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WASHINGTON AND LEE UNIVERSITY

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INTRODUCTION

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I was fifteen years old when I read a book that profoundly influenced me in a way no other book has. Before, the novel was *The Fountainhead* by Ayn Rand. As its pages I discovered a world filled with characters whose brilliance was matched only by their integrity. As a young high school student who was tired of countless classes, I was striving to look, act, and think exactly like in an anti-... of Rand's characters seemed refreshingly... in the novel's protagonist, Howard Roark, I saw the embodiment of the glory and... of the glory and... convictions, which seemed startlingly rational, that he was willing to defy society and... them. Roark's... While the unapologetic individualism of her works attracted countless readers to... including myself, Rand did not always maintain this ideal throughout her life. Though an ardent individualist, she paradoxically involved herself with collective organizations. Her first experience with the collective began in the 1940s during her crusade against communism. Rand initiated her personal attack on communism as an individual through her writing, but she soon turned to the collective in an attempt to amplify her influence. These first experiences with the collective were disastrous; Rand seemed too radical for her colleagues and often alienated them with her ideas. Rand's involvement in organized anti-communism indicated that she was far too individualistic to accomplish more in a collective setting than she could alone. Anti-communism was Rand's first failed attempt at collective action, but it was not her last nor most disastrous. During the late 1950s Rand reluctantly involved herself in the

INTRODUCTION

I was fifteen years old when I read a book that profoundly influenced me in a way no writing had done before; the novel was *The Fountainhead* by Ayn Rand. In its pages I uncovered a world filled with characters whose brilliance was matched only by their integrity. As a young high school student who witnessed countless classmates striving to look, act and think exactly alike in an attempt to avoid any dreaded peer criticism, the unapologetic individuality of Rand's characters seemed refreshing. In the novel's protagonist, Howard Roark, I saw the embodiment of the glory and capability of a single individual. Roark believed so firmly in his moral convictions, which seemed startlingly rational, that he was willing to defy society to uphold them. Roark's character was truly inspirational, and in his creator, Rand, I had found a hero.

While the unapologetic individualism of her works attracted countless readers to them, including myself, Rand did not always maintain this ideal throughout her life. Though an ardent individualist, she paradoxically involved herself with collective organizations. Her first experience with the collective began in the 1940s during her crusade against communism. Rand initiated her personal attack on communism as an individual through her writing, but she soon turned to the collective in an attempt to amplify her influence. These first experiences with the collective were disastrous; Rand seemed too radical for her colleagues and often alienated them with her ideas. Rand's involvement in organized anti-communism indicated that she was far too individualistic to accomplish more in a collective setting than she could alone.

Anti-communism was Rand's first failed attempt at collective action, but it was not her last nor most disastrous. During the late 1950s Rand reluctantly involved herself in the

collectivization of her own philosophy, Objectivism, when her closest intellectual colleague, Nathaniel Branden, began teaching lecture courses on Rand's ideas. Although organized Objectivism, led by the Nathaniel Branden Institute, gained thousands of followers, many of them did not fully understand the philosophy and instead were more interested in belonging to the movement itself. Organized Objectivism ended in shambles in late 1968 when Branden told Rand that he did not want to reinitiate a sexual affair with her and admitted that he had been lying to her about another affair for years. Rand retaliated against her new nemesis by banishing him from Objectivism and forcing all those who wanted to remain a part of the movement to renounce him. Since Rand did not fully disclose the reasons for the schism and would not allow Objectivists to hear Branden's version of what had transpired, she consequently asked her colleagues and followers to violate her own philosophy by making an irrational, uninformed decision. The champion of individuality and rationality throughout her writings now demanded irrational conformity, irreparably discrediting her philosophy by contradicting it.

Rand's involvement in anti-communism groups and organized Objectivism proved disastrous because her individualistic ideas were not intended for the collective. Rand was an author who communicated best through her writings, which allowed her to directly address each reader individually. She succeeded in positively influencing countless readers, many of whom have risen to prominence in various fields where they can apply the Objectivist principles in which they believe. Rand failed in her work with the collective but succeeded in reshaping many who understood and cherished her ideas — her individual readers.

CHAPTER 1

AYN RAND AND ANTI-COMMUNISM:
EXPERIMENTATION WITH THE COLLECTIVE

A critical phase in the development of Ayn Rand's career as a writer/philosopher was her involvement in the crusade against communism. Rand's hatred of communism was deeply personal, originating early in her life as she witnessed the horrors of such a political system in her native country Russia. Once in America, Rand continued to address communism in a personal manner through her writing. Anti-communism was an important theme in several of her earliest works of fiction and non-fiction. These works showed both the evils of communism in practice as well as in its theory. As a writer, Rand wanted to communicate individually with her readers and illustrate for them the problems of communism.

Through her writing Rand sought to address people intellectually on an individual basis, but Rand's crusade against communism also marked the beginning of her paradoxical involvement with collective organizations. In the 1940s she changed her anti-communist tactics from simply writing and communicating with her readers to a more collective approach that involved organized groups. Her participation in such groups devoted to anti-communism earned her both notoriety and scorn. Her involvement in organized anti-communism also showed Rand that she was vastly more individualistic and philosophically uncompromising than many of her contemporaries. As a writer dedicated to the termination of communism, Rand learned that collective organizations were not the appropriate outlets for her radically individualistic ideas.

Rand's philosophy, including her anti-communistic beliefs, developed at an early age. Rand did not believe, however, that her early life experiences shaped her ideas. She claimed that

since she became aware of herself at age two and a half, the fundamental aspects of her view of life did not change. She further asserted:

When I am questioned about myself, I am tempted to say, paraphrasing Roark [the protagonist of *The Fountainhead*]: ‘Don’t ask me about my family, my childhood, my friends or my feelings. Ask me about what I think.’ It is the content of a person’s brain, not the accidental details of his life, that determines his character The specific events of my private life are of no importance whatever. I have never had any private life in the usual sense of the word. My writing is my life.¹

While Rand denied any link between her life and her philosophy, the events of her youth appear to have supported her developing hatred of communism. She witnessed the horrors of communism during the time in which she formed her philosophy as a child in Russia named Alissa Rosenbaum. From the balcony of her house in St. Petersburg, she could see the red flags rise on the street, symbolizing the start of the Russian Revolution.² The Bolshevik Revolution, which followed the failure of Alexander Kerensky’s “Bloodless Revolution,” began in October of 1917 and drastically affected Alissa’s life. She watched helplessly as the communists nationalized her father’s pharmacy, which forced her family to flee to Crimea in 1918.³ While in Crimea, the communist government declared a “week of poverty” during which soldiers raided people’s homes and took their possessions to redistribute to the poor.⁴ Alissa again felt helpless as communist soldiers took her family’s last luxury items — a few bars of soap.

Alissa’s exposure to the horrors of communism continued as she entered the University

¹Ayn Rand, “To the Readers of *The Fountainhead*,” 1945, in Michael Berliner, ed., with an introduction by Leonard Peikoff, *Letters of Ayn Rand* (New York: Dutton, 1995), 669.

²Michael Paxton, *Ayn Rand: A Sense of Life* (Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith, 1998), 38.

³Barbara Branden, *The Passion of Ayn Rand* (New York: Doubleday, 1986), 21, 29.

⁴*Ibid.*, 37.

of Petrograd in 1921.⁵ In Russia during the early 1920s, academic institutions were in a chaotic state of flux with changing faculty and the infusion of new communist ideas throughout the curriculum.⁶ The student body at the University of Petrograd also experienced drastic change, with communist students pitted against anti-communists. In May 1924, the communists began to purge the anti-communists, many of whom had been active leaders in student government.⁷ In addition to the anti-communist expulsion, all students who could not prove their proletarian backgrounds could also be purged. Alissa saw many students whom she admired sent to suffer a slow death in Siberia. The daughter of a previously wealthy pharmacist, she barely escaped the purges because the commission decided to allow students on the verge of graduation to complete their studies, which permitted her to graduate on July 15, 1924.⁸

In addition to her time at the University of Petrograd, Alissa's experiences within her family continued to demonstrate to her the evils of Karl Marx's teachings. Years after the communists confiscated her father's first pharmacy, they permitted him to open a new one with a few other men because of the community's need. After her father and his partners succeeded in establishing a successful business, the communist government again nationalized it after only one year.⁹ Alissa witnessed the juxtaposition of her father's two successful, independent pharmacies

⁵Ibid., 41.

⁶Chris Matthew Sciabarra, *Ayn Rand: The Russian Radical* (University Park, PA: The Penn State University Press, 1995), 75.

⁷Ibid., 77.

⁸Ibid., 77, 93.

⁹Barbara Branden, 43.

with the continued failure of nationalized businesses. During these turbulent times Alissa also witnessed in her father the importance of maintaining one's integrity in the face of adversity. Although Alissa's family did not have enough food to eat, her father, whom she considered an intellectual ally, vowed that they would all starve before he worked for the communists.¹⁰ Later in her life Alissa would maintain her ideology with the same unyielding determination as her father once did. Although Alissa would have denied any link between her father's courage in the midst of communist totalitarianism and her own ideas, her philosophy praised just such an individualist who defied the oppressive forces of the collective. She later expanded upon the theme of the individual battling the collective in the setting of communist Russia in works of fiction.

As Alissa entered adulthood, the oppression of communist Russia grew unbearable. She felt as if her spirit was dying in Russia and wanted desperately to leave the country and move to the United States. In the fall of 1925 her dream came true — she secured a passport to travel to the United States for six months, although she knew she would never return to Russia.¹¹ At her farewell party in January, an acquaintance barely known to her said, "If they ask you, in America, tell them that Russia is a huge cemetery and that we are all slowly dying."¹² Alissa promised him that she would tell America about the plague of communism in Russia. Once Alissa moved to the United States and established herself in the film industry in California (with the new name of Ayn Rand, taken from her Remington-Rand typewriter), she found that America was not

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid., 59.

¹²Paxton, 54.

receptive to anti-communistic views. In the early 1930s America was in the depths of the Great Depression, which included unprecedented government involvement in the lives of Americans under Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal. During this decade, which earned the title of the "Red Decade," Americans — especially artists and intellectuals — were very sympathetic to Russia's experiment with communism, creating a hostile environment for Rand to introduce her radical ideas.

Rand first put her anti-communist ideas in writing in her first novel, *We the Living*, which was published in 1936. Rand began plotting the book in 1930 and did not complete it until 1933.¹³ Despite its working title of *Air Tight: A Novel of Red Russia*, Rand insisted that the theme of the book was not simply the denunciation of communism in Russia. She asserted, "*We the Living* is not a novel 'about Soviet Russia.' It is a novel about Man against the State."¹⁴ The novel's theme may have been broader than anti-communism, but the medium through which Rand chose to express this theme was Russian communism, which she denounced implicitly and explicitly throughout. Rand's own comments on *We the Living* also support the idea that the novel was intended to serve as a condemnation of communist Russia. When a potential publisher criticized *We the Living* for having too much background, Rand responded, "[T]he background is more essential than the plot itself for the story I want to tell. Without it — there is no story. It is the background that creates the characters and their tragedy If one does not understand the background — one cannot understand them."¹⁵ When the editor asserted that the

¹³Sciabarra, 99.

¹⁴Ayn Rand, qtd. in Paxton, 100.

¹⁵Ayn Rand to Jean Wick, 27 October 1934, in *Letters of Ayn Rand*, 17.

American public did not need so much background because it had an adequate understanding of life in Russia, Rand's reply further evidenced the anti-communistic agenda of her book:

The American reader has no knowledge of it [life in Russia] If he had — we would not have the appalling number of parlor Bolsheviks and idealistic sympathizers with the Soviet regime, liberals who would scream with horror if they knew the truth of Soviet existence. It is for them that the book was written.¹⁶

About the writing of *We the Living*, Rand also asserted, "No one has ever come out of Soviet Russia to tell it to the world. That was my job."¹⁷ Rand even agreed with the characterization of her book as the "*Uncle Tom's Cabin* of Soviet Russia."¹⁸ Despite Rand's claim that *We the Living* was not "about Soviet Russia," her intention was to reveal the horrors of Russian communism to the American public. Further refuting her prior claim that her life did not influence her philosophy, Rand's personal exposure to Russian communism provided material for the anti-communistic beliefs exhibited in the novel.

While working on *We the Living*, Rand became frustrated with her slow progress and began to write another work in 1931.¹⁹ She penned this new work, a screenplay titled *Red Pawn*, during her spare time at her job in RKO's wardrobe department.²⁰ Rand wanted to sell the screenplay so she could cease working at RKO and devote her time entirely to her novel.²¹ Like

¹⁶Ibid., 17-18.

¹⁷Ibid., 18.

¹⁸Ibid., 19.

¹⁹Barbara Branden, 105.

²⁰Paxton, 84,93.

²¹Barbara Branden, 105.

We the Living, *Red Pawn* illustrates the evils of Soviet communism.²² The screenplay details the story of a beautiful woman who becomes the mistress of the communist commandant of a prison for political prisoners with the hope of freeing her husband, who is one of the inmates.²³

The screenplay portrays the destructive nature of communism by showing how it ruins capable men. For example, Commandant Kareyev, the head of the prison on Strastnoy Island, is not portrayed as an unintelligent barbarian, but rather as an intelligent idealist whom communism has destroyed. While the commandant learned to hate death during war, peace under communism “gave him Strastnoy Island and a contempt of life.”²⁴ Kareyev, however, falls in love with the protagonist Joan and realizes the error of his communist ways. He learns to hate the word “us,” which represents the collective. As he explains to Joan:

“We — the people, the collective, the millions. I’ve fought on barricades — for us. I’ve fought in the trenches. I’ve shot at men and men have shot at me. For us, for them, for those countless others somewhere around me, those whom I’ve given a lifetime, my every moment, my every thought, my blood. For us. I don’t want to hear the word. Because now — it’s for me. You came here — for me. You’re mine. I won’t share that with anyone on earth. Mine. What a word that is — when you begin to understand it!”²⁵

Although Joan spurns Kareyev at the conclusion of the screenplay, and although he will be executed for his counterrevolutionary activities, he is happy because he has learned to live before his death. This dramatic ending juxtaposes the tremendous sense of life that individualism

²²Sciabarra, 98.

