. Instead, Rand wants the reader to infer that quite the opposite is true: by withdrawing from society, the harm caused by the military-industrial complex has only worsened. In other words, the charges against industry and capitalists were largely false, according to Galt, and much more applicable to what federal and regulatory power do. The last line is clearly a reference to the Marxist criticism of class hierarchy.

print, it is the reader who moves through the text, at a pace set by the reader herself (122). Whereas the "electronic order" is "in most ways opposite": "impression and image take precedent over logic and concept," the text is no longer linear, and here the text itself decides the pace and moves through the sequence of images rather than the reader (122). At this point, one might want to challenge Birkerts: surely a viewer is capable of rewinding to view a scene again or pausing to scrutinize a particularly insightful passage. But such a challenge misses Birkerts's point. Birkerts is not arguing that viewers can't take on a more active role when viewing moving images. Rather, he is pointing out that every technology will have innate biases, including the depth of reading it allows, and an electronic text, such as this YouTube video, won't allow for the deeper reading that print text allows. So in the case of Galt's speech, although the viewer of these clips might be able to glean some of the information, there are far too many other components to the video to distract him or her. The fleeting images, the enticing colors and music, the jump-cutting from one image to the next—all of this acts to distract the viewer from the ideas within the speech.

Part of the reason that the message changes between the print text (the novel itself) and between the representations of the text (popular culture appropriations) isn't just a matter of different technologies; it also stems from the difference between the objective of the novel of ideas and the imperatives of popular culture. As we have already discussed, Rand clearly wrote the novel not just to entertain people, but as a means of spurring a serious discussion and revealing a political philosophy that she deemed important. In an entry for the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, David Simpson describes existential philosopher-novelist Albert Camus and gives the following

criteria as the primary reasons why Camus can be considered a "philosophical writer" or novelist of ideas: "[He] (a) conceived his own distinctive and original world-view and (b) sought to convey that view mainly through images, fictional characters and events, and dramatic presentation rather than through critical analysis and direct discourse" (par. 20). Though Simpson is describing a different writer, his definition proves helpful here in how we might consider Rand's writing. She was, regarding the novel of ideas, much like Camus: she presents a "unique worldview," but she chooses to express her ideas in fiction rather than formal philosophy. As we have noted previously, Rand's novel presents us with an integrated system of thought, which comments upon all the major branches of philosophy: metaphysics, ethics, and epistemology. A novelist who embarks upon such a journey clearly is writing to do more than merely entertain; Rand's goal is to compose and disseminate serious political, social, and philosophical discourse. Rand herself, in *Romantic Manifesto*, argues that a distinction can be made between "popular fiction" and serious fiction in that the former fails to "raise or answer abstract questions" and largely relies on "common sense ideas" instead (110). Rand clearly, at least in her own estimation, set out to write a novel that included such abstract ideas, and in many ways, to challenge our common sense notions (such as selfishness being a vice). The main point here, though, is that the novel of ideas seeks to engage in serious discourse and in complex, nuanced ideas.

The goal of the mass media, however, is to create texts that are easy to consume, which requires that they be devoid of overly complex ideas. In fact, according to John Fiske in *Understanding Popular Culture*, the transmission of popular texts requires simple content and abbreviated form: "Popular texts are to be used, consumed, and discarded, for they

function only as agent in the social circulation of meaning and pleasure; as objects they are impoverished" (123). In essence, the number one goal of popular texts is entertainment. If we consider this basic tenet, this means that the primary expectation of viewers who tune into Fox News's programing isn't to become informed about serious political philosophy, but rather to merely be entertained by the program.[2] In place of serious public discourse, where complexity and nuance is embraced, we receive simplistic, bumper-sticker catch phrases from the mouths of pundits. And perhaps this difference in goal that Fiske writes about is the reason why, even in *Atlas Shrugged, Part Two*, a film that at least attempted to accurately convey Rand's ideas, many of the speeches that gave a more explicit treatment of Rand's philosophy were greatly condensed. It's not very entertaining to hear a character go on a five-minute monologue on the virtues of a cash economy as a tool to help avoid coercion in economic exchanges, and therefore, the producers are forced to greatly condense such moments in their adaptation. If part of the goal of mass media is to entertain and provide easy-to-consume material, then those representations that advance that goal are going to differ from the goals of the novel of ideas.

