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# RECENT WORK

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## AYN RAND

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Since the 1982 death of novelist and philosopher Ayn Rand, there has been ever-growing interest in her thought. In the immediate aftermath of her death, Douglas Den Uyl and Douglas Rasmussen's edited collection, *The Philosophic Thought of Ayn Rand*, and the first edition of Mimi Reisel Gladstein's *Ayn Rand Companion* were published. This was followed in the late 1980s by the appearance of a memoir from Rand's closest associate, psychologist Nathaniel Branden, and a best-selling biography by Barbara Branden, *The Passion of Ayn Rand*. That biography was later adapted as a Showtime movie, starring the Emmy-award winning Helen Mirren as the Russian-born Rand. Rand's life was also the subject of a 1997 Academy Award-nominated documentary, 'Ayn Rand: A Sense of Life', directed by Michael Paxton and narrated by actress Sharon Gless. Rand-mania reached a cultural apex of sorts with the release, in 1999, of a United States commemorative postage stamp in her honour.

With her influence extending even to a Federal Reserve Chair, Alan Greenspan, who was a high profile member of her inner circle in the 1950s and 1960s, Rand citations have multiplied exponentially. Popular references to Rand can be found in the music of the rock band Rush (and in scholarship on progressive rock, see my 'Rand, Rush, and Rock'), in the comics of Frank Miller and 'Spider-Man' co-creator Steve Ditko, in television series, such as 'The Gilmore Girls', 'Queer as Folk', and 'Judging Amy', and even in cartoons—from 'South Park' to 'The Simpsons'. Indeed, philosopher William Irwin and writer J.R. Lombardo, in an examination of textual allusion, tell us of Rand's appearance in *The Simpsons and Philosophy*: ". . . in 'A Streetcar Named Maggie', Maggie is placed in the 'Ayn Rand School for Tots' where the proprietor, Mr. Sinclair, reads *The Fountainhead Diet*. To understand why pacifiers are taken away from Maggie and the other children one has to catch the allusion to the radical libertarian philosophy of Ayn Rand. Recognizing and understanding this allusion yields much more pleasure than would a straightforward explanation that Maggie has been placed in a daycare facility in which tots are trained to fend for themselves, not to depend on others, not even to depend on their pacifiers" (p. 85).

Together with this heightened cultural awareness of Rand's life and thought, academic work has proceeded apace with some fanfare. Both *The*

*Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Lingua Franca* featured major stories on new books and research projects involving philosophy, political theory, literary criticism, and feminism, highlighting how Rand had “finally caught the attention of scholars” (*Chronicle*, p. A17). These articles note the increase in scholarly sessions devoted to Rand’s work in organisational meetings of the Modern Language Association and the American Philosophical Association, Eastern Division, which includes an affiliated Ayn Rand Society.

My own *Ayn Rand: The Russian Radical*, published in 1995, was central to the *Chronicle* and *Lingua Franca* studies—as was my 1999 anthology, *Feminist Interpretations of Ayn Rand*, co-edited with Mimi Reisel Gladstein. The former book rooted Rand’s intellectual development in Silver Age Russian thought and reconstructed her Objectivist philosophy as a radical dialectical project. The latter book is part of the Penn State Press ‘Re-reading the Canon’ series, edited by Nancy Tuana, in which nearly two dozen volumes centre on questions of gender and sexuality in the works of thinkers as diverse as Plato, Aristotle, Hegel, Marx, Arendt, Sartre, Levinas, and Foucault. The Rand anthology includes original and reprinted contributions from writers across the globe, including Susan Brownmiller, Camille Paglia, Karen Michalson, and Melissa Jane Hardie.