²³Barbara Branden, 105.

²⁴Ayn Rand, *Red Pawn*, in *The Early Ayn Rand*, ed. Leonard Peikoff (New York: New American Library, 1984), 113.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 141.

instills in its supporters with the innate tragedy of communism.

Red Pawn was revolutionary in another aspect of its anti-communistic message which dealt with the relationship between communism and religion.²⁶ Religion was traditionally viewed as an opposing force to communism, but Rand saw them as two similar evils. She argued that both religion and communism insisted that man's place was below a higher power: in religion man was below God, and in communism man was below the state. In *Red Pawn* Rand symbolically shows this concept through the prison which holds political deviants. The prison was previously a monastery, implying that communism has succeeded religion as a force dominating man's mind and spirit. Rand viewed organized religion as a form of collective mysticism that destroyed the individual and his sense of reason. The association of the church with communism, therefore, equated the two institutions with the immoral collective battle against the individual.

In early 1932 Universal Studios purchased *Red Pawn*, paying Rand \$700 for the story and an additional \$800 for the screenplay.²⁷ Universal then traded the screenplay to Paramount pictures in exchange for an E. Phillips Oppenheim story.²⁸ Rand's unique anti-communist work never reached the American public, however, because Paramount did not produce the screenplay.²⁹ Despite this setback, Rand was not deterred and continued to crusade against communism. In the winter of 1940, Rand and her husband, actor Frank O'Connor, had just

²⁶Sciabarra, 98.

²⁷Barbara Branden, 106.

²⁸Ibid., 107.

²⁹Ibid., 108.

finished campaigning for Republican presidential candidate Wendell Willkie. Although Rand was disappointed with Willkie for compromising his previously adamant support of capitalism, her campaign work allowed her to meet several important conservatives.³⁰ Channing Pollack, a novelist and playwright, was one of the most important of these acquaintances.

Soon after the conclusion of the Willkie campaign, Rand wrote to Pollack about the need for reform on behalf of personal freedom, which she believed was especially important in the arts: “Our literature, our theater and all our arts are now one gigantic conspiracy against the mind. Not even merely against the great mind, but against any mind, against the mind as such. Down with thought and up with emotion. When thought is destroyed — anything goes.”³¹ Rand also linked the current state of the arts to communism, asserting, “It’s not surprising, therefore, that most of our editors and other literary authorities are Red. I don’t believe that they are all in the pay of Moscow. The trouble is deeper and more vicious than that. We are living in the century of the Second-Rater. The second-rater is always pink — by sheer instinct.”³² To combat the leftist state of the arts in the United States, Rand suggested to Pollack that they form a group advocating a philosophy and morality in support of capitalism. This was the first step in Rand’s paradoxical involvement with a collective organization to secure a morality which ardently advocated individualism. Pollack supported Rand’s plan and volunteered to be the official organizer because he had a more influential name.³³ He decided to test the idea on a lecture tour,

³⁰Ibid., 160-162. Channing Pollack, 7 March 1941, in *Letters of Ayn Rand*, 45.

³¹Ayn Rand to Channing Pollack, 8 June 1941, in *Letters of Ayn Rand*, 49.

³²Ibid., 50. Branden, ed., *The Journals of Ayn Rand*, 375.

³³Barbara Branden, 162. Channing Pollack, 7 March 1941, in *Letters of Ayn Rand*, 44.

instructing individuals interested in joining the organization to write to him. Rand and Pollack did not believe they needed a large number of individuals to start the organization; as Rand explained, “I am firmly convinced that if we could get together — as you suggested in our conversation — about fifty men of good reputation and standing in their various professions, who share our political convictions — the most important step would be accomplished right there.”³⁴ Rand’s emphasis on recruiting a small number of strong individuals somewhat reconciled her involvement with a collective organization by emphasizing individuals, rather than a large mass of members. Although Rand and Pollack did not believe many members were necessary, they received an overwhelming response — after a few months on his lecture tour, Pollack had over 8,000 letters of inquiry awaiting him.³⁵

Rand wrote about the need for such an organization devoted to restoring freedom to the arts in a letter entitled “To All Innocent Fifth Columnists.” While Rand never published the essay, it is likely that she intended it to be directed to the potential members of the organization she wanted to form with Pollack.³⁶ Rand sent a copy to Pollack while he was on his lecture tour, advising that, “I shall be only too happy if you can find that you can use any of it in your lectures — with or without credit. I do not care at all about credit, but I care tremendously to have these ideas spread in every possible manner.”³⁷ Pollack responded positively to “To All Innocent Fifth Columnists,” so it was likely that he included some of its content in his lectures to recruit

³⁴Ayn Rand to Channing Pollack, 7 March 1941, in *Letters of Ayn Rand*, 45.

³⁵Barbara Branden, 163.

³⁶David Harriman, ed., *The Journals of Ayn Rand*, 355.

³⁷Ayn Rand to Channing Pollack, 7 March 1941, in *Letters of Ayn Rand*, 44.

members for their future organization.

In her typically dramatic fashion, Rand began “To All Innocent Fifth Columnists” with a stunning indictment: “You who read this represent the greatest danger to America.”³⁸ Rand argued that these men were so dangerous because they were destroying the American ideals of capitalism and freedom without even knowing it. She further admonished them: “Perhaps it is your right to destroy civilization and bring dictatorship to America, but not unless you understand fully what you are doing.”³⁹ Rand believed that it was her job to educate these men about their unknowingly harmful actions. She offered a test for her readers to see if they were one of the so-called “Fifth Columnists.” Among the five questions Rand posed were: “Are you the kind who considers ten minutes of his time too valuable to read this and give it some thought?” and “Are you the kind who sits at home and moans over the state of the world — but does nothing about it?”⁴⁰ Rand thought that her readers’ acknowledgment of their harmful tendencies was a crucial first step in enacting change.

After urging her readers to evaluate their past actions, she expected conversion. She argued that the individual could change society, a common theme in her future works. She resorted to the history of her homeland to provide her with evidence: “You say, what can one man do? When the communists came to power in Russia, they were a handful of *eighteen* men.

³⁸Ayn Rand, “To All Innocent Fifth Columnists,” circa 1940, in *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 345.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 345.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 346.

Just *eighteen*. In a country of [170,000,000] population.”⁴¹ Rand insisted that her readers could no longer remain passive and indifferent to their own views and actions. She wrote, “There is no personal neutrality in the world today . . . Repeat that and scream that to yourself. In all great issues there are only two sides — and no middle And so, you are against Totalitarianism — or you are for it. There is no intellectual neutrality.”⁴² Rand further argued that passivity and indifference of individuals only aided totalitarianism, which she believed was responsible for the success of Hitler and Stalin.

Rand believed that action was necessary to combat totalitarianism, and paradoxically advocated the formation of a collective movement to fight for the individual. Rand proclaimed the goals of her group:

We propose to unite all men of good will who believe that Freedom is our most precious possession, that it is greater than any other consideration whatsoever, that no good has ever been accomplished by force, that Freedom must not be sacrificed to any other ideal, and that *Freedom is an individual, not a collective entity*.⁴³

Rand thought that widespread acceptance of these ideas was not enough to ensure their success, reasoning that, “We are the majority, but we are scattered, unorganized, silenced and helpless To be heard, we must be organized.”⁴⁴ Rand, who was such an ardent individualist that it seemed anathema for her to organize a collective group, acknowledged that it was against the nature of “the most independent, the hardest working, the most productive members of society”

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid., 348.

⁴³Ibid., 352.

⁴⁴Ibid. Rand, “The Only Path to Tomorrow,” *Reader’s Digest* (January 1944): 88.

to join organizations because they usually worked alone.⁴⁵ Rand concluded, however, that without an organized outlet for individuals to unite in their similar beliefs, freedom and individuality would be in grave danger. While Rand's proposal to battle for individuality through a collective organization seemed paradoxical, it also undermined her own belief that individuals were the true fountainheads of progress because it insisted that a collective organization was superior.

Although Rand never published "To All Innocent Fifth Columnists," she wrote a somewhat similar article entitled "The Only Path to Tomorrow," which *Reader's Digest* did publish in 1944. As with "To All Innocent Fifth Columnists," Rand directed this article to those interested in forming an organization with herself and Pollack. Rand intended "The Only Path to Tomorrow" to serve as a warning to Americans about the danger of totalitarianism. As she had argued in "To All Innocent Fifth Columnists," Rand again proclaimed that education and awareness among the American public were necessary to combat totalitarianism: "The greatest threat to mankind and civilization is the spread of the totalitarian philosophy. Its best ally is not the devotion of its followers but the confusion of its enemies. To fight it, we must understand it."⁴⁶ Rand again assumed the responsibility of urging her readers to fight for individuality and deny the belief that sacrificing the individual for the common good of the state was noble.

In addition to condemning totalitarianism, Rand also presented her readers with a new code of morality. She argued, "Degrees of human ability vary, but the basic principle remains the same: the degree of a man's independence and initiative determines his talent as a worker and

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ayn Rand, "The Only Path to Tomorrow," *Reader's Digest* (January 1944): 88.

his worth as a man.”⁴⁷ Rand’s ideas on evaluating an individual’s worth differed radically from traditional Judeo-Christian concepts. Instead of valuing qualities emphasized in Christianity, such as altruism and compassion, Rand believed that a man’s ability to assume responsibility for himself was his greatest moral obligation. Rand contrasted her ideal man, whom she labeled “active man,” with his antithesis, “passive man.” She described the former as “the producer, the creator, the originator, the individualist,” whereas the latter was “the parasite who expects to be taken care of by others, who wishes to be given directives, to obey, to submit, to be regulated, to be told.”⁴⁸ In a bold move, Rand had linked her new code of morality to personal freedom and associated the altruistic aspects of Judeo-Christian beliefs, which supported the idea of caring for all men in need, to totalitarianism. Rand also reaffirmed her belief in the superiority of the individual to the collective in her comparisons of “active” and “passive” man. “Active man” clearly relied on himself and his own ability to succeed in life, whereas “passive man” could not stand alone and instead had to rely on the collective to care for him. Rand could clearly communicate her message of the glory of the individual through her writing, which enabled her to communicate on an individual basis with her readers. Through her writings Rand did not need collective organizations. On the contrary, she could condemn them because the exchange of intellectual ideas through writing was an exchange between two individuals — the writer and the reader.

After publishing “The Only Path to Tomorrow” and collaborating with Pollack, Rand was very enthusiastic about founding their new organization. She believed that others had the same

⁴⁷Ibid., 89.

⁴⁸Ibid., 89-90.

uncompromising attitude as herself. After speaking with a potential member, Dr. Ruth Alexander, Rand reflected:

She was quite enthusiastic about our project, and she says that she will join us — but one condition: that our organization remain as direct and uncompromising in its “ideology” as I outlined it to her. She explained that she will not belong to any group which evades or puss-foots [sic] on major issues, such as the issue of defending capitalism. I assured her that this was precisely our attitude.⁴⁹

Rand was also excited about the possibility of enlisting Henry Ford in her plans. In a response to a letter of DeWitt Emery, who was also involved with planning the organization, Rand wrote, “I was quite simply thrilled to hear that you had spoken about me to Henry Ford and read to him parts of my ‘Manifesto.’ I am a natural-born hero worshipper, but I find damn few heroes to worship — and he’s one of my last few, because he is a symbol of capitalism at its best.”⁵⁰ Her admiration of Ford reflects another paradox in Rand’s life. Although Ford was a tremendous capitalist and individualist, he, not unlike Rand, also associated himself with the collective in a seemingly contradictory way. Ford endorsed collectivism through his outspoken anti-Semitism and his sympathy with the Nazi cause of fascism, a brutal form of totalitarianism. Despite Ford’s shortcomings, Rand wanted to arrange a meeting with him, asserting, “I am perfectly certain that if I could speak to him for half an hour (uninterrupted), I could get him to back us and we wouldn’t need anything or anybody else.”⁵¹ Rand, however, never did meet with Ford and he never affiliated himself with her proposed organization.⁵²

⁴⁹Ayn Rand to Channing Pollack, 23 June 1941, in *Letters of Ayn Rand*, 53.

⁵⁰Ayn Rand to DeWitt Emery, 10 September 1941, in *Letters of Ayn Rand*, 58.

⁵¹*Ibid.* Rand to Channing Pollack, 8 June 1941, in *Letters of Ayn Rand*, 48.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 59. Rand to Channing Pollack, 1 May 1941, in *Letters of Ayn Rand*, 4.

Rand's enthusiasm about starting her organization quickly turned to disappointment after only a few preliminary meetings. She remarked, "It was a complete disaster. . . . What disillusioned me was the realization that they were really nonphilosophical, and that education would have to begin with them."⁵³ In forming the organization, Rand wrote:

We must avoid all generalities, compromises, "softening up" and attempts to pacify or appeal to too many different viewpoints Unless we stick very clearly to our basic principles — and keep these principles clear-cut — we will become another ineffectual patriotic organization."⁵⁴

In preparation for her first group meetings, Rand had written an 8,000 word "manifesto" elaborating on the ideas presented in "The Only Path to Tomorrow," which she hoped all members would sign before releasing it to the public. Rand expected that her manifesto would greatly influence American society. "When it is released," she gushed, "I think it should bear the signatures of our Committee — let us be the signers of a new Declaration of Independence."⁵⁵

She was, in time, sorely dissatisfied with the group, which never signed or released her manifesto. Rand found her recruits to be too cynical, unintellectual, timid, and compromising. Although she had devoted much time to planning the organization and had been hopeful about its impact, Rand had proved to be too great of a radical individualist for running with a pack.