In trying to understand why Rand is so often misrepresented, we've established that a difference in technology and a difference in goals can account for the differences between *Atlas Shrugged* and its numerous appropriations in popular culture. While this might help explain some of the basic problems of representation, especially representation in modern media, it is time for us to consider, arguably, the most important

[2] Neil Postman, in "The Age of Show Business," argues that all televised news is essentially nothing more than entertainment, as the inherit bias of television as a technology is to entertain.

factor: the effects of this process. What problems arise from such misrepresentations? Although we could likely spend an enormous amount of time on this process (there is, after all, a glut of representations of *Atlas Shrugged*), for the sake of concision, we will focus on three key problems: Rand is now assumed to symbolize the modern-day Republican Party; her integrated philosophy is lost for the sake of political effect; and, her ideas are used primarily to engage in an ideological war of polarization rather than in a civil and reasoned discussion of political philosophy.

In *Goddess of the Market*, Jennifer Burns masterfully traces the impact of Rand on right-wing politics in America. In the beginning of her book, Burns describes her project as an attempt to reveal that Rand remains a "veritable institution within the American right" (4). She goes on to note that "*Atlas Shrugged* is still devoured by eager young conservatives, cited by political candidates, and prompted by corporate tycoons" (4). But the fact that Rand has now become an emblem of the modern-day Republican Party should come as no surprise. After all, the majority of the pundits who have commented upon her are from Fox News (which is practically a platform for the Republican Party) and many of the politicians that cite her as an influence are also Republicans. This embrace of Rand by the Republican Party is, of course, extremely problematic. Rand, the devoted atheist and abortion-rights advocate, who filled her novels with graphic sex scenes between unmarried couples, seems an unlikely object of affection for contemporary Republicans. This odd relationship forms the main source of tension in Burns's book: how did such a writer become the "gateway drug" to modern right wing politics (4)? Burns isn't alone in seeing some possible friction between contemporary Republicanism and Rand. Shortly after the 2011 proposed Republican

budget was released (largely crafted by Republican Paul Ryan), the widely read *U.S.A. Today* published an article titled, "Budget Battle Pits Atheist Ayn Rand vs. Jesus, Say Liberals." In the article, Daniel Burke holds that liberals, such as Eric Saap, are beckoning Republicans to choose who they are influenced by; he quips that "you can follow Ayn Rand or Jesus, but not both" (par. 5). This is just one of many social commentators who called out Paul Ryan on his affiliation with Rand during his bid for Vice President. *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *Forbes*, CNN, and a host of other major news outlets entered the fray about whether or not Ryan should be affiliated with the famed Objectivist philosopher. I've already commented upon a number of Republicans who have cited Rand's influence on them (in Chapter One), but this is just a sampling. In February of 2013, an Idaho Republican introduced legislation that would require every high school student to read and pass an exam on *Atlas Shrugged*. Though largely considered a political ploy, such examples prove how closely aligned today's Republican Party can seem to be to Ayn Rand's Objectivism. If a viewer of network news hadn't read the novel, but had followed the 2012 election relatively closely, he or she would likely associate Rand with Paul Ryan and the Republican Party. After all, every pundit on Fox News seems enamored of her, and even the 2012 candidate for Vice President, at one time, admitted to giving all his interns and staff *Atlas Shrugged* for Christmas (Burns "Atlas Spurned," par. 1).

In fact, the Republican embrace of Rand, particularly by pundits at Fox News, seems to be the real subject matter in the Colbert episode discussed earlier. Not only did Colbert open the segment showing many Fox commentators who referred to Rand, his entire show is part of a modern media that, although it uses the form of contemporary

news, is actually an interrogation of that form. Geoffrey Baym argues that *The Daily Show* (which is where Stephen Colbert got his start) is much more than "fake news," but rather "an alternative to journalism" that "uses satire to interrogate power" and "parody to critique contemporary news" (261). In essence, Baym argues that shows such as *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* act as a type of metacommentary on the content, form, and style of contemporary televised news media. I mentioned in Chapter Three that Colbert's associating Rand with the banking bailout was disingenuous (clearly Rand wouldn't have approved such political action), but with Baym's help, we might suggest that Colbert wasn't so much commenting upon the ideas within *Atlas Shrugged* as he was lampooning *Fox News* and its tendency to tout her ideas. Colbert designed his show to parody right-wing news commentators; he himself is a parody of such an anchor, and as such, many of his references to Rand can be seen as a critique of the Glenn Becks of the world more so than of Rand herself. The question will always remain though, how many viewers of Colbert's program have a more nuanced understanding of what his program is about? If they don't pick up on this, then Colbert's episode acts as just another representation that seems to tie her to the Republican Party.