Another measure of Rand’s growing scholarly presence is the appearance of entries on her in textbooks—in philosophy, political science, and economics—and in reference works, such as Routledge’s *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* and *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, Scribner’s *American Writers*, Gale’s *American Philosophers, 1950–2000* (a volume of the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*), and Lexington’s *History of American Thought*. A Rand primer, by philosopher Allan Gotthelf, in the Wadsworth Philosophy Series, a volume by philosopher Douglas Den Uyl on *The Fountainhead* and another by Mimi Reisel Gladstein on *Atlas Shrugged*, in Twayne’s Masterwork Series, and CliffsNotes monographs on *Anthem*, *The Fountainhead*, and *Atlas Shrugged*, by philosopher Andrew Bernstein, are further evidence of increased attention to Rand by professional scholars.<sup>1</sup> (It should be noted too that one can find an increasing number of master’s and doctoral dissertations devoted to Rand’s thought.)<sup>2</sup> A forthcoming collection on *The Literary Art of Ayn Rand* (edited by William Thomas and David Kelley) and a

1. There are also quite a few accessible works written by non-professional philosophers. See Ronald Merrill’s *Ideas of Ayn Rand*, which focuses on the broad essentials of Rand’s system of thought; Craig Biddle’s *Loving Life*, which focuses on Rand’s ethics; Alexandra York’s *From The Fountainhead to the Future and Other Essays on Art and Excellence*, which deals with Objectivist aesthetics and romanticism; Tom Porter’s *Ayn Rand’s Theory of Knowledge*, which offers a commentary on Rand’s *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*; and Peter Erickson’s *The Stance of Atlas*, which features critical discussion in dialogue form. Recently published commentaries by writers of a more religious bent include John Robbins’s *Without a Prayer: Ayn Rand and the Close of Her System* and Michael B. Yang’s *Reconsidering Ayn Rand*. For a discussion of Rand’s Objectivist movement, starkly alternative readings are offered by Jeff Walker (*The Ayn Rand Cult*) and philosopher David Kelley (*The Contested Legacy of Ayn Rand*).
2. One notable published title is Gregory M. Browne’s *Necessary Factual Truth*, which is an expansion of his philosophy dissertation. Browne discusses central themes in Leonard Peikoff’s ‘Analytic-Synthetic Dichotomy’, which can be found in the expanded edition of Rand’s *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*.

Thomas-Kelley authored study, *The Logical Structure of Objectivism*, are both on the horizon, as is a book on induction and integration, written by Leonard Peikoff, entitled *The One in the Many: How to Create It and Why*.

One final measure of expanding Rand scholarship is the commencement, in the Fall of 1999, of *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies*, co-founded by R.W. Bradford, literature professor Stephen Cox, and me. The journal is a non-partisan, semi-annual interdisciplinary double-blind peer-reviewed scholarly periodical dedicated to an examination of Rand's work and legacy. In its contents, one will find essays by Objectivist philosophers and those sympathetic to Rand, as well as critics of Objectivism, including Marxist aesthetician and literary theorist Gene Bell-Villada and the Lacanian philosopher Slavoj Žižek. (Žižek, in fact, discusses Rand in his book *The Abyss of Freedom*, pp. 85–86; his essay, which serves as an introduction to Schelling's unfinished *Ages of the World*, sees in Howard Roark of *The Fountainhead*, a character who inspires authenticity and benevolence.)

Clearly, the ever-expanding scope of Rand studies suggests that philosophers of various stripes have begun a long overdue reassessment of her thought. This reassessment must proceed with a few caveats, however.

Ayn Rand was the charismatic leader of a kind of people's movement in philosophy. Her novels grew in popularity not because the literati praised them, but because people—especially young people—were inspired by her tributes to individualism. *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged* became underground classics by word-of-mouth—even as critics on the left recoiled in horror over her moral defence of capitalism, while critics on the right detested her atheism and her defence of reproductive freedom. With the establishment of the Nathaniel Branden Institute in the late 1950s, Rand's philosophy was spread by live and audio lectures. Rand was very much a public philosopher, appearing before large crowds at Columbia, Princeton, Harvard, Yale, New York University, and other colleges. Though she accepted an honorary degree, Doctor of Humane Letters, at Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Oregon, in 1963, she and many of her immediate followers revelled in their outsider status. While much of the intellectual establishment dismissed her as a 'pop philosopher', Rand's public appeal grew. When her movement was sundered in 1968 by her break from Nathaniel Branden—rooted in the collapse of their personal relationship—many saw the 'excommunications' that followed as proof positive of the cult-like character of Rand's Objectivism.