Rand chose Hollywood's film industry as her next venue for promoting her ideas. Rand had always had an interest in the movies — even as a young woman in Russia Hollywood had captured her imagination. She wrote about Hollywood, although she had never seen it, in one of

⁵³Ayn Rand, qtd. in Barbara Branden, 163.

⁵⁴Ayn Rand to Channing Pollack, 8 June 1941, in *Letters of Ayn Rand*, 48.

⁵⁵Ayn Rand to Channing Pollack, 1 May 1941, in *Letters of Ayn Rand*, 46.

her earliest recorded essays entitled “Hollywood: American City of Movies.” That piece reflected her romantic image of tinsel town: “The estates surrounding Los Angeles speak of marvelous sums of money made by their owners who work in the movies. Try to find a single one of them whose net worth is less than tens of thousands of dollars. Yet they often started from rags.”⁵⁶ Still, Rand was already critical of certain aspects of the film industry, attacking the owners and presidents of film studios, who “like obedient slaves . . . strive to satisfy every desire of the omnipotent public.”⁵⁷

Although Rand became most involved in Hollywood in the 1940s, she had a long history in a film industry that made movies an attractive medium for her to communicate her anti-communistic ideas. After arriving in America, Rand did not wait long to experience the Hollywood of which she had dreamed — within months she had moved from her relatives’ house in Chicago to Hollywood. Rand took up residence in the Studio Club, an inexpensive boarding house for women attempting to start careers in the film industry. It was later home to such notables as Marilyn Monroe and Donna Reed.⁵⁸ Rand had obtained from her relatives’ friend a letter of introduction to a woman who worked in publicity for Cecil B. DeMille, and upon arriving in Hollywood she immediately sought employment at his studios.⁵⁹ After meeting with the lady in publicity, Rand sadly realized that the studio did not have a position for her. As she

⁵⁶Ayn Rand, “Hollywood: American City of Movies,” in Michael S. Berliner, ed., *Russian Writings on Hollywood* (Los Angeles: Ayn Rand Institute Press, 1999), 79.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 81.

⁵⁸Barbara Branden, 75.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 73.

was leaving, however, she saw DeMille himself, who was her favorite director, driving past.⁶⁰ Rand was gawking so noticeably that DeMille stopped the car and introduced himself. He was immediately fond of Rand, whom he called “Caviar,” and invited her to visit the set of his film *The King of Kings* for a few days before offering her a position as an extra, thus beginning Rand’s temporary acting career.⁶¹ Rand soon earned a position as a screenwriter, which enabled her to write with her still limited abilities in English. Throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s, she held various jobs in the film industry before writing and selling her own screenplay *Red Pawn*.

By the 1940s, Rand had earned herself a name in Hollywood, and she wished to use her influence to curb communism within the film industry. Rand found allies in her cause within the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals. This organization of actors and others involved in the film industry enlisted such members as John Wayne, Gary Cooper, Walt Disney, Adolphe Menjou and Cecil B. DeMille.⁶² After attending her first meeting, the members unanimously elected Rand to the board. In 1947, Rand wrote a pamphlet called “Screen Guide for Americans” for the Alliance. Rand’s pamphlet, which she intended to be “a guide for all those who do not wish to help advance the cause of communism,” enumerated ways in which the film industry could cease its unknowing promotion of communism.⁶³ As she had argued before

⁶⁰*Russian Writings on Hollywood*, 83; Barbara Branden, 77.

⁶¹*Ibid.*

⁶²Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 127.

⁶³Ayn Rand, “Screen Guide for Americans,” in *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 356.

in "To All Innocent Fifth Columnists" and "The Only Path to Tomorrow," Rand again asserted that it was not due to conscious support that communism thrived, but through indifference and ignorance. She warned:

The influence of Communists in Hollywood is due, not to their own power, but to the unthinking carelessness of those who profess to oppose them. Some dangerous Red propaganda has been put over in films produced by innocent men, often by loyal Americans who deplore the spread of Communism throughout the world and wonder why it is spreading.⁶⁴

Rand offered her guide "to the independent judgement and for the voluntary action of every honest man in the motion picture industry," with the hopes that she could raise their awareness and curb what she viewed to be a dangerous trend in the American cinema.

Rand wanted film makers to be aware of the sneaky nature of communists, affirming that, "It is the avowed purpose of Communists to insert propaganda into movies."⁶⁵ She urged film makers to assume responsibility for detecting such Communist propaganda or other political messages in their films. She argued that if film makers did not have time to study politics and become familiar with propagandist techniques, they should not hire "Reds."⁶⁶ In addition to detecting Communist propaganda, Rand pressed film makers to support values associated with capitalism. She beseeched them not to criticize industrialists, wealth, or the profit motive. While there were countless examples of hard-working and honorable self-made men in America, "all too often industrialists, bankers, and businessmen are presented on the screen as villains,

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Ibid., 357.

⁶⁶Ibid.

crooks, chiselers or exploiters," she observed.⁶⁷ Rand also advocated that film makers avoid themes which she believed promoted communist ideas, such as the deification of the "common man."⁶⁸ Rand asserted that in America's democracy all men are equal and therefore may only be "common" in regards to their mediocre qualities. She declared that America, as opposed to a communist country, was "not the land where one glories or is taught to glory in one's mediocrity."⁶⁹

Rand's screen guide received tremendous attention from the film industry and the media. The Motion Picture Alliance distributed the guide to various production companies. It was also published in *Plain Talk*, a politically conservative magazine, and reprinted on the front page of the *New York Times's* entertainment section.⁷⁰ The response to the guide within the Motion Picture Alliance, however, was not as supportive as Rand had hoped. As Rand had been considered too radical within the previous organization she joined, some members of the Motion Picture Alliance judged Rand's ideas as too extreme. Although the Alliance distributed her screen guide, Rand was again disillusioned with her intellectual allies and resigned from the Alliance's board.⁷¹

Rand continued her anti-communist crusade within the film industry on an even grander scale in the fall of 1947. In October, the Motion Picture Alliance hosted the House Un-American

⁶⁷Ibid., 258.

⁶⁸Ibid., 361-362.

⁶⁹Ibid., 362.

⁷⁰David Harriman, ed., *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 355; Whitfield, 131.

⁷¹Paxton, 126.

Activities Committee's (HUAC) investigation of communism in the film industry with the hopes that the committee would publicize the Red taint in American films.⁷² During the 1940s, when Russia's army was battling the Third Reich, Hollywood was in a "rose period" during which it produced some films clearly sympathetic to communism. HUAC called Rand and other members of the film industry, including Ronald Reagan, Gary Cooper and Adolphe Menjou, to testify as friendly witnesses.⁷³ Rand agreed to testify on the condition that she be allowed to speak freely without censorship. She specifically wished to speak about the two films *The Song of Russia* and *The Best Years of Our Lives*. HUAC agreed to Rand's conditions, and she testified on October 20, 1947.⁷⁴

After a few introductory questions, Rand began her testimony on *The Song of Russia*. She first defined the term "propaganda," stating, "I use the term to mean that Communist propaganda is anything which gives a good impression of communism as a way of life. Anything that sells people the idea that life in Russia is good and that people are free and happy would be Communist propaganda."⁷⁵ Rand then proceeded to attack the film as communist propaganda that offered an absurd representation of life in communist Russia. Rand criticized the unrealistic wealth and freedom that even Russian peasants enjoyed in the film. She also attacked the movie's depiction of religion within communism as portrayed through the village priest:

⁷²Whitfield, 127-128.

⁷³Barbara Branden, 200.

⁷⁴Ibid.; David Harriman, ed., *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 371.

⁷⁵Ayn Rand, Testimony before the House Un-American Activities Committee, 20 October 1947, in *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 372.

The priest was in the village scenes, having a position as a sort of constant companion and friend of the peasants, as if religion was a natural and accepted part of that life. Well. Now, as a matter of fact, the [policy on] religion in Russia in my time was, and I understand it still is, that for a Communist Party member to have anything to do with religion means expulsion from the Party . . . For a non-Party member it was permitted, but it was so frowned upon that people had to keep it secret if they went to church.⁷⁶

Rand further noted that religious weddings had to be performed privately in homes and in secrecy from the community for fear that an employer would discover the affair.⁷⁷ She then attacked the film's unrealistic wedding, a grand affair between an American and a Russian peasant that is complete with a large church ceremony.

Rand further criticized *The Song of Russia's* comparison of the Russian communists to American revolutionaries who fought for the United States' independence. In the film, the Russian protagonist refuses to leave her country and decides that she must fight for communism. An American then responds to the Russian, "“You are a fool, but a lot of fools like you died on the village green at Lexington.””⁷⁸ Rand found the comparison ridiculous and offensive, growling, “Now, I submit that this is blasphemy . . . They [the America revolutionaries] were fighting for the rights of man. To compare them to someone fighting for a slave state, I think is dreadful.”⁷⁹ While some Americans tried to excuse this favorable portrayal of the fight for communism as necessary for the war effort in World War II, Rand rejected this defense: “I don't believe that the morale of anybody can be built up by a lie. If there was nothing good that we

⁷⁶Ibid., 375.

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Ibid., 376.

⁷⁹Ibid.

could truthfully say about Russia, then it would have been better not to say anything at all.”⁸⁰ America may have been allied with Russia when *The Song of Russia* was made, but Rand did not see this as a valid excuse for blatantly misrepresenting life in communist Russia.

After critiquing *The Song of Russia*, Rand responded to various questions about life in communist Russia. Congressman John McDowell (R-PA) remarked, “You paint a very dismal picture of Russia. You made a point about the number of children who were unhappy. Doesn’t anybody smile in Russia any more [sic]?”⁸¹ Rand responded that people did not generally smile in Russia, explaining that if “they do, it is privately and accidentally. Certainly, it is not social. They don’t smile in approval of their system.”⁸² Rand also conveyed to the committee the difficulty of explaining the horrors of totalitarian government to people who have not experienced it. She remarked:

It is almost impossible to convey to a free people what it is like to live in a totalitarian dictatorship. I can tell you a lot of details. I can never completely convince you, because you are free They [Russians] try to live a human life, but you understand it is totally inhuman. Try to imagine what it is like if you are waiting for the doorbell to ring, where you are afraid of anything and everybody, living in a country where human life is nothing, less than nothing, and you know it.”⁸³

In a time when many Americans knew little about Soviet communism, Rand used her personal experience to try to convince the congressmen of its dreadful nature.

As she had with other organizations dedicated to fighting communism, Rand soon grew

⁸⁰Ibid., 380.

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Ibid.

disillusioned with HUAC. She wanted to speak about *The Best Years of Our Lives*, which was a tremendously popular film that had won seven Academy Awards in 1946.⁸⁴ When she agreed to testify, HUAC assured her that she would be able to speak about *The Best Years of Our Lives*, but after she concluded her testimony about *The Song of Russia* and her personal experiences in Russia, the committee reneged on its promise.irate, Rand complained until committee member Parnell Thomas relented and assured her that she would be permitted to testify further in a day or two.⁸⁵ The committee, however, never recalled Rand. Very disappointed that she was not able to testify about *The Best Years of Our Lives*, she later noted that:

The Best Years of Our Lives was the big hit of the period and the movie I particularly wanted to denounce. . . . It was much more important to show the serious propaganda about America — not some musical about Soviet Russia that would not fool anybody; and that had failed at the box-office. . . . But the Congressmen told me that they would not dare come out against a movie about an armless veteran — there would be a public furor against them.”⁸⁶

Rand was not only upset with the committee’s refusal to let her testify as promised, but with the committee members themselves. Calling them “intellectually out of their depth, and motivated by a desire for headlines,” Rand judged the committee to be incompetent as well as insincere.⁸⁷ Once again, Rand had found an experience with an organization devoted to anti-communism to be sorely disillusioning.

Although Rand may have been disappointed with HUAC, she did make a noticeable

⁸⁴David Harriman, ed., *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 369, 381.

⁸⁵Barbara Branden, 201. *Activities Committee Report*, qtd in Whitfield, 131.

⁸⁶Ayn Rand, qtd in *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 381.

⁸⁷Barbara Branden, 201. *Letter*, 26 March 1949, in *Letters of Ayn Rand*, 834.

impact on the committee and its findings. Her influence was evident in the committee's 1951 report, which stated, "We are less interested in a film that has [a] communist context, where a few hundred people will come and see it We are more interested in an ordinary John-and-Mary picture where there is only a drop of progressive thought in it."⁸⁸ Despite her considerable disappointment with HUAC's hearings in Los Angeles, Rand's participation was not completely wasted because her ideas impacted HUAC's final report.

Rand's aggravation with the HUAC hearings continued even after the committee left Los Angeles. She was angered that many friendly witnesses were suffering career setbacks because of their participation in the hearings. Rand had been accustomed to accepting the consequences of her outspoken anti-communism in the past; she could not find work in the movie industry after publication of the anti-communistic *We the Living*, even though her play *The Night of January 16th* had just completed a successful run on Broadway.⁸⁹ Rand did not suffer personally from her HUAC testimony because she was busy writing her next novel, *Atlas Shrugged*, and no longer tried to find employment in the movie industry. When she learned, however, that other friendly witnesses were being denied opportunities in films because of their involvement with HUAC, she deemed it necessary to act in their defense: "If we do not defend the people who take the risk of standing openly on our side, we shall defeat our cause completely, and we shall deserve to be defeated."⁹⁰ Despite her continued disillusionment with groups organized to fight communism, she believed that one loud, organized protest would "be much more effective than any

⁸⁸House Un-American Activities Committee Report, qtd in Whitfield, 131.

⁸⁹Barbara Branden, 127.