The second effect is, in part, related to the first. Because Rand is so often associated with the Republican brand in popular culture, parts of her integrated philosophy end up taking a back seat to a rather simplistic view of her politics. In other words, many of her ideas not related directly to politics seem to go unnoticed by popular culture. One of the items largely ignored in the current discourse on *Atlas Shrugged* is her ideas concerning sex and romantic love. We must, once again, keep in mind Sciabarra's point regarding Rand's "integrated system": our understanding of Rand's

notions of sex is part and parcel of her larger corpus of ideas (or at least it should be). Sciabarra argues that one of the important contributions that Rand makes to ideas concerning sex is her emphasis on partners who "incorporate the welfare of each other into their hierarchy of values" (254). Rand held that sex was virtuous when it was the celebration of one's own self-esteem and virtue.[3] Susan Love Brown, in her essay "Sexuality in *Atlas Shrugged*," posits that Rand contributes an important voice to the discourse on human sexuality as she finds an objective "value" in her philosophy on sex without the standard religious overtones (289). Moreover, Rand allows her concept of human sexuality to extend to women (Dagny has three sexual relationships over the course of the novel outside of wedlock), despite the fact that she was writing at a time when such ideas were, at the very least, controversial.

In the novel, Rand uses Dagny's relationship as a foil to the relationship between her brother James and the simple shop girl, Cheryl. Whereas Dagny is in relationships of equals, James seeks a relationship in which the woman will remain subordinate to him, and as such, will offer him almost dog-like affection. In "Romantic Love in *Atlas Shrugged*," Jennifer Iannolo describes James's relationship with Cheryl as one in which his primary reason for choosing her was to create a perpetual state of debt by which to entrap Cheryl. As she looks around at the plush and wealthy life she now has, she must be continuously grateful that he saved her from her poverty (274). We can see evidence of Iannolo's point in the dramatic sequence of conversations that Rand strings together

[3] Francisco, when he first talks to Rearden, gives a rather famous speech on the meaning of sex, in which he argues that a man "will always be attracted to the woman who reflects his deepest vision of himself" (453). In other words, Rand is arguing that in a healthy relationship, the individual finds a partner that he or she respects and values, and from this relationship, he or she is celebrating his or her own virtues.

between Cheryl and James. At the beginning of their relationship, Cheryl seems awe-struck with the grandeur of James's rich lifestyle. This eventually starts to fade, however. In one particular scene, we see that James shows affection for Cheryl while she was adjusting to the conventions and etiquette of his wealthy lifestyle; indeed, he "never uttered a word of reproach," and almost seems to enjoy watching her fumble with his lifestyle (800). However, after Cheryl takes lessons on dinner etiquette and proper social behavior, and particularly, after she shows herself now to be proficient in social occasions, we find James sulking in a corner "with an undecipherable glance" (801). It is quite clear from this scene that James never wanted an equal; he wanted the devotion of someone inferior to him in social class and standing. Iannolo goes on to point out that once Cheryl realizes that James is mostly a fraud, and that it is Dagny who effectively runs the railroad, she no longer respects or admires James, which in the novel, culminates with James physically abusing Cheryl, and eventually Cheryl committing suicide rather than "live in his kind of world" (274). A relationship like James and Cheryl's is in diametric opposition to that of Dagny and Rearden, and later, Dagny and Galt: James seeks a relationship of inequality, whereas Dagny seeks a relationship of equality.

Rand was writing in the middle of the twentieth century, and she crafted a philosophy on sexuality that allows her heroine to have multiple sex partners without condemnation (all the while operating a successful business). Most important, she advocates a form of relationship and sex that relies on equality rather than subordination. Further, her philosophy on sex plays a major role within the novel. In fact, when Rand was approached by Al Ruddy, the famed producer of *Godfather*, he told her that he wanted to make a movie that centered on the love story of Dagny Taggart, to which Rand replied,

"that's all I ever wanted it to be [Dagny's love story]" (McConnell 507). Although I doubt Rand is being literal here, it certainly reveals that she herself considered the love story to be an essential part of the novel's progression.