These purges continued even after Rand's death, leading to highly volatile debates within Objectivism over what David Kelley has called "the contested legacy of Ayn Rand". The 'orthodox' branch of Objectivism, headed by Rand's legal heir, Leonard Peikoff, views Objectivism as a 'closed system'. This approach is embodied in the Ayn Rand Institute (ARI), founded in 1985. ARI and its affiliated scholars view Objectivism as the word of Ayn Rand—and *only* the word of Ayn Rand. Indeed, Peikoff has stressed that not even his own work qualifies as 'Objectivism', for "'Objectivism' is the name of Ayn Rand's philosophy as presented in the material she herself wrote or endorsed" (*Objectivism*, p. xv).

Since Rand's death, the Estate of Ayn Rand has continued to issue a number of edited collections of Rand's writings. These books have—to varying degrees—aided scholars in their attempts to trace the development of Rand's thought. Among the posthumous collections are: *The Early Ayn Rand* (Rand's unpublished fiction); *The Voice of Reason* (reprints from Rand's periodicals, plus a brief memoir by Peikoff); *The Ayn Rand Column* (mostly from the *Los Angeles Times*); *Ayn Rand's Marginalia* (comments on the works of such writers as C.S. Lewis, Wilhelm Windelband, and F.A. Hayek); *Letters of Ayn Rand* (correspondence from 1926 to 1981); *Journals of Ayn Rand* (intellectual notes from 1927 to 1977), *Russian Writings on Hollywood* (translations of two recently discovered booklets written by a teen-aged Rand about the American film industry); and *The Art of Fiction* and *The Art of Nonfiction*—both of which serve as guides on exposition for writers and readers, and which include many observations on the subconscious and tacit dimensions of creativity. The Estate is also working closely with the Institute in the preparation of an archival research library.

The central problem with the collections of previously unpublished material, however, is that it is virtually impossible to check the accuracy or quality of the editing. In some instances, because so much of Objectivist philosophy was long consigned to an oral tradition, the editors have had to edit down many hours of taped lectures into cohesive books. The editing is sometimes partisan in nature: those individuals who are *persona non grata* with the Institute are subtly erased from historical memory. In other instances, certain passages in Rand's journals, for example, have been altered in a way that does damage to the historical record.<sup>3</sup> Tibor Machan observes that the hagiographic treatment of Rand by some of her orthodox followers is not unlike that shown to other charismatic philosophical figures—for example, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Wittgenstein, Popper, and Sartre—who were surrounded by “admirers and epigone[s]” (*Ayn Rand*, p. xi). It is, therefore, questionable if the Estate will ever open its archives to bona fide independent scholars or those affiliated with organisations deemed unacceptable.<sup>4</sup>

One such organisation is The Objectivist Center—originally the Institute for Objectivist Studies—founded in 1990 by philosopher David Kelley. TOC is much more ecumenical in spirit. Kelley himself views Objectivism in terms of its core ideas in each of the major branches of philosophy. But, for Kelley, Objectivism is an ‘open system’. My own view, which shares Kelley's open-ended commitment, is that Objectivism—like other systems of thought—is evolving over time through a critical hermeneutic, where people working in very different traditions engage one another in serious scholarly dialogue, propelling the discussion toward all sorts of provocative unintended intellectual consequences that vary in their implications and applications.

3. On these points, see my ‘Bowdlerizing Ayn Rand’, ‘A Renaissance in Rand Scholarship’, ‘Objectivism: The Progress, The Politics, The Promise’, and ‘In Search of the Rand Transcript’.

4. Some materials not held by the Institute are publicly available to scholars, regardless of affiliation, in the Madison Building of the Library of Congress, which houses 28 containers of the manuscripts for Rand's novels. Shoshana Milgram has done pioneering work in her examination of various drafts of *The Fountainhead* (see ‘Artist at Work’).

Among the most important recent volumes that have emerged from such scholarly engagement are works by Tibor Machan, Louis Torres and Michelle Marder Kamhi, Tara Smith, Neera K. Badhwar, and Roderick T. Long. In the remainder of this review essay, I will examine each of these works briefly.