⁹⁰Ayn Rand to Edna Lonigan, 26 March 1949, in *Letters of Ayn Rand*, 434.

Washington hearing.”⁹¹

Although she was angry about the treatment of other HUAC friendly witnesses, Rand did not form an organization to defend them. Her involvement in anti-communism in the 1930s and 1940s had shown her the limitations and frustrations of working within a movement. In her unions with Channing Pollack, the Motion Picture Alliance, and HUAC, Rand had repeatedly alienated her colleagues with her extreme and unrelenting ideas. She, in turn, was offended by their compromising nature. After three failed attempts at working within an organized anti-communist group, perhaps Rand had learned that she was too individualistic and far too uncompromising. If so, the lesson gained was temporary, for Rand's greatest involvement with an organized movement was yet to come.

⁹¹Ibid.

CHAPTER 2

ORGANIZED OBJECTIVISM: THE COLLECTIVIZATION OF INDIVIDUALISM

With the advent of suburbia, Levittown, the baby boom, and fast food chains such as McDonalds, an atmosphere of conformity enveloped the United States during the 1950s. Despite all of this remarkable postwar growth and affluence, many Americans became discontented beneath the rosy appearance of their suburban lives. The couple described in Sloan Wilson's popular novel *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* epitomized this newfound angst in America:

By the time they had lived seven years in the little house on Greentree Avenue in Westport, Connecticut, they both detested it. There were many reasons, none of them logical, but all of them compelling. For one thing, the house had a kind of evil genius for displaying proof of their weaknesses and wiping out all traces of their strengths.¹

The couple's aimlessness and discontent were symbolized by a crack in their living room wall shaped in the form of a question mark, which was the result of the husband throwing a vase in a fit of anger. The couple in Wilson's novel represented the problems of countless affluent Americans whose lives suddenly felt meaningless despite their cheery exterior. It was in this atmosphere of discontent that Rand reached out to hundreds of thousands of Americans through her literature with an arresting message emphasizing the glory and splendor of the individual. While Rand had also connected with many readers in the 1940s — over 500,000 copies of *The Fountainhead* were sold between its publication date in 1943 and 1948 — it was not until the

¹Sloan Wilson, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955), 3.

1950s that Objectivism evolved as a social movement.² During that time the greatest paradox of Rand's life dawned when her radically individualistic philosophy became an organized, or serving collective movement.

The roots of Objectivism as a movement sprouted in early 1950 when Rand's husband, actor Frank O'Connor, noticed a fan letter which he deemed exceptional. He encouraged Rand to reply and after a brief correspondence, the author of the letter, a young psychology student at UCLA named Nathan Blumenthal, met Rand and O'Connor at their ranch outside of Los Angeles on March 2, 1950.³ Blumenthal stayed at Rand's house until late into the night discussing her philosophy. He also told Rand about his friend Barbara Weidman who shared his ideas about *The Fountainhead*, and Rand extended an invitation to her to visit as well. Blumenthal and Weidman began to visit Rand and O'Connor regularly on Saturday nights, often arriving at eight o'clock and staying until five in the morning.⁴ The four became very close, increasing their meetings to a few times each week. Rand even showed them the opening chapter of her next novel, *Atlas Shrugged*. At the end of the summer of 1951, Blumenthal and Weidman decided to leave Los Angeles to continue their respective studies in psychology and philosophy at New York University.⁵ Rand sorely missed her intellectual soulmates and, quickly tiring of California, returned to New York City.

²James T. Baker, *Ayn Rand* (Boston: Tawyne Publishers, 1987), 16.

³Nathaniel Branden, *My Years with Ayn Rand*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1999), 32-33.

⁴*Ibid.*, 43.

⁵Barbara Branden, 249. *My Years with Ayn Rand*, 159; Scott McLemee, "The Heirs of Ayn Rand: Has Objectivism Survived?", *Lingua Franca* (September 1999): 47.

In New York Rand labored full-time on *Atlas Shrugged* while Frank worked as a florist.⁶ Also in New York Blumenthal and Weidman married, with Rand and O'Connor serving as best man and matron of honor. Blumenthal also changed his name to Nathaniel Branden, a more American name that perhaps reflected the new identity he was beginning to assume. Rand continued to have late night discussions with the Brandens, and their group expanded. The Brandens brought friends who shared their admiration of *The Fountainhead*. Meeting at Rand's apartment every Saturday evening, she nicknamed the group the "Class of '43," after the year *The Fountainhead* was published.⁷ The "Class of '43," which jokingly called itself "The Collective" in contrast to their individualistic philosophy, was a distinguished group of young intellectuals. Among its ranks was an economic consultant named Alan Greenspan, known to the group as "A.G." or "The Undertaker" because of his ultra serious personality.⁸ Other members included Joan Mitchell, who had been married to Greenspan for a short time, and Leonard Peikoff, Barbara Branden's cousin who also studied philosophy at NYU. Rand would read chapters of her manuscript, *Atlas Shrugged*, and discuss philosophy and current events until early in the morning.

During this time Rand was so consumed with writing *Atlas Shrugged* that she rarely left her apartment. She was also isolating herself from conservatives, with whom she grew

⁶Baker, 17.

⁷Barbara Branden, 254.

⁸*My Years with Ayn Rand*, 159; Scott McLemee, "The Heirs of Ayn Rand: Has Objectivism Gone Subjective?", *Lingua Franca* (September 1999): 47.

increasingly disaffected.⁹ Her hatred of racism contributed to her rejection of the conservative movement; she believed that any ideology integrating the defense of capitalism alongside racism served to discredit capitalism and aided in its destruction.¹⁰ Rand also despised the pairing of conservatism and religion, which she reflected in her criticism of William F. Buckley's *National Review*. Rand considered Buckley's publication, which he launched in 1955, the "worst and most dangerous magazine in America."¹¹ Her hatred of the *National Review* is evidenced in a letter to Senator Barry Goldwater, who was a fan of Rand's writing:

[T]he fact that the *National Review* poses as a secular magazine, while following a strictly religious "party line," can have but one purpose: to slip religious goals by stealth on those who would not accept them openly, to "bore from within, to tie Conservatism to religion, and thus to *take over* the American Conservatives."¹²

The combination of Rand's self-induced isolation while working on her manuscript and her disappointment with and even hatred of the mainstream conservative movement in America caused her to rely heavily upon "The Collective" for support and intellectual kinship. Through this mutually dependent relationship between "The Collective" and Rand, Objectivism as an organized force emerged.

Crafting *Atlas Shrugged* proved emotionally and physically draining, but Rand believed the benefits of publishing the novel would far surpass the pain of writing. In 1943, when Rand

⁹Barbara Branden, 252.

¹⁰Sciabarra, 348-349.

¹¹ John Phillips Stierman, *Ayn Rand and Objectivism: Her Role in American Thought*, (University of Northern Iowa, 1986), 15; Ayn Rand, Interview with Alvin Toffler, In *Playboy Interviews*, (Chicago: Playboy Press, 1967), 119..

¹²*Letters of Ayn Rand*, 565, 571.

started planning *Atlas Shrugged*, she explained her reasons for writing:

I was disappointed in the reaction to “The Fountainhead.” A good many reviewers missed the point. A friend called me to sympathize, and said I should write a non-fiction book about the idea back of “The Fountainhead.” While I was talking, I thought, “I simply don’t want to do this. What if I went on strike?” My husband and I talked about that all night, and the idea was born then.”¹³

In *Atlas Shrugged* the world collapses when the men of mind decide to strike because they no longer wish to live and work in a society that loathes them because of their achievements. Rand shifted to full-time work on the novel in April 1946, and it took her ten years to complete it.¹⁴

She worked diligently, explaining to an acquaintance, “I am working on it full blast, day and night, which is my usual way of working.”¹⁵ The messages Rand wanted to convey through *Atlas Shrugged* evolved as she worked on the project:

Atlas Shrugged started with the idea of the plot-theme: the mind goes on strike. At first I saw it more as a political and social novel; I remember thinking that it will not present any new philosophical idea, that the philosophy will be the same as *The Fountainhead*. It will be individualism, only now I’ll show it in the political-economic realm Then I started working on the philosophic aspect of it, with the assignment to myself to concretize the theme. Why is the mind important? What specifically does the mind do in relationship to human existence? It’s then I began to see that this is going to be a very important and new philosophical novel. There was a great deal more to say than merely what I had said in *The Fountainhead*.¹⁶

Rand clearly intended *Atlas Shrugged* to be more than literature — she wanted it to be a manifesto detailing many aspects of Objectivism. This is particularly evident in the inclusion of

¹³Ayn Rand, in Lewis Nichols, “Talk with Ayn Rand,” *New York Times*. 15 October 1957, 16 (VII).

¹⁴David Harriman, ed., *The Journals of Ayn Rand*, 389; Nichols, 16.

¹⁵Ayn Rand to John L.B. Williams, 21 March 1947, in *Letters of Ayn Rand*, 363.

¹⁶Ayn Rand, qtd in David Harriman, ed., *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 389.

a sixty page speech by the story's hero, John Galt, which reads like a philosophical treatise rather than fiction.¹⁷

Rand published *Atlas Shrugged* in 1957 with the hope that it would unsettle American society. As she wrote to a fan who was overwhelmed by the novel:

You say that it [*Atlas Shrugged*] frightened you. It was meant to. But — forewarned is forearmed. We are still free to stop the collectivist-altruist trend that is destroying the world. My purpose was not merely to portray the horror of altruism, but to show the kind of life and character men have the capacity to achieve on the proper, rational, morality. My purpose is not just to defeat Wesley Mouch, but to make John Galt possible.¹⁸

While Rand may have succeeded in influencing individual readers, the literary community did not warmly receive *Atlas Shrugged*. The *New York Times* published a scathing review of Rand's novel. Its author, Granville Hicks, sniffed that *Atlas* was not "in any literary sense a serious novel."¹⁹ He further criticized the author's motives:

[L]oudly as Miss Rand proclaims her love of life, it seems clear that the book is written out of hate Perhaps most of us have moments when we feel that it might be a good idea if the whole human race, except for us and the few nice people we know, were wiped out; but one wonders about a person who sustains such a mood through the writing of 1,168 pages and some fourteen years of work.²⁰

Once again, it appeared to Rand that reviewers had not understood her purpose. She had once stated, "Ayn Rand, old or new, *is* her novels, and doesn't want to be anything else."²¹ With the

¹⁷Barbara Branden, 267.

¹⁸Ayn Rand to Frederica McManus, 14 December 1957, in *Letters of Ayn Rand*, 498-499.

¹⁹Granville Hicks, "A Parable of Buried," *New York Times*, 13 October 1957, 4 (VII).

²⁰*Ibid.*, 5.

²¹Ayn Rand to Archibald Ogden, 23 April 1949, in *Letters of Ayn Rand*, 437.

harsh reception of *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand personally felt rejected and misunderstood. Soon she became dispirited.²²

As Rand slipped into depression in the fall of 1958, her intellectual soulmate, Nathaniel Branden, undertook a project to move Objectivism into a new realm — the collective. He decided to offer a lecture course entitled “Basic Principles of Objectivism” in January 1958.²³ Rand approved of the idea, but as a business venture it was Branden’s independent project.²⁴ In order to further separate his endeavor from Rand, he omitted her name in the course title.²⁵ Along with his wife, Branden prepared a mailing list from the “intelligent” letters that Rand had received from her admirers. He informed all potential students that he would offer twenty lectures given once a week for a total of seventy dollars. Rand’s only direct participation in the course was during the question and answer section at the end of each lecture, when she fielded questions from the class.

Branden’s project was an immediate success, with twenty-eight students enrolled in the winter/spring session of 1958.²⁶ The popularity of his lecture series grew at a quick rate with forty-five students enrolled in the fall of 1958 and sixty-five in February of 1959. His students were of various backgrounds and ages; the youngest was a sixteen year old high school student and the eldest was a sixty-six year old physics professor, with their average age in the early

²²*My Years with Ayn Rand*, 208.

²³*My Years with Ayn Rand*, 205.

²⁴Barbara Branden, 307.

²⁵*My Years with Ayn Rand*, 206.

²⁶*Ibid.*

thirties.²⁷ Many students later became instrumental in forming the Libertarian Party.²⁸ The success of the lecture series, which was soon offered under the name Nathaniel Branden Institute (NBI), marked the beginning of Objectivism as an organized movement. For the first time students of Objectivism had an organized forum to learn more about the philosophy and forge intellectual and social bonds with one another. Consequently, it was Branden, not Rand, who truly started Objectivism as a movement. He even claimed that Rand acknowledged his achievement when she admitted, “My novels created the readers, Nathaniel Branden Institute created the movement.”²⁹

The prestige of Objectivism and NBI grew rapidly during the early 1960s. By 1963, *Atlas Shrugged* had sold 1.2 million copies.³⁰ Ayn Rand’s influence was evident in various aspects of American society, including higher education. In 1963 at Yeshiva University, a professor of English gave his freshmen an assignment to comment on the book that had most influenced them. Twenty-five percent wrote about a Rand novel.³¹ By the fall of 1963, NBI courses were offered in forty-four cities in the United States and Canada. College clubs formed on campuses around the United States, and NBI opened a publishing wing, NBI Press, which was followed by the NBI book service. In 1964, NBI even offered its course “The Basic Principles of Objectivism” on board a United States Polaris submarine located in the mid-Atlantic. By 1966,

²⁷Barbara Branden, 307.

²⁸*My Years with Ayn Rand*, 208.

²⁹Ayn Rand, qtd in *My Years with Ayn Rand*, 208.

³⁰Paxton, 164.

³¹Barbara Branden, 313.