Now fast forward to 2011, when the novel is finally turned into a film, and the philosophy of love seems entirely missing from the film version. As a love story, Dagny and Rearden's relationship stays in the background to the larger political message. In fact, the writers didn't even attempt to incorporate Francisco's sex speech into the film (where he explicitly states Objectivism's theories concerning sex).[4] When viewers watch the film, the love story appears to be no different than your typical Hollywood love story; the philosophical ideals of Rand are largely missing. The film might hint at the ideas (Rand's concept of ideal romantic love) by showing that Rearden and Dagny are attracted to each other (and that they both act as Randian heroes), but romantic love certainly doesn't constitute a major theme as it does in the novel. Rand tied her philosophy of sex to her epistemology and her ethics. By crafting the binary of the two types of relationships, she tried to portray the importance of equality in a relationship. When watching the films, one doesn't get that message; the producers, writers, and director didn't sufficiently develop that part of Rand's story.

What's clear from this example, and also from the countless examples we see from pundits on television, is that Rand's political ideas seem to dominate the popular culture

[4] Francisco says: "tell me what a man finds sexually attractive and I will tell you his entire philosophy of life. Show me the woman he sleeps with, and I will tell you his evaluation of himself" (453). In short, Francisco argues that a man who is of "moral virtue" and "self-esteem" will seek a partner who reflects his own values and one "he admires." However, he then goes on to argue that the man "without self-esteem" will wander after countless lovers who he doesn't admire, but rather allow him to "fake virtue" temporarily (453-4).

representations. Certainly, Rand's unabashed embrace of capitalism and trust in free markets is a major point in *Atlas Shrugged* and in her philosophy. I do not contest that. But the problem is that Rand's message regarding politics is often divorced from her other ideas, without context. When Sean Hannity looks to his millions of viewers and says "Some authors just had the foresight…Ayn Rand saw all this coming," the viewers see Rand as just another extension of Hannity's rather simplistic political views (assuming they haven't studied her in more detail). Remember, this was a woman who, when someone once asked her why she was so against the Libertarian Party when it could "provide intermediate steps towards your goals," replied, "I want philosophically educated people: those who understand ideas, care about ideas, and spread the right ideas" (*Ayn Rand Answers* 74). This was the same reason she refused to support the modern Republican Party: it lacked a philosophical defense for capitalism (according to her). She was more interested in the philosophy of her ideas than just in the political efficacy. Sciabarra reminds us that *Atlas Shrugged* "traces the links between political economy and sex, education and art, metaphysics and psychology, money and moral values" (114). Within Rand's integrated system, there are numerous points to question, discuss, and, ultimately, learn from. Unfortunately, the popular culture representations don't provide a full context in which viewers can understand Rand's philosophy. These representations have focused almost entirely on her politics, and because of this, many individuals who come across her ideas in popular culture might only remember her for those ideas.

In such a climate—where Rand's political ideas seem to be in the forefront of her influence—it should come as no surprise to anyone that Rand has become a polarizing

figure. And while this polarization makes sense (few topics bring out stronger tendencies toward polarization than politics), the final consequence is that a more nuanced discussion of Rand's ideas is largely lacking in more serious discourse.

Consider, for instance, her absence from scholarly discourse. Sciabarra, who was the first intellectual to treat Rand in a book-length study (who was neither a former disciple nor political opponent), comments on the hostility within academia to Rand's ideas: "The mere mention of Ayn Rand's name in academic circles can evoke smirks and a rolling of the eyes. Most often she is dismissed, without discussion, as a reactionary, a propagandist, or a pop-fiction writer with a cult following" (8). Despite Sciabarra's experiences, the climate has changed a bit as of late, though she still remains a polarizing figure.

In his 2012 book *Pity the Billionaire: The Unlikely Comeback of the American Right*, Thomas Frank uses his characteristic mixture of astute political knowledge and sarcasm to label *Atlas Shrugged* as "political flim-flam" (140). Frank spends approximately twelve pages connecting Rand's novel to part of a larger ideology he sees embodied in the Tea Party, in which the powerful, wealthy, exploitation-happy capitalists have somehow turned the tables and made government the supposed problem, rather than the workings of free-market capitalism run amuck. But even Frank, despite the depth of his political knowledge, gives us a rather straw-man portrayal of Rand's philosophy. According to Frank, the main strike that appears in the novel is that of "businessmen" vs. "the workers" (146). Although the short passage that Frank provides certainly insinuates that the strike is largely a matter of social class (the business tycoon against their

workers), the previous page portrays Galt describing it as a strike of "the men of the mind":

[T]he mind has been regarded as evil, and every form of insult: from heretic to materialist to exploiter—every form of iniquity: from exile to disfranchisement to expropriation—every form of torture: from sneers to rack to firing squad—have been brought down upon those who assumed the responsibility of looking at the world through the eyes of a living consciousness and performing the crucial act of rational connection. (Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* 677)

As noted in Chapter Two, Rand's epistemology asserts that the universe is objectively knowable, and as such, reason is of ultimate importance to the "living consciousness" of humans. To say that Rand was simply showing "businessmen" on strike is simply not accurate. The richest "businessman"—James Taggert—is not part of Galt's Gulch, and Rand shows throughout the novel that Taggert is not a "man of the mind". Moreover, Rand goes through quite a bit of detail on minor characters to reveal that the gathering of individuals is of no certain class and profession, but rather like-minded individuals. In a striking scene, in which Dagny seems distraught that many of the country's best minds are spending their time running grocery stores and raising chickens, she comments that Galt seems to employ no one except "aristocrats for the lousiest jobs." Ellis Wyatt, an oil tycoon and one of the first individuals to disappear in the novel, replies, "They're all aristocrats, that's true . . . because they know there's no such thing as a lousy job" (661). After Wyatt's reply, Dagny turns to a man, tells him he looks "dressed like a truck driver," and coyly asks him if he was once a "professor of comparative literature," to which he replies, "No ma'am . . . I was a truck driver" (661). Rand is clearly trying to

demonstrate that not everyone at Galt's Gulch is a high-powered executive (she also includes a mother of two children and a famous composer, though neither has employed anyone nor run a business). Rather, the strike is basically a strike of Objectivists—individuals who value reason above all else and act in accordance with Rand's philosophy. To be sure, there are a number of problems that we can look at here, not the least of which is the fact that Galt's Gulch implicitly suggests that no one can be an isolated individual without some form of community. In order to assert the importance of the individual, Galt had to gather a community of like-minded individuals, not just for the strike to be successful, but because the fictional community needed the benefits of a genuine community: someone who knows how to farm, someone who can build houses, someone who can help with the health of others, etc. In other words, those on strike needed a community in order to survive. Perhaps, it does take a village to raise a child. But once again, our goal here isn't to decide whether or not Objectivism is true, but to decide if it's accurately being represented. And in order for us to discuss, intelligently, both the strengths and weaknesses of Rand's ideas, we first need to fully understand them. And in this case, Frank's description of the novel as a strike between "businessmen and workers" greatly simplifies both Rand's plot and the politics of Objectivism.

Frank wasn't the first intellectual from the left to disdain Rand. Since Rand's recent surge in popularity, there has been an equal surge in short articles published by those who want to criticize Rand's ideas. In 2009, Gerald Houseman published an article in *The Times Higher Education Supplement* in which he claims, among other things, that Rand considered poor people to be lazy and dull, and that her "so-called philosophy"

(par. 15) is simply derived from the theories of Austrian economists (par. 16). And then there was John Nichols's article for *The Nation*, which doesn't go into any detail on what Rand espoused, but claims nonetheless that the "social Darwinist teachings of Ayn Rand have consistently been denounced by major Catholic leaders" (par. 6). George Monbiot, writing for the *Guardian*, amped up the attacks: "It has a fair claim to be the ugliest philosophy the postwar world has produced. Selfishness, it contends, is good, altruism evil, empathy and compassion are irrational and destructive. The poor deserve to die; the rich deserve unmediated power" (qtd. in Worstall par. 2). Although such a reading of Rand is quite common, it reinforces my basic contention that Rand is still largely misunderstood, despite her strong presence in our culture. The idea that Rand considered "empathy and compassion" as "irrational and destructive" is simply false. Reading through the corpus of Rand's work, one won't find any mention of such harsh ideas.[5]

Such misreadings of Rand circulate daily. The most common of these misrepresentations is the idea that Rand embraced a form of ruthless selfishness. We've already discussed the clear differences between Rand's Aristotelian-rooted ethics and the simplistic Hobbesian egoism that many want to associate Rand with, but that hasn't stopped many critics of Rand from crafting straw-man arguments against Rand. Type in "Ayn Rand" to Twitter's search engine, and you'll find ample evidence that many would rather deal with Rand in broad and simplistic strokes. On February 2, 2014, a number of Twitter accounts used Rand's birthday as a chance to remind everyone exactly how evil