NBI had a mailing list of over 60,000 people, and over 5,000 had already attended its lecture courses.³² Students enrolled in NBI courses in over eighty cities in the U.S. and Canada, and NBI was negotiating for future courses in Greenland, Germany, Vietnam, and the Marshall Islands. In New York City alone, 200 people enrolled in “The Basic Principles of Objectivism” and two-thirds of those students labeled themselves professionals. One year later, in 1967, NBI moved into 8,000 square feet of office space in the Empire State Building.³³

Objectivism attracted a variety of students who wanted to study its philosophy for different reasons. Most were fairly well-off and in their twenties or thirties.³⁴ Many were attracted to Objectivism because it seemed like a truly rational philosophy. They had seen the inconsistency of a capitalist economy mixed with a morality of altruism, and Objectivism offered them a new, consistent code of ethics. As Nathaniel Branden explained, “[*The Fountainhead*] dramatized for me, and no doubt for many young people seeking a rational view of life, that the moral and the practical are not in conflict, provided one knows what is, in fact, moral. This was hardly what I was hearing from my peers and elders.”³⁵ One student of Objectivism, who was a retail store executive in Manhattan while he was involved with the movement, echoed Branden’s sentiments: “I came across *The Fountainhead* in college, and I almost flunked out because I

³² William F. O’Neil, *With Charity Toward None: An Analysis of Ayn Rand’s Philosophy*, (Totowa, NJ: Littlefield, Adams, & Co., 1977), 5.

³³ McLemee, 48.

³⁴ Dora Jane Hamblin, “The Cult of Angry Ayn Rand,” *Life* (7 April 1967): 94.

³⁵ *My Years with Ayn Rand*, 16..

couldn't put it down I had found my spiritual home."³⁶ Objectivism also catered to those who were dedicated to their work. As Rand explained:

Friendship, family life and human relationships are not primary in a man's life. A man who places others first, above his own creative work, is an emotional parasite; whereas, if he places his work first, there is no conflict between his work and his enjoyment of human relationships.³⁷

Rand's new code of morality reassured men and women who were dedicated to their professions, even at the expense of personal relationships, that they were making the most ethical choice.

Objectivism's simplicity also made it very appealing to many people. Rand admitted, "I most emphatically advocate a black and white view of the world."³⁸ Objectivism, based upon Aristotle's theory of non-contradiction, was very simple in nature. It asserted that contradictions cannot exist, but rather people only perceive them to exist because they accept a faulty premise.³⁹ Objectivism therefore eliminated complicated ambiguities by urging its students to simply do what is rational, assuring them that this is always the correct action. A woman who was involved with Objectivism as a student at Bryn Mawr remembered that "*The Fountainhead* seemed so moral to me, so upright and clean and clear and logical. . . . I was brought up a Roman Catholic and I had begun to think religion was hypocritical, full of myths. I suppose I was looking for another code, and she gave it to me. It was so simple and direct."⁴⁰ Although Granville Hicks,

³⁶Qtd in Hamblin, 95.

³⁷Ayn Rand, Interview with Alvin Toffler, in *Playboy Interviews* (Chicago: Playboy Press, 1967), 108.

³⁸Ibid., 111-112.

³⁹Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* (New York: Signet, 1957), 934.

⁴⁰Qtd in Hamblin, 98.

the *New York Times*'s reviewer of *Atlas Shrugged*, may not have fully understood Rand's ideas, he appeared to be correct in asserting that the "spirit" of Rand's work "is calculated to appeal to those who feel that life could and should have more meaning than they have experienced."⁴¹ In a world that seemed very complicated and bewildering to many, Objectivism presented its students with a rational and direct "cosmovision."

When Branden began NBI, Rand was deep in depression and very disenchanted with the state of American society. The success of NBI and Branden himself, however, pulled Rand out of her depression.⁴² Rand once again was ready to fight for Objectivism, which was always a passionate struggle for her. As she explained:

All values have to be gained and kept by man, and, if they are threatened, he has to be willing to fight and die, if necessary, for his right to live like a rational being. You ask me, would I be willing to die for Objectivism? I would. But what is more important, I am willing to *live* for it — which is much more difficult.⁴³

Rand continued to believe that she could and should change American society with Objectivism: "It is ideas that determine social trends, that create or destroy social systems. Therefore, the right ideas, the right philosophy, should be advocated and spread."⁴⁴ Rand consequently took a more direct approach in bringing Objectivism to the American people by writing nonfiction rather than fiction.

Rand's transition piece as she shifted from fiction to nonfiction was her book *For the*

⁴¹Hicks, 5.

⁴²Barbara Branden, 308.

⁴³Ayn Rand, in *Playboy Interviews*, 114.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 122.

New Intellectual, which emphasized basic premises of her philosophy. Rand did not consider philosophy to be a scholarly exercise, but rather a need of every human being. She therefore offered a clear and concise text on philosophy for the individual American, and *For the New Intellectual* was the first step Rand took in meeting this need. The book consisted of a nonfiction introductory essay followed by key concepts from her previously published fiction which read more like nonfiction than fiction. In the introductory essay, Rand claimed that “America is culturally bankrupt” and she called upon her readers to be the new generation of intellectuals to save their beloved country.⁴⁵ She further characterized America’s intellectual crisis, stating that a “country without intellectuals is like a body without a head. And that is precisely the position of America today.”⁴⁶

In addition to critiquing America’s intellectual establishment, Rand criticized the antagonistic relationship between intellectuals and businessmen:

The professional businessman and the professional intellectual came into existence together, as brothers born of the industrial revolution. Both are the sons of capitalism — and if they perish, they will perish together. The tragic irony will be that they will have destroyed each other, and the major share of the guilt will belong to the intellectual.⁴⁷

Rand thought that capitalism was the only means to ameliorate the sorry state of American intellectualism, arguing that “a free mind and a free market are corollaries.”⁴⁸ She asserted that

⁴⁵Ayn Rand, *For the New Intellectual: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand* (New York: Signet, 1961), 11.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 12.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 13.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 25.

intellectuals had “sold [the businessman] out” and attacked him as an exploiter while they failed to recognize “the difference between the earned and unearned.”⁴⁹ She accepted the necessity of a revolution to resolve this problem: “The world crisis of today is a moral crisis — and nothing less than a moral revolution can resolve it: a moral revolution to sanction and complete the political achievement of the American revolution.”⁵⁰ Rand consequently called upon her readers to serve as the “New Intellectuals” who would close the rift between intellectuals and businessmen in order to preserve the American ideals of freedom and capitalism.

As NBI soared to new heights in the 1960s and Rand made a transition into nonfiction and presented herself as a philosopher and writer, instead of simply a novelist, she attracted media attention. Articles in popular magazines and newspapers commented on Rand and Objectivism, often presenting it as a cult movement. A *Newsweek* article entitled “Born Eccentric” attempted to highlight the ridiculousness of NBI and its participants, alluding to the cultish nature of Rand’s group: “[a]lthough mysticism is one of the nastiest words in her polemic arsenal, there hasn’t been a she-messiah since Aimee McPherson who can so hypnotize a live audience.”⁵¹ The article also attacked Rand’s philosophy as “ruthless self-interest” and labeled *Atlas Shrugged* a “masochist’s lollipop.” It concluded on a gentler note, stating that Rand was simply “born eccentric.” Such a characterization of Rand, although certainly not as harsh as many, was equally detrimental because it dismissed her and Objectivism as a quirk rather than as a serious philosopher leading a moral and intellectual awakening.

⁴⁹Ibid, 27.

⁵⁰Ibid., 54.

⁵¹“Born Eccentric.” *Newsweek*. (27 March 1961), 105.

The controversy surrounding Rand did not always discredit her, however, and at times offered her opportunities to reach those whom she hoped to convert to the “New Intellectuals.” During the early 1960s Rand spoke at Harvard, Johns Hopkins, Wisconsin, Columbia, MIT, Sarah Lawrence, Brown and Michigan.⁵² On March 26, 1961, she delivered her first annual Ford Hall speech in Boston. The Ford Hall Forum, a nonpartisan group which hosted nationally distinguished speakers, sponsored the lecture.⁵³ She found the experience to be delightful and was impressed with the forum’s “remarkably intellectual atmosphere, which is very rare these days.”⁵⁴ In general, though, Rand did not like public speaking, believing her Russian accent hindered her effectiveness.⁵⁵ Refusing to remain passive while newspapers and magazines assailed her ideas, she continued to speak publicly when she had the opportunity. Rand also made her mark in the field of public speaking because her style contrasted with the norm in the early sixties. As Objectivist Harry Biswanger explained:

We were just coming out of the fifties, the Leave it to Beaver, Father Knows Best era — when no one would take a stand on anything, when making a value-judgement was considered a sin. But she was there making the most dramatic and passionate statements, saying [that] everything was simple, absolute, clear.⁵⁶

Rand’s notoriety also earned her appearances on the Tonight Show three times in 1967 and 1968. Her appearances sparked the largest mail response in the history of the television show. Only

⁵²*My Years with Ayn Rand*, 253.

⁵³Michael Berliner, ed., *Letters of Ayn Rand*, 585.

⁵⁴Ayn Rand to Louis P. Smith, 31 March 1961, in *Letters of Ayn Rand*, 585.

⁵⁵Paxton, 160.

⁵⁶Harry Biswanger, qtd in Paxton, 161.

twelve of the letters received were negative.⁵⁷

Although Rand used her public appearances to convey her messages to Americans, she continued to regard writing as the most effective medium to reach people. She focused more on political and social commentaries, which showed the application of her philosophy to everyday life. Rand clarified her reasons for writing about political issues:

When I came here from Soviet Russia, I was interested in politics for only one reason — to reach the day when I would not have to be interested in politics. I wanted to secure a society in which I would be free to pursue my own concerns and goals, knowing that the government would not interfere to wreck them, knowing that my life, my work, my future were not at the mercy of the state or of a dictator's whim. This is still my attitude today. Only today I know that such a society is an ideal not yet achieved, that I cannot expect others to achieve it for me, and that I, like every other responsible citizen, must do everything possible to achieve it.⁵⁸

Rand worked to achieve her goal of securing personal freedom by writing a weekly column in the *Los Angeles Times* in 1962. Her first column on June 17, 1962 was the article “Introducing Objectivism,” which offered a brief overview of her philosophy. She emphasized the importance of objective reality, explaining that “facts are facts, independent of man’s feelings, wishes hopes or fears.”⁵⁹ She also introduced her code of morality, which dictated that man was an end in himself and that the “pursuit of his own rational self-interest and of his own happiness is the highest moral purpose of his life.”⁶⁰ Rand argued that her new moral code was necessary to save

⁵⁷Barbara Branden, 325.

⁵⁸Rand in *Playboy Interviews*, 120-121.

⁵⁹ Ayn Rand, *The Ayn Rand Column: Written for the Los Angeles Times*, edited with an introduction by Peter Schwartz (New Milford, CT: Second Renaissance Books, 1991), 3.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 3-4.

America from its current crisis, asserting that the nation needed to choose between “a new morality of rational self-interest” or suffer the dire consequences of maintaining its current altruistic morality.⁶¹

In many of her columns Rand dispensed political commentary. One of her most common topics was the statist tendencies of the Kennedy administration. Rand viciously attacked Kennedy’s goal of social gains:

“Social gains,” as the term is used today, does not mean the economic progress earned by a particular group in free trade on a free market, but unearned advantages or handouts granted to it by the government, which means: extorted by legalized force from the productive effort of other groups.⁶²

Rand thought that Kennedy’s adamant promotion of improving the public good through government action was especially dangerous and could lead to a totalitarian government.⁶³ Rand did not, however, blame all of America’s ailments on the liberal Kennedy administration. She also blamed conservatives and liberals for the mixed economy that she believed was causing the country to crumble. “The issue which neither camp dares to identify,” she stated, “is the fact that a ‘mixed economy’ is an unstable, untenable mixture of capitalism and socialism.”⁶⁴ In her estimation America was settling for a mediocre blend of freedom and statism that would ultimately lead to its self-destruction. Most of the responsibility for this crisis she placed on the conservatives because they were the people who should have been relentlessly advocating

⁶¹Ibid., 4.

⁶²Ibid., 9.

⁶³Ibid., 5.

⁶⁴Ibid., 65.

capitalism but instead settled for a compromise.

Although the majority of Rand's columns focused on current political events, she did take the opportunity to assess American culture in general. In an article entitled "The New Enemies of 'The Untouchables,'" Rand showered abuse on the critics of her favorite television show, which she deemed "profoundly moral."⁶⁵ It was important for Rand to address television programming, which she viewed as the battle for American minds over the airwaves. She argued that the current trends in television programming reflected the disastrous state of morality. To her the various dramas that focused on "man's helplessness or loneliness or essential depravity" were anathema.⁶⁶ She juxtaposed these dramas with what she believed constituted the only moral programming on television:

Crime stories and Westerns are the last remnant of romanticism on our airwaves. No matter how primitive their terms, they deal with the most realistic issue of man's life: the battle of good and evil. They present man as a purposeful being who is able to choose his goals, to fight for his values, to resist disaster, to struggle and to win.⁶⁷

Rand argued that critics, afraid to sanction anything that made a confident, unapologetic ethical stand, attacked "The Untouchables" because of its "moral absolutism," which further reflected the nation's sorry moral state. By applying her philosophy to a contemporary social issue, Rand reached Americans through a topic with which they were familiar and could relate — television.

In her article "Through Your Most Grievous Fault" Rand addressed another important social issue that had touched nearly all Americans — the death of Marilyn Monroe. Rand had

⁶⁵*Letters of Ayn Rand*, 598; *The Ayn Rand Column*, 12.

⁶⁶Rand, "The New Enemies of the Untouchables," in *The Ayn Rand Column*, 13.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 12.

greatly admired Monroe and in her article she praised the actress's sense of life, calling Monroe "an image of pure, innocent, childlike joy in the living." She added that Monroe's apparent suicide was a chilling commentary about American society: "[i]f ever there was a victim of society, Marilyn Monroe was that victim — of a society that professes dedication to the relief of the suffering, but kills the joyous."⁶⁸ Mediocre people who harbored a "profound hatred of life, success and of all human values" because they knew they could not achieve what others had earned, were the torchbearers of this sordid morality. Rand asserted that it was these immoral men who were responsible for Monroe's death: "[a]nyone who had ever felt resentment against the good for being good and has given voice to it, is the murderer of Marilyn Monroe."⁶⁹ Rand's bold indictment of who killed America's most beloved actress encouraged her readers to evaluate their actions and codes of morality in an attempt to exonerate themselves from her accusation.

Rand enjoyed writing her newspaper column and rated it very successful in reaching Americans with her messages. The column apparently evoked a strong, positive response from its readers, as Rand explained in a letter to them: "In his column of July 29, Mr. Nick B. Williams, editor of the *Los Angeles Times*, mentioned that he was swamped with letters about my column and that 'the count has been running solidly for Miss Rand.'"⁷⁰ Rand reflected on the challenges she encountered in her work:

From the start of my career, the issue I found hardest to fight — harder than the opposition of sundry leftists — was the blind, malevolent stubbornness of men who kept telling me that my work was too intellectual and that 'the public doesn't think.'

⁶⁸Rand, "Through Your Most Grievous Fault," in *Ayn Rand Column*, 30.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 32.

⁷⁰Rand, "An Open Letter to My Readers," in *Ayn Rand Column*, 33.

I have heard it from men in every medium of communication: from book publishers, from stage, screen, TV and radio producers, from newspapermen, from professors, from politicians.

She thanked her readers who wrote in support of the column, stating, “You have helped me to prove once more a conviction of mine which is shared by few of today’s ‘intellectuals,’ namely: that the public does think.”⁷¹ Rand viewed her column as a stunning success because she not only reached a large and diverse audience with her message, but also because she evoked intelligent responses from it, which indicated that she had prompted her readers to evaluate society’s and their own codes of morality.

In addition to writing her column, Rand started another journalistic endeavor in 1962 when she and Nathaniel Branden published *The Objectivist Newsletter*. Launched as a four page monthly newsletter with brief articles addressing Objectivist issues, in 1966 the pamphlet evolved into the more substantial publication, *The Objectivist*. *The Objectivist* quickly became a popular publication; it boasted a subscription rate of 15,000 copies in 1967 and over 21,000 in 1968. Rand and various leaders at NBI, such as Nathaniel and Barbara Branden and Alan Greenspan, contributed articles to the journal. Like Rand’s column in the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Objectivist* offered commentary on various political and social issues in the United States. For example, both Rand and Greenspan criticized the FDA as an ineffective government regulatory agency.⁷² Several articles focused on education reform and advocated such measures as a tax-credit for education which would allow parents to have greater control over where their children attended school. *The Objectivist* also criticized government sponsorship of higher

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Stierman, 76.

education and research, preaching that such involvement corrupted education.

Through books, such as *For the New Intellectual*, her *Los Angeles Times* column, and *The Objectivist*, Rand gained fame as a nonfiction writer. Like her intellectual mentor, Aristotle, Rand succeeded in bringing a concrete philosophy to the people.⁷³ She offered her readers a refreshing perspective, since her views were unlike those of other writers and critics of the time. She also succeeded in reaching readers with her philosophy in the way she preferred most — on an individual basis. Through her writing she was able to communicate individually with her readers, presenting her philosophy for them to receive and question alone. With these various nonfiction writings, Rand influenced scores of thousands.

Though Rand reached new heights as a nonfiction writer, the success of Objectivism as a movement could not last forever. In late 1968, NBI, which embodied the Objectivist movement, began to collapse. The origins of its crisis trace back to January 1955, when Rand and Branden started an affair.⁷⁴ Branden assumed greater responsibility for initiating the romance, explaining: “I was clearly the initiator, much more so than I had been previously.”⁷⁵ When they first discovered their love for each other, both informed their spouses. Announcing that they did not want to have a sexual affair because of their age difference (Branden was twenty-five years Rand’s junior), they asked their spouses to simply allow them to spend one afternoon and one evening alone together each week.⁷⁶ The spouses consented and appeared to understand the

⁷³Merrill, 88.

⁷⁴*My Years with Ayn Rand*, 136.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*

⁷⁶Barbara Branden, 258-259.

request, aware that Rand and Branden were intellectually and emotionally very close to each other. After a few weeks had passed, Rand requested another meeting with Nathaniel, Barbara and O'Connor during which she decreed that a sexual affair between Nathaniel and herself was right and proper. Rand's views on sex explain why she did not necessarily consider an affair outside of wedlock to be immoral:

Sex must not be anything other than a response to values I think the question of an affair or a marriage depends on the knowledge and the position of the two persons involved and should be left up to them. Either is moral, provided only that both parties take the relationship seriously and that it is based on values.⁷⁷

According to Rand's ideas on the morality of sexual relations, her affair with Branden would be ethical since it reflected a love based on philosophical values.

Rand's strange marriage to O'Connor may also help others to understand her affair. Her husband never appeared to be very intellectual and was not heavily involved in Objectivism, so it is possible that Rand was unfulfilled in her marriage.⁷⁸ Frank had the spirit that Rand admired but most likely not the intellect, which she was able to find in her young lover. In essence, O'Connor was similar to Roark, the protagonist of *The Fountainhead* who embodied the Objectivist spirit but not its philosophical underpinnings, whereas Branden was more like *Atlas Shrugged's* John Galt, who fully comprehended all philosophical aspects of his moral code. O'Connor also differed greatly from Rand's conception of the ideal man. Rand respected businessmen and producers who were dedicated foremost to their careers. O'Connor, by contrast, never seriously pursued a career, in part because Rand's career needs, such as moves

⁷⁷Rand in *Playboy Interviews*, 109-110.

⁷⁸Barbara Branden, 273.

across the country, made this difficult. In Rand's novels even the strongest women are dominated by the men they love — in *The Fountainhead* Roark actually rapes his future wife, Dominique. In Rand's marriage she assumed the role of the more assertive partner, although, according to her writings which project her ideal relationship, it seems unlikely that Rand wanted to be the aggressor in her sexual relationship. Through her affair with Nathaniel, Rand may have hoped to force O'Connor into becoming more assertive by refusing to sanction the affair, or perhaps she simply wanted to pursue an intimate relationship with a man who seemed closer to her ideal.⁷⁹

Rand did not succeed in forcing O'Connor to assert himself; both O'Connor and Barbara unhappily consented to their spouses' sexual affair. Rand and Branden did offer their spouses some consolation, however, promising that their affair could only last a few years because of the age difference and claiming that it did not affect the way they felt about their spouses. In fact, the affair lasted until 1958, when they placed it on hold because of Rand's depression.⁸⁰ In 1964, however, Rand approached Branden and told him that she wanted to resume their affair.⁸¹ By then, unknown to either Barbara or Ayn, Nathaniel had already fallen in love with a student of Objectivism named Patrecia Scott and had begun an affair with her.⁸² Branden held Rand at a distance by dissembling that he could not resume their affair because his marriage to Barbara was

⁷⁹Barbara Branden, 273.

⁸⁰*My Years with Ayn Rand*, 219.

⁸¹Barbara Branden, 331.

⁸²*Ibid.*, 332.

on the verge of complete failure.⁸³ Rand then tried to counsel Barbara and Nathaniel, both of whom she cared for deeply. Her efforts were to no avail — Barbara and Nathaniel separated during the summer of 1965.⁸⁴

Once separated from his lawful wife, Nathaniel needed another reason to rebuff Rand. In 1968 he wrote her a letter that honestly explained that their age difference was an insurmountable obstacle to resuming sexual relations but that he wanted to remain close friends and “intellectual comrades.”⁸⁵ She read the rejection and was irate before she finished.⁸⁶ Rand promptly severed personal relations with her ex-lover. She even canceled a production of *The Fountainhead* that NBI Theater had been planning for over a year, although work with Nathaniel on the tremendously popular *Objectivist* did continue.⁸⁷ Barbara was overcome by guilt when she first learned of Nathaniel’s affair with Patrecia, realizing that Nathaniel had resisted telling Rand about it. After Nathaniel’s letter, Rand decided to make Barbara the heir to her estate if O’Connor’s death preceded her own.⁸⁸ In August 1968, Barbara finally confessed to Rand that Nathaniel and Patrecia had been involved in a sexual affair ever since 1964. Barbara also admitted that she had known about the affair for two years and had helped hide it from Rand.⁸⁹

⁸³Ibid., 333.

⁸⁴Ibid., 333-334.

⁸⁵Nathaniel Branden, *Judgement Day: My Years with Ayn Rand* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1989), 375-376.

⁸⁶*My Years with Ayn Rand*, 333-335.

⁸⁷Barbara Branden, 333-335, 341-342.

⁸⁸Ibid., 343.

⁸⁹*My Years with Ayn Rand*, 341.

Barbara's confession to Rand set into motion a chain of events that resulted in the demise of NBI and Objectivism as a movement. Disappointed that Barbara had helped conceal Nathaniel's deceit, Rand managed to forgive her. She was not, however, so lenient with Nathaniel, from whom she demanded a public confession: that he had acted immorally and inconsistently given the principles of Objectivism. She also demanded that he turn over full ownership of NBI to Barbara without compensation, that he transfer his 50% ownership of *The Objectivist* to Rand without compensation, and that he sever his affiliation with Objectivism.⁹⁰ Branden agreed to these draconian conditions as long as he could maintain rights to the articles he had written and published in *The Objectivist*, which had been copyrighted out of convenience in the name of the magazine.⁹¹ Rand verbally promised that he could maintain the rights, so Nathaniel signed an agreement complying with her conditions on August 25. Later, Rand reneged on her part of their bargain, refusing to let Nathaniel have the rights to his writings.⁹² In early September, soon after the falling-out between Nathaniel and Rand, Barbara spoke with a few friends about Rand's increasingly reckless threats against Nathaniel.⁹³ When Rand heard of these remarks, she wanted Barbara to appear before several members of the remaining "Collective" in a makeshift trial for her comments. Barbara refused and severed herself from Objectivism. She immediately began to liquidate NBI; she canceled lectures, sold equipment and found a replacement for the institution's Empire State Building lease. The liquidation generated

⁹⁰Barbara Branden, 343; *Judgement Day: My Years With Ayn Rand*, 389..

⁹¹*Judgement Day: My Years With Ayn Rand*, 390.

⁹²*Ibid.*, 349.

⁹³*Ibid.*, 351.

only \$45,000, which Barbara, Nathaniel and Wilifred Schwartz, NBI's and *The Objectivist's* business advisor, divided equally.⁹⁴

As Barbara physically dismantled NBI, the social network of Objectivism underwent equally devastating destruction. All of "The Collective" sided with Rand against Nathaniel and Barbara; only a few dared to even speak to the Brandens to find out their version of what had transpired.⁹⁵ The general population of students of Objectivism was puzzled by the schism between Rand and the Brandens and wanted to know what had happened. Rand answered their questions in an article entitled "To Whom It May Concern" in the May issue of *The Objectivist*, which was not published until October, 1968. In it, Rand announced:

I have permanently broken all personal, professional and business association with them [Nathaniel and Barbara Branden], and have withdrawn from them the permission to use my name in connection with their commercial, professional, intellectual or other activities.⁹⁶

Rand then proceeded to list the reasons why she had broken all relations with the Brandens. She stated that for the past three years she had "observed a disturbing change in Nathaniel Branden's intellectual attitude" which indicated a decreased interest in Objectivist philosophical issues. She argued that Nathaniel became consumed by NBI Theater's planned production of *The Fountainhead* and neglected his intellectual and business obligations. She also asserted that Nathaniel's character had changed in various, unfortunate ways. Rand stated that he worked with "an attitude that can best be described as authority-flaunting, unserious, and, at times,

⁹⁴*Judgement Day: My Years With Ayn Rand*, 397; Barbara Branden, 350.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, 394.

⁹⁶Rand, "To Whom it May Concern," *The Objectivist* 7(5) (May 1968), 1.

undignified,” which was unacceptable behavior for an Objectivist.⁹⁷

Although Rand concealed the crucial fact that she and Branden had been having a sexual affair that he terminated, she did allude to their personal relationship. Referring cryptically to his desire to stop their affair and his failure to explain the reason fully, Rand described Nathaniel as “unable or unwilling to identify the motivation of some of his actions or the nature of his long-range goals” and as a man who “was acting on the basis of unidentified feelings.”⁹⁸ Rand added that Barbara and Nathaniel had been deceiving her about a personal matter (his affair with Patricia Scott, no doubt) for two years. Rand explained her outrage at this deceit:

At my lowest opinion of Mr. Branden’s behavior, I had not expected conscious deception on his part. . . . I have never accepted, condoned or tolerated conscious breaches of morality. This was the last of the evidence which caused me to break all professional, as well as personal, association with him.⁹⁹

Associate Lecturers at NBI supported Rand’s excommunication of the Brandens in a postscript announcement following the article, which was entitled “For the Record.” The Objectivists wrote: “Because Nathaniel Branden and Barbara Branden, in a series of actions, have betrayed fundamental principles of Objectivism, we condemn and repudiate these two persons irrevocably, and have terminated all association with them and with Nathaniel Branden Institute.”¹⁰⁰ Among the signers of this declaration were Leonard Peikoff and Alan Greenspan.

Nathaniel and Barbara were both outraged at the libelous content of Rand’s article. They

⁹⁷Ibid., 1.

⁹⁸Ibid., 3.

⁹⁹Ibid., 4.