[5] In *Ayn Rand Answers*, Rand gives several answers to questions about welfare that make clear she never held such a simplistic views. In fact, she states quite clearly "This doesn't mean the poor are evil. They may be victims of misfortune." She also states that "voluntary charity," rather than government programs, should take on the role of helping them (121).

this woman apparently was. The account "Disalmanac" posted "Today in 1905, Ayn Rand was born. She called her philosophy 'Objectivism' because 'Being A Goddamn Selfish Prick' wasn't nearly as catchy." Another account—a faux Jon Stewart account, tweeted, "Wait, Rand Paul was named after Ayn Rand? What's his middle name, SelfishSoullessPrickAndOverratedAuthor??"

And this is just a sampling. In 2010 (with a flurry of individuals recirculating the article in 2012 due to the Rand-Ryan connection), Mark Ames—a journalist and political blogger— published an article on the progressive politics website AlterNet that claimed Rand had worshipped, in her early years, the notorious serial killer William Edward Hickman, who had brutally murdered a twelve-year-old girl in 1927. Ames writes, "Ayn Rand's thinking is [that of] a textbook sociopath. In her notebooks Ayn Rand worshipped a notorious serial murderer-dismemberer, and used this killer as an early model for the type of 'ideal man' she promoted in her more famous books" (par. 3). Of course, given modern technology, when such information comes out, it quickly spreads, and countless websites reposted the article, various meme's circulated on social media, and before long, the Internet was abuzz: Ayn Rand, the serial killer lover.

Back what's the actual story here? With a reading of the published *Journals of Ayn Rand*, one quickly realizes the extent of the straw-man argument Ames created here (if Objectivism promotes serial killers, who could possibly take Rand's ideas seriously?) First, it's important to remember that Rand, then twenty-three, was writing down, for her personal use, some notes on an upcoming piece of fiction she was working on (she would never actually write the piece). In these journals, Rand does discuss Hickman, but it's quite clear that she wishes to capture the way the nation reacted to him (in total disgust)

and his lack of interest in what they thought. She saw in these two reactions (and only in the reactions), a dynamic that she could recreate for her own character. She wasn't, however, admiring him for his actions: "[My hero is] very far from him, of course. The outside of Hickman, but not the inside. Much deeper and much more. A Hickman with a purpose. And without the degeneracy. It is more exact to say that the model is not Hickman, but what Hickman suggested to me" (22). Rand, like many writers, was drawing from her surroundings. She wanted to capture the essence of an individual who doesn't care about public opinion (which sounds very much like her eventual character Howard Roark), but this quote clearly demonstrates that she found Hickman himself deplorable.

Now one might still find it odd that Rand wanted to privately muse on how such a person could serve as a model, in any way, for a piece of fiction, but we can certainly agree that Rand didn't see him "as an ideal man" to laud in her fiction. But nuance and facts don't seem to matter much here, when countless individuals circulate this type of information. If you hadn't read much of Rand, if you disagreed with her politically, or simply had caught a recent clip in which Glenn Beck gushes over her (and you, of course, are no fan of Beck), it was a succulent piece of information. How could you not forward the link on your Facebook profile? Whether such commentators are writing published articles for a major newspaper or simply making a meme to circulate online, what's clear is that people love to represent Rand's philosophy as a ruthless embrace of selfishness, infused with win-at-all-cost, total cut-throat ethos. Such tactics though, are far removed from a more balanced interpretation of Rand.

Gary Weiss titled his book-length study of Rand *Ayn Rand Nation: The Hidden Struggle for America's Soul* (published the same year that Frank's book came out). According to Weiss, Rand is the spearhead of an ideological war going on America, and her libertarian ideas are polluting and drastically changing the mindset of many Americans. Although like Frank, Weiss strongly disagrees with the philosophy that Rand espouses, he also cautions that liberal detractors not make the mistake of simply labeling Rand as a bubble-gum philosopher with a few dull droids that hang onto every word she ever wrote or spoke. Instead, he argues that "dismissing Rand and her followers as cultists ignores the strength of her appeal for nearly seven decades—not to crackpots but to intelligent, educated, even brilliant people" (20). To dismiss Rand as such would be to deny the depth and sincerity of the people who have been largely influenced by Rand's ideas, and for Weiss, to underestimate the power of her appeal.