¹⁰⁰“For the Record,” *The Objectivist* 7(5) (May 1968): 9.

consulted a lawyer who was unfamiliar with Objectivism and assured them that a libel suit could easily be won in their favor.¹⁰¹ They elected not to sue, however, because of the emotionally draining time commitment involved in such a suit. Instead, they responded to Rand's article with a pamphlet of their own entitled "Answer to Ayn Rand." In the pamphlet, they defended themselves against Rand's accusations. In his response, Nathaniel briefly mentioned his affair with Rand. He noted that in "To Whom it May Concern," Rand had commented on a written statement that Nathaniel had given her that she claimed was "so irrational and so offensive."¹⁰²

Nathaniel chose to explain the meaning and content of those remarks to his readers:

Miss Rand has given me the right to name that which I infinitely would have preferred to leave unnamed, out of respect for her privacy. I am obliged to report what was in that written paper of mine, in the name of justice and of self-defense That written statement was an effort not to terminate my relationship with Miss Rand, but to save it in some mutually acceptable form. . . . It was a tortured, awkward, excruciatingly embarrassed attempt to make clear to her why I felt that an age distance between us of twenty-five years constituted an insuperable barrier, for me, to a romantic relationship.¹⁰³

Nathaniel's admission that Rand wanted a "romantic relationship" with her most admired intellectual colleague, becoming irrational when he did not feel mutually, furthered the controversy and confusion surrounding the schism.

The break between Rand and the Brandens was devastating to Objectivists and to Objectivism as a movement. In addition to destroying NBI and the infrastructure of Objectivism, the schism damaged the philosophy of Objectivism as well. Students of Objectivism who

¹⁰¹*Judgement Day: My Years with Ayn Rand*, 404.

¹⁰²"To Whom it May Concern," 3.

¹⁰³Nathaniel Branden, qtd. in *Judgement Day: My Years with Ayn Rand*, 405.

refused to accept Rand's explanation of what had transpired and to believe that Nathaniel had not been at fault, were considered apostates to Rand and Objectivism.¹⁰⁴ The real apostate, however, was Ayn Rand herself since she demanded that students make a judgment about the guilt of Nathaniel without knowing all of the facts about what had actually occurred. Neither Nathaniel nor Rand ever publicly mentioned the affair, but some students could sense from Rand's "To Whom It May Concern" and Nathaniel's "Answer to Ayn Rand" that they were not given all the facts. Since students were also not permitted to question Rand's opinions on Nathaniel, they were left the option of either accepting Rand's verdict out of trust and with incomplete information, or removing themselves from any formal affiliations with Objectivism, such as study groups or other remnants of the NBI social network.

Rand had once written:

I cannot emphasize strongly enough the most important thing in life is never to surrender one's concept of what is right, what life could and should be. If your concept of the right is rational, you will be able to achieve it in your own life and, perhaps influence others to achieve it.¹⁰⁵

Her actions now contradicted her philosophy; she wanted students of Objectivism to condemn Nathaniel with incomplete knowledge, which did not seem rational to many of them. Rand's dictatorial demands of allegiance from those who wished to consider themselves Objectivists, combined with the acknowledged moral shortcomings of Nathaniel, meant that Objectivists no longer had flawless heroes to admire. Nathaniel and Rand had been the embodiments of

¹⁰⁴ *Judgement Day: My Years with Ayn Rand*, 406.

¹⁰⁵ *Letters of Ayn Rand*, 599.

Objectivism, and both now seemed fraudulent to many followers.¹⁰⁶ With the closure of NBI, Rand's refusal to let any of her associates create another organization that promoted Objectivism, and the wholesale disillusionment of NBI students, Objectivism as a movement came apart.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 407.

CHAPTER 3

LEGACIES OF AYN RAND AND OBJECTIVISM

In theory, if not in actuality, Rand was an exceptionally individualistic woman whose philosophy demanded that its adherents be equally individualistic. As Howard Roark, one of Rand's protagonists, stated:

[T]he mind is an attribute of the individual. There is no such thing as a collective brain. An agreement reached by a group of men is only a compromise or an average drawn upon many individual thoughts. It is a secondary consequence. The primary act — the process of reason — must be performed by each man alone. We can divide a meal among many men. We cannot digest it in a collective stomach. No man can use his lungs to breathe for another man. No man can use his brain to think for another. All the function of body and spirit are private. They cannot be shared or transferred.¹

The organized Objectivist movement, however, did not always attract such strong individuals. Many students were drawn to Objectivism because they were impressed with the confidence and clarity of Rand's messages — perhaps she embodied the strength they did not possess and coveted. Rand's fictional heroes were men and women who were so confident in the justness of their unique philosophies and moral codes that they were not even shaken by defying all of society. To students of Objectivism, Rand and Branden embodied these same qualities.² Rand preached that “[i]n order to be in control of your life, you have to have a purpose — a productive purpose.”³ She believed that a man without purpose “cannot tell what is or is not important to

¹Ayn Rand, *The Fountainhead* (New York: A Signet Book, 1971), 679.

²Nathaniel Branden, *Judgement Day: My Years With Ayn Rand*, 407.

³Rand in *Playboy Interviews*, 106.

him . . . can enjoy nothing. He spends his life searching for some value which he will never find.”⁴ Objectivism filled this void of purposelessness for many people — it became their productive purpose. And yet Objectivism was never intended to serve as a crutch to uphold those who were too weak to stand on their own.

It was apparent that many students involved in organized Objectivism did not fully understand Rand’s philosophy and were in fact using it as a crutch. In a disastrous appearance on the television program *Donahue*, a woman remarked that she used to read Rand’s works and had been active in Objectivism until she realized that Rand wanted to create a “me-first society.”⁵ Although the woman did not realize it in her confession, she revealed that she had clearly misunderstood the fundamental tenets of Objectivism while she was participating in its movement. In nearly all of her works Rand unabashedly advocated rational self-interest, which included the idea that each person in society needed to be his own first priority and responsibility. Rand blatantly advocated a “me-first society,” and the fact that a disciple could have considered this a revelation after having studied Objectivism illustrated that some followers did not grasp the philosophy that they believed they were upholding. Another supposed student of Objectivism wrote a letter to Rand stating that she and her friends revered Rand and would follow her blindly. Rand replied:

My philosophy advocates *reason*, not faith, it requires men to *think* — to accept nothing without a full, rational, firsthand understanding and conviction — to claim nothing without factual evidence and logical proof. A *blind follower* is precisely

⁴Ibid., 107.

⁵Phil Donahue, *Interviewing the Great Minds of America: Phil Donahue Interviews Ayn Rand and Milton Friedman*, 60 min., No Free Lunch Distributors, 1994, videocassette..

what my philosophy condemns and what I reject. Objectivism is not a mystic cult.⁶

Men and women who preferred blindly following Rand and Objectivism may not have been the students Rand wanted, but they were many of the students Objectivism received. After the dissolution of organized Objectivism, they were the only men and women who remained affiliated with the cause. Only those who would make a judgment “without a full, rational, firsthand understanding and conviction” in condemning Nathaniel Branden were allowed to retain any affiliation with Rand and her philosophy.

Rand refused to believe that Objectivism could have ever been dogma, stating:

I have found that Objectivism is its own protection against people who might attempt to use it as a dogma. Since Objectivism requires the use of one’s mind, those who attempt to take broad principles and apply them unthinkingly and indiscriminately to the concretes of their own existence find that it cannot be done.⁷

Rand’s belief may have been true of the philosophy, but not of the organized Objectivist movement. Many students of Objectivism were attracted to the “authority” of Rand’s works and, not really understanding the philosophy, “blindly” followed it in search of adding more meaning to their lives. During the schism between Rand and Branden, Rand herself defied the principles of Objectivism, demanding that her followers condemn her longtime intellectual partner without the facts necessary to make a rational decision. Thus, organized Objectivism and Rand’s participation in it ultimately contradicted and discredited the philosophy of Objectivism.

Objectivism as an organized movement failed. Rand understood its failure and refused to permit any of her intellectual colleagues to form another organization that would promote

⁶Letters of Ayn Rand, 592.

⁷Rand in *Playboy Interviews*, 112.

Objectivism.⁸ After Rand's death, however, some of her associates decided it was necessary to resurrect organized Objectivism and founded the Ayn Rand Institute (ARI). Leonard Peikoff, Rand's heir, founded the ARI in 1985 in Marina Del Rey, California.⁹ Peikoff received financial support for the project from Ed Snider, then majority owner of the Philadelphia Flyers of the National Hockey League and longtime supporter of Objectivism. Snider clarified his reasons, "I felt, after she [Rand] died, that if there wasn't an organized approach, [O]bjectivism would simply fade away."¹⁰ ARI promotes Objectivism in various ways, although it particularly targets youth by funding high school and college essay contests on Rand's novels.¹¹ ARI's commitment to bring Objectivism to America's youth is strategic — the idealism of adolescents attracts them to Rand's heroic characters and the uncompromising ideals they promote.¹² ARI has succeeded in reaching young students through its contests — over 59,000 students have entered since the competitions began in 1986 and the annual prize money currently totals \$59,000.¹³ To further promote Objectivism in education, ARI sends, on request, copies of works explaining Objectivism to philosophy professors. It also promotes Objectivism among the general public by publishing Objectivist editorials in various newspapers, producing radio shows that discuss

⁸Barbara Branden, 363.

⁹"About ARI," Ayn Rand Institute website, <http://www.aynrand.org/about_ari.shtml>

¹⁰Qtd in Marci McDonald, "Fighting over Ayn Rand," U.S. News & World Report 124 (9 Mar 1998): 56.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Janet Sasson Edgette, "Psychoanalytic Application of the Works of Ayn Rand to Adolescence," June 1987, 55-56.

¹³"About ARI," Ayn Rand Institute website, <http://www.aynrand.org/about_ari.shtml>

Objectivism, and by maintaining a website that lets users read about Objectivism, biographical information on Rand, and even excerpts from Rand's writings. These methods of spreading Objectivism differ significantly from those of NBI. With such measures ARI tries to promote Objectivism on an individual basis by letting people read about the philosophy and contemplate it on their own. NBI had also emphasized the importance of learning about Objectivism directly from Rand's writings.

Although ARI has implemented measures that emphasize an individual's decision to study and support Objectivism, it has other legacies of NBI running through it which promote Objectivism as an organized, collective movement. One example of this is ARI's dedication to starting Objectivist clubs at universities. ARI currently boasts clubs at universities in several countries, with American chapters at such institutions as Harvard, the University of Michigan, the University of Chicago, and Columbia.¹⁴ ARI also follows in NBI's footsteps by organizing social events for its members, such as dinners and balls. It encourages as well the recruitment of members, or more appropriately converts, to the Objectivist movement. To this end it publishes a brochure on speaking to friends about Objectivism.

ARI also has maintained the legacy of NBI that dictates purity amongst its affiliates. The "excommunications" of members of NBI continue to be a tradition at ARI. David Kelley, a former Vassar philosophy professor and close associate of Rand's who read her favorite poem "If" by Rudyard Kipling at her funeral, worked to promote Objectivism with ARI.¹⁵ Kelley

¹⁴Ayn Rand Institute website, "Upcoming Campus Events,"
<http://www.aynrand.org/campus/clubs_events.html>

¹⁵McLemee, 51; McDonald, 57.

challenged Peikoff in stating that Objectivism, which Rand never systematized, was not a closed philosophical system.¹⁶ Peikoff refused to accept Kelley's view, which essentially stated that Objectivism was open to extensive interpretation according to its adherent. Kelley eventually spoke at a meeting of the libertarian Laissez Faire Supper Club. Like Rand and all true Objectivists, Peikoff dismissed libertarians as "hippies of the right" and excommunicated Kelley from ARI in 1989 for his heresy.¹⁷

The 1989 break between Kelley and Peikoff disrupted the movement just as the 1968 schism between Rand and Branden had done. Peikoff wrote a philosophical explanation of why he had sundered ties with Kelley entitled *Fact and Value*. Objectivists involved with ARI were soon asked to pledge their agreement with the writing as a loyalty test. Objectivist economist Northrop Buechner asked his associate George Walsh to pledge his agreement before allowing him to lecture at a conference. When Walsh refused, Buechner asserted that he would not continue any personal relations with him. Peikoff soon consulted with Walsh and dismissed him from ARI and organized Objectivism.¹⁸ In 1990 David Kelley founded the Institute For Objectivist Studies (IOS) in Poughkeepsie, New York, with a few others whom ARI had either excommunicated or disgusted.¹⁹ Kelley explained the challenges of starting a competing Objectivist organization unaffiliated with ARI:

It was very hard in many ways because we had no access to the organized instruments

¹⁶McLemee, 51-52.

¹⁷McDonald, 57.

¹⁸Jeff Walker, *The Ayn Rand Cult* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999): 90.

¹⁹McDonald, 57; Walker, 93.

of the Objectivist movement, mailing lists, or visible names. George Walsh, Jim Lennox, and I were the only three intellectuals who came over and had any kind of visibility in the Objectivist movement.²⁰

Despite initial difficulties, IOS succeeded in attracting objectivists who were disillusioned with ARI, including the wealthy Snider.²¹ Kelley has also succeeded in keeping IOS a more intellectually tolerant organization than its west coast rival. Unlike the leaders of ARI who scorn libertarians, IOS has worked together with libertarians at the Cato Institute. IOS has also examined the Objectivist movement of the 1960s in its magazine *Full Context*, which published interviews with academics and intellectuals who participated in the movement.²²

In stark contrast to the intellectually open-minded approach to Objectivism that IOS has maintained, ARI continues to be absolutist in the tradition of Rand herself. About ARI's refusal to work with IOS in promoting Objectivism, Peikoff fumed, "I'm an ideological purist I'd rather blow up the whole movement than ally myself with this slime [IOS]" ²³ ARI has preserved other dictatorial practices in its promotion of Objectivism. For example, the Institute sued to prohibit the auctioning of a private collection of Rand's belongings, claiming the ARI had a legal right to all of Rand's objects.²⁴ ARI also refuses to grant independent scholars access to their archives of Rand's materials. Rivalry between IOS and ARI ensures the failure of the resurrected Objectivist movement. IOS does not have the breadth, the prestige, or the resources

²⁰Kelley, qtd in Walker, 93.