Although the book-length studies by Weiss, Burns, and Heller all point to the fact that Rand is becoming more accepted by those who engage in serious discourse and study (at least compared to the academic climate when Sciabarra wrote his book), it's important to note that Randian scholarship is still catching up to addressing the myriad of topics one can discuss when looking at the controversial philosopher and novelist. Indeed, until 2009 when Burns released her biography, she notes that "[u]nlike other novelists of her stature, until now Rand has not been the subject of a full-length biography. Her life and work have been described instead by her former friends, enemies, and students" (2).

In this thesis, I have tried to focus on a topic that none of the previous Rand scholars has addressed, namely: that the transmission of Rand's ideas, distorted by the ideology of popular culture and further distorted by the brevity enforced by electronic

media, has shaped our understanding of Rand and altered the potency of her ideas. As I have attempted to prove, Rand's popularity cuts two ways: it increases her influence upon the culture, but it also often misrepresents what her ideas actually are. Rand's ideas will naturally create some polarization and extreme responses, but the various forms of modern media and representations of her ideas have made this process of misunderstanding and polarization only worse. Rand's ideas have serious political consequences, and we've already seen the many ways she's influenced American politics. At the same time, she's often appropriated by individuals who don't attempt to grasp, with a little more nuance and fairness, the actual tenets of her integrated philosophy. Ultimately, Rand's writing is serious, it evokes serious consequences (even influencing the most formative Federal Reserve chair in U.S. history), and as such, we need a more robust discourse on Rand's ideas, outside of the realm of popular culture.

Conclusion

Several nights before Rand would board a ship that brought her to the United States, a relative took her aside and pleaded with her: "When you get out, tell the rest of the world that we are dying in here" ("Introduction", *We The Living* v). In many ways, we shouldn't just understand Ayn Rand as the philosopher who came to embrace a certain ideal of American individualism. We must also remember her as Ayn Rand the Russian immigrant who watched, in horror, as her father's pharmacy practice was taken away from him during the Bolshevik revolution. When trying to publish her first novel, *We the Living* (which is also the most autobiographical of her novels), Rand told her publishers that she had a duty to tell Americans what was really happening under the conditions of Communism in Russia. "This is my job," she declared (Heller 83). For Rand, the seizure of her father's property (despite his having largely built his rather small business himself) would remain a constant image of the dangers of collectivism and centrally-planned government, and likely helped formulate her embrace of the anti-coercion principle (which states that individuals should never initiate force against another individual).

What's more, for Rand, the eventual bloodshed and starvation that would follow the Bolshevik revolution wasn't simply a sign of government gone wrong or even a necessary evil that would eventually lead to a more peaceful existence. For Rand, it was the embodiment of a dangerous philosophy:

When, at the age of twelve, at the time of the Russian revolution, I first heard the Communist principle that Man must exist for the sake of the State, I perceived that this was the essential issue, that this principle was evil, and that it could lead to nothing but

evil, regardless of any methods, details, decrees, policies, promises and pious platitudes. ("Preface," *We The Living* vii)

According to Rand, no matter how well-intended, the principles espoused by Communism will naturally lead to violence, and ultimately, sacrifice the dignity of the human individual. It doesn't take a psychologist to understand how watching her father (who by most accounts was a genteel, hard-working man) lose everything he had worked for might have led to Rand's eventual distrust of all forms of collectivism, and her unwillingness to consider a compromise of sorts between individual rights and collective responsibility. According to Heller, when Lenin ordered many middle-class families to relinquish their business in order to "pacify the poor," he called it "looting the looters" (31). Heller goes on to comment that nearly forty years later, when Rand published *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand had businessman-hero Hank Rearden both confront and beat a government bureaucracy of "looters and moochers" in his courtroom scene (in which the panel of judges is forced to neither charge Rearden of a crime nor attempt to steal his metal from him)[55] (32). As Heller suggests, perhaps this was Rand's chance of "getting the scene right," a chance for art to offer a more satisfying experience than the young novelist had endured, watching her father go from a self-made, middle-class pharmacist to an impoverished man overnight. Unlike her father, Rearden didn't lose everything he had worked for (32).

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[55] In the novel, the fictional Bureau of Economic Planning National Resources—which is the federal council that oversees most of the sweeping changes, such as nationalizing industries and freezing wages—doesn't want the trial to give the Bureau any negative press. As the judges question Rearden, he refuses to accept any of their propositions, and much to everyone's surprise, the crowd seems to support Rearden's case (to not relinquish the rights to his metal alloy). Seeing that public opinion is clearly in Rearden's favor, the board essentially does nothing to punish Rearden for refusing to hand over his metal to the federal government (440-47).