²¹McDonald, 57.

²²McLemee, 52.

²³Peikoff, qtd in McDonald, 57.

²⁴"Still Spouting," *The Economist* (Nov 27 - Dec 3 1999): 89

(such as access to Rand's unpublished materials) to compete with ARI. Likewise, ARI demands the intellectual purity and absolutism reminiscent of the purging of Nathaniel Branden supporters that destroyed the integrity of the Objectivist movement of the 1960s. Once again, organized Objectivism careens towards failure.

Although organized Objectivism has not been successful, Objectivism has survived and will continue to survive as Rand intended — through the individual. Rand has reached countless individuals through her writings and left indelible marks on their characters and intellects. She believed in the heroic potential of the individual, and it was through the individual that Objectivism succeeded. One individual whom Rand influenced was Alan Greenspan, who immediately identified with the messages in Rand's teachings. Greenspan was involved with "The Collective" in the 1950s. His girlfriend at the time, Joan Mitchell, introduced Greenspan to Rand, although it was not until Mitchell and Greenspan were married that Greenspan regularly attended Rand's Saturday evening meetings.²⁵ He admired Rand's writings and publicly defended them — indeed, the first time his name ever appeared in the *New York Times* was as the author of a letter criticizing the newspaper's negative review of *Atlas Shrugged*. Despite his interest in Objectivism, Greenspan was not as involved in "The Collective" as its other members. He earned the nickname "The Undertaker" because he seemed cold and indifferent to his intellectual colleagues. The future Chairman of the Federal Reserve also received intellectual privileges from Rand. As another "Collective" member Edith Efron explained, "He was Rand's special pet, because he was older, and in the business world. . . . [Rand] didn't know anyone else

²⁵R. W. Bradford, "Alan Greenspan — Cultist?" *American Enterprise*, 8 (September 1997): 31.

very well who was a businessman. I think this was very important to her . . . [S]he allowed him more intellectual liberty than she did other people.”²⁶

Greenspan maintained a life-long friendship with Rand. At the time of the schism, he even publicly repudiated Branden, without ever speaking to him, upon Rand’s request.²⁷ About her early impressions of Greenspan, Rand remarked, “He impressed me as very intelligent, brilliant unhappy. . . . He was groping for a frame of reference. He had no fundamental view of life.”²⁸ Rand helped complete her disciple’s intellectual views and morals. Greenspan remembered that, “She demonstrated to me . . . that not only was laissez-faire capitalism an efficient and productive system, but was also the only system consistent with political freedom.”²⁹ He further acknowledged, “Ayn Rand was . . . clearly a major contributor to my intellectual development, for which I remain profoundly grateful to this day.”

Objectivism played an important role in Greenspan’s early political career. In 1967, Martin Anderson, who was also a student of Objectivism and somewhat involved with “The Collective,” recruited Greenspan for the Nixon presidential campaign.³⁰ After the campaign Greenspan returned to his career of economic forecasting in New York, but he accepted an offer from President Gerald Ford in 1974 to serve as chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors. Shortly after his appointment he appeared on the television show “Meet the Press,” where he was

²⁶Edith Effron, qtd in Bradford, 32.

²⁷Ibid., 33.

²⁸“The Chairman’s Favorite Author,” *Time* (30 September 1974): 88.

²⁹Greenspan, qtd in Barbara Branden, 410.

³⁰Bradford, 33.

asked whether or not he still believed that anti-trust laws should be abolished, as he had written in an NBI pamphlet years before. Greenspan replied that he continued to believe that such laws should be abolished, but that this was not politically desirable in the near future. While Objectivism opened doors for Greenspan in 1967 and continued to influence his political and economic views during his years in the Ford administration, it also caused problems for him. Some critics feared that Greenspan would simply serve as a puppet obeying Rand's commands. Both Rand and Greenspan allayed these concerns. Rand explained, "I am a philosopher, not an economist. Alan doesn't seek my advice on those matters. He can tell me more than I can tell him, and knows more about the day-to-day events."³¹ Rand and Greenspan remained close friends, however, and Rand even traveled to attend his swearing-in ceremony in Washington, D.C.

Greenspan's career as a political economist flourished. In 1981 President Reagan appointed him to head a special commission on Social Security and since 1987 he has served as Chairman of the Federal Reserve.³² His position at the Federal Reserve has been controversial regarding his Objectivist beliefs. Leonard Peikoff has pointed out that a true Objectivist would never accept such a position in economic planning.³³ Greenspan himself seemed sympathetic to such a view and in April 1997 made a speech advocating the abolition of his job and other regulatory influences in the economy. He has also backed other measures commonly supported by Objectivists. He has even advocated the return to the gold standard, stating that, "I've been

³¹Rand, qtd in "The Chairman's Favorite Author," 87.

³²Bradford, 33.

³³McDonald, 56.

recommending it for years, there's nothing new about that. . . . It would probably mean that there is only one vote in the Federal Open Market Committee for that, but it is mine."³⁴ Greenspan has also argued for the installation of fixed life-spans on all economic regulators, including the Federal Reserve, so that they will expire unless specifically renewed. All of these reform proposals point towards the laissez-faire politics that Objectivism supports and morally justifies. Greenspan has truly been a success story of Objectivism, advocating ideas based in Objectivist philosophy within his own area of expertise.

Rand has also been successful in influencing individuals involved in the Libertarian Party, which is ironic because she never considered Libertarians to be intellectual allies. In a 1972 "movement survey" of the Libertarian Party, respondents cited Rand and Nathaniel Branden as the two individuals who had the greatest impact on their thinking.³⁵ Robert Poole, president of the Reason Foundation, a libertarian organization in Los Angeles, claims that he and the majority of his organization's members consider Rand their inspiration for becoming active in the Libertarian Party.³⁶ Rand also had limited influence on John Hospers, a philosophy professor at Brooklyn College and the University of California, Los Angeles, who became the first Libertarian Party presidential candidate in 1972.³⁷ Hospers was very interested in Objectivism in the early 1960s. He appeared on radio shows with Rand, included many of her ideas in a textbook he authored, and corresponded with her on a regular basis for approximately a

³⁴Greenspan, qtd in Bradford, 33.

³⁵David Nolan, "The Road to Liberty," *Reason* 10:1 (May 1978): 39.

³⁶McDonald, 57.

³⁷*Letters of Ayn Rand*, 502; McLemee, 50.

year.³⁸ Rand and Hospers did not always agree on philosophical issues, but both benefited from the intellectual discourse. Although Rand dropped her relationship with Hospers after he criticized her address to the American Society for Esthetics in 1962, Objectivism left an indelible mark on Hospers.³⁹

In addition to influencing politicians, Rand also reached countless businessmen with her philosophy. Robert Bleiberg, publisher and editorial director of *Barron's* magazine, was immediately taken with Rand's revolutionary ideas. He read *Atlas Shrugged* soon after it was published in 1957, boasting of the novel's influence on him: "It was filling in great gaps in my economic theories and presenting a totally new philosophy. I'm in very substantial agreement with Ayn Rand; all the years have done is to confirm the wisdom of her ideas."⁴⁰ He regarded Rand as a revolutionary figure in America:

She has had an enormous influence on the country. . . . She deserves a great deal of the credit for the fact that we are beginning to get out of the statist muddle of the last decades. . . . To have arrived at where we are today is an astonishing intellectual voyage — and we have not yet seen the end of it; her influence continues to grow.⁴¹

Bleiberg has helped ensure that Rand will continue to influence readers by printing articles by Rand and Greenspan in his magazine.

The legacy of Objectivism has touched the leader of Cypress Semiconductor, T.J. Rogers too. About Rogers' interest in Rand's writings, ARI leader Michael Berliner asserted, "I know

³⁸*Letters of Ayn Rand*, 502.

³⁹Bradford, 32.

⁴⁰Robert Bleiberg, qtd in Barbara Branden, 411.

⁴¹*Ibid.*

that T.J. Rogers loves *Atlas Shrugged*.”⁴² Rogers has adhered to an Objectivist morality, although it has at times caused controversy. When a group of Catholic nuns who owned 7,000 shares of stock in Cypress wrote a letter to Rogers which advanced their beliefs that he should place women and minorities on the company’s board of directors, Rogers responded in a truly Objectivist manner.⁴³ He not only asserted its impracticality because there were few women with the business and engineering experience necessary to earn them such a position, but he also defended his code of morality. Rogers told the letter’s authors to get off their “moral high horse,” because it was immoral to grant such an important position to an unqualified individual on the basis of gender or race. Rogers has continued in the tradition of Rand by defending his beliefs in front of Congress when he testified against government spending in technological research. He serves as another successful example of Objectivism; he read Rand’s works, agreed with her ideas, and then applied Objectivist principles to his own life.

Rand’s influence has reached far beyond business and politics, touching disparate expressions of western culture. The members of the Canadian band “Rush” thrived on the ideas they encountered in Rand’s writings.⁴⁴ They based one of their albums, *2112*, on Rand’s novelette *Anthem*. The band composed the lyrics on Rand’s book and acknowledged “the genius of Ayn Rand” on the inside of the album cover.⁴⁵ Rand also inspired many actors and actresses,

⁴²Gayle M.B. Hanson, “Ayn Rand Inspired High-Tech Capitalism,” *Insight on the News* 13(35) (September 1997): 16.

⁴³Hanson, 17.

⁴⁴McLemee, 46.

⁴⁵Rush, *2112*, Core Music Publishing, 1976.

including Clark Gable, Gary Cooper, who starred in a screen adaptation of *The Fountainhead*, and Sharon Stone, who lobbied to gain a part in the planned production of an *Atlas Shrugged* mini-series, claiming that the book changed her life.⁴⁶ While it may not be startling that capitalist Hugh Hefner confessed that Rand's works had a deep emotional and intellectual impact on him, Rand's rather surprising influence even reached models Hefner featured in his magazine.⁴⁷ Over a dozen *Playboy* models have cited *Atlas Shrugged* or *The Fountainhead* as their favorite novels.⁴⁸

Rand's writings continue to influence countless readers today. In 1998, the Freshman class at the University of California at Berkeley, one of the nation's traditionally most liberal universities, named *The Fountainhead* as its favorite novel.⁴⁹ In a joint Library of Congress and Reader's Digest survey taken in the early 1990s, *Atlas Shrugged* was second only to the *Bible* as the book that most influenced the respondent's lives. Rand's books continue to sell an impressive 300,000 copies a year, ensuring that Rand will continue to reshape individuals in the way she originally intended — through her writing.⁵⁰

⁴⁶McLemee, 47; McDonald, 56.

⁴⁷Barbara Branden, 319.

⁴⁸McLemee, 46.

⁴⁹McDonald, 54.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*

CONCLUSION

Ayn Rand's paradoxical involvement with collective organizations began early in her career during her crusade against communism. Rand developed her anti-communistic ideas as an individual during her youth in Soviet Russia. Her first blow against communism was also an individual effort that occurred in her writing. Her first novel, *We the Living*, explained the philosophical immorality and horrific consequences of communism in Soviet Russia to each of Rand's readers. Rand's involvement with collective organizations came in the 1940s, when she believed that a group of competent individuals could accomplish more in the anti-communist crusade than they could separately. Rand's idea of bonding together as a collective to fight for the individual seemed contradictory considering her ardent individualism. Rand herself argued that contradictions did not exist, but rather people assumed that two premises were correct when only one was valid. The faulty premise in Rand's seemingly contradictory action was the belief that she could accomplish more within a group than she could as an individual in her crusade against communism. Rand learned her lesson with great difficulty. She tried to work with several different organizations, yet each time she proved to be too radical, too uncompromising, and too individualistic for her colleagues.

Anti-communism was Rand's first failed attempt at leading a collective organization, but it was not the most destructive to her philosophy, which came with the end of organized Objectivism in late 1968. Rand did not launch organized Objectivism, but she sanctioned it when Nathaniel Branden wanted to launch the project. Rand quickly became attached to both Branden and organized Objectivism in the form of NBI. The spread of Objectivism pulled Rand

out of her depression and made her increasingly optimistic about the future of American society. Rand's participation in organized Objectivism, however, carried a high cost — the validity of her philosophy. Rand disliked many of her followers and correctly thought that some did not fully understand Objectivism. After the schism with Nathaniel and Barbara Branden, organized Objectivism crumbled and destroyed much of Rand's credibility in the process. When Rand insisted that her colleagues take oaths of loyalty and publicly renounce Nathaniel Branden without knowing all of the facts of what occurred, she promoted both heresy and heresy, asking her fellow Objectivists to act irrationally. As a consequence, she contradicted and discredited her own commandments.

Rand never imagined Objectivism as an organized movement. At the time of the schism, Rand wrote, "I never wanted and do not now want to be the leader of a 'movement.' I do approve of a philosophical or intellectual movement, in the sense of a growing trend among a number of independent individuals sharing the same ideas. But an organized movement is a different matter"¹ Rand was passionate about her philosophical ideas and wanted to communicate them to others with the hopes of improving society. Rand's actions with collective organizations, both in her crusade against communism and in organized Objectivism, did not help her achieve this goal. Her efforts in organized anti-communism were frustrating and generally achieved very little impact on society. Her participation in organized Objectivism proved much more destructive by discrediting the validity of her philosophy. After the failure of NBI, Rand refused to let any of her intellectual colleagues create another organization devoted to Objectivism. Perhaps Rand finally learned that she was far too individualistic for a collective

¹"To Whom it May Concern," *The Objectivist* 7(5) (May 1968): 6.

organization and that she achieved her greatest glory as a writer communicating her ideas to each of her readers, individually.

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