Beyond this historical perspective that Rand offers us of her experiences in Russia, she also offers us the interesting philosophy of Objectivism. It is clear that Rand considered the ideas she espoused in her most famous novel important. For twenty-five years, after the novel was first published, Rand turned down multiple attempts to turn the book into a film because she was so adamant to hold all the rights to script approval. Despite the fact that she could make a huge profit by relinquishing the rights, she refused. The ideas were, simply put, too important to her to entrust to others.

But regardless of how strongly an author might want to keep control of her ideas, eventually a text will take on a life of its own. This was partly the reason that Plato was skeptical of written language itself. Could such a representation accurately lead man to enlightenment (could the signifier accurately represent the signified?) or would the representation ultimately lead to problems in accessing truth? In *Phaedrus*, Plato notes that once written, words become detached from the author and can become "bandied about" by anyone, even those who don't properly understand them (par. 460). Writing many years later than Plato, Paul Ricoeur wrote his influential essay, "The Model of the Text," in which he posits that with "written discourse," authorial intent ceases to matter because the text extends well beyond the author him or herself: "The text's career escapes the finite horizon of its author" (94). In other words, the text is going to spread beyond the confines of what the author might want because it allows for an infinite number of future readings and interpretations of that text.

When Rand first published *Atlas Shrugged*, social media wasn't even a term in our lexicon, and the first personal computer wouldn't be sold for nearly three decades. In many ways, the study of Rand requires the study of the technological revolutions of the

later part of the twentieth century. And as a number of the theorists that we've discussed have argued (Fiske, Postman, Birkerts), often electronic and visual technologies can act to threaten serious discourse.

If John Galt had given his radio address today, how different would the circumstances have been? Certainly it wouldn't have aired on the almost-archaic medium of radio. Most likely, the fictional President of the U.S. would have been preparing to give a televised address. And on that televised address, would there be a bottom ticker, streaming loads of information of happenings going on around the world? Would there be several hashtags listed, so that individuals could take a break from hearing Galt speak and get on Twitter to interact with other individuals talking about the speech? The simple fact of the matter is that today, we have an increasing number of devices and media that are competing for our attention: advertising, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, cable news, countless internet sites, and thousands of apps for smart phones. It is very unlikely that Galt, today, could have demanded the attention he needed to explain to his fellow citizens the serious philosophical problem facing them all.

Ultimately, this project has attempted to reveal three fundamental ideas concerning Ayn Rand and her most famous novel. First, she was, and continues to be, a highly influential thinker. Second, Rand achieved great success in popularizing her ideas, as evidenced by the many attempts to represent her ideas in modern media. And third, because of Rand's popularity, her ideas are often misconstrued and changed by the technological media that represent them, and because of this, her ideas have often been used to widen various ideological divisions, rather than serve as a moment for an important conversation and an opportunity for serious discourse. In *Atlas Shrugged*,

Rand wrote a novel of ideas, ideas she cared greatly about, and she hoped to create a serious conversation about the nature of reality, the role of reason in man's life, and the possible political consequences of various ideologies (to name but a few of her objectives). Her ability to reach a wider audience meant that popular culture clung to her ideas as well, and with this process, the message has often become diluted and transformed from what we receive in the actual novel. In many ways, this study isn't just about Ayn Rand's novel, but about any novelist who hopes to write the novel of ideas in the twenty-first century. Using the form of fiction—instead of nonfiction—might allow one to reach a wider audience, but there's a catch: if one achieves popularity, one should expect a myriad of representations of those ideas to issue forth from a variety of media. With the advent of modern technology, which allows information to be so easily procured, assimilated, and reproduced, the contemporary reader is left with an ocean of texts and just one lifetime to read. This new technology helps us account for the quick proliferation of representations that uphold, alter, or even invert the ideals that Rand wanted to convey in her novel.

Indeed, one can readily imagine the fictional audience of Galt's radio address, kindly listening for the first minute or two, becoming a bit restless, and then taking out their smart phones to catch up on Twitter, watch a favorite YouTube clip, or maybe stream their favorite show on Netflix. Why listen to such a lengthy speech? Surely, someone will write a Wikipedia page with a short summary of it, or Colbert will do a quick skit on it, or maybe the Huffington Post will pass along a short article by someone who interprets the speech. The options, today, are seemingly endless.

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