Tibor R. Machan's *Ayn Rand* is part of the Peter Lang series, 'Master Works in the Western Tradition'. It is in the spirit of the OUP Past Masters series, and is an important step toward viewing Rand in terms of the larger community of Western philosophy. For Machan, Rand is a neo-Aristotelian whose system is founded on a minimalist metaphysics. Focusing on Rand's view of axiomatic concepts, Machan answers O'Neill's and Dancy's criticisms of the principle of non-contradiction. These axioms—of existence, identity, consciousness, and so forth—are not the basis of any rationalistic system. Rand endorses an ontological view of logic as laws not only of thought, but of existence itself. Her epistemology, however, is not of the classical (lower-case 'o') objectivist sort; it views knowledge as a relational product of the mind's engagement with an objective reality, and it proposes a theory of definition and certainty that is fully contextual.

Machan traces the implications of Rand's naturalistic ethics and libertarian politics in a fruitful comparison with Marx's conception. Because Machan is deeply critical of the Hobbesian notion of the person, he tends to focus on those aspects in Marx that oppose "a neo-Hobbesian conception of the human individual" (p. 105). But Machan shows us how Marx is as reductionistic and deterministic as Hobbes. Machan's view of individualism is of an enriched classical sort. What he does not recognise, however, is the Aristotelian essentialist ingredient in Marx's social ontology. This aspect of Marx's thought has been explored variously by writers such as Carol Gould (*Marx's Social Ontology*, MIT Press, 1978) and Scott Meikle (*Essentialism in the Thought of Karl Marx*, Open Court, 1985). The Aristotelian dimension points to a provocative convergence of Rand and Marx that is not easily apparent on first reading. So too, Machan's comparative analysis of Rand and Kant suffers—but that's because the discussion is all too brief.<sup>5</sup>

Machan ends his study with the trenchant observation that Rand provided "the broad outlines and some of the details of a complete philosophy which, however, is open-ended and allows for, indeed invites, continued development" (p. 134). On this basis, he challenges Objectivists to extend Rand's insights in a discussion of induction, free will, evolution, aesthetics, moral obligation, and the family.

It might be said that Louis Torres and Michelle Marder Kamhi take up one of Machan's challenges since they devote a whole book to a development of Rand's aesthetics. *What Art Is: The Esthetic Theory of Ayn Rand* is easily the most important comprehensive study of Rand's philosophy of art ever published. Focusing on Rand's understanding of the cognitive function of art and

5. Given Rand's antipathy toward Kant and his dualisms, a more extensive comparative analysis between the two thinkers is long overdue. See two published discussions: Walsh's 'Ayn Rand and the Metaphysics of Kant' and Hill's 'Rethinking Rand and Kant'.

its importance in human life, the authors provide scientific corroboration of many of her aesthetic insights and apply those insights to a full-fledged critique of modernist and postmodernist art. The authors clearly distinguish Rand's philosophy of art from her Romantic literary notions, and argue that, at its foundation, Rand's understanding of the creative process is "comparable to Aristotle's understanding of artistic *mimesis* ('imitation')" (p. 28). Like Machan, Torres and Kamhi are fully committed to a respectful, critical engagement with Objectivism; they are not afraid to point out those areas where they believe Rand errs or to compare her theories to others in the history of their discipline. Along the way, they raise controversial points about such topics as architecture and photography, which have generated much discussion in the literature.<sup>6</sup>

Tara Smith's *Viable Values* is a reconstruction and defence of Rand's ethics. She carefully distinguishes between Rand's notion of ethics and competing 'intrinsic' and 'subjective' conceptions. For Smith, an objective conception of the good is one that is inherently relational; it relates to the moral agent's life, which is the "root and reward of morality". Arguing that "morality and rationality are tightly linked" (p. 40), Smith takes on intuitionist, contractarian, and rationalist alternatives. Whereas Rand was not nearly as rigorous in her critique of philosophic adversaries, Smith exhibits detailed knowledge of her foes. She develops a case for eudaimonia, or flourishing, that is, in essence, a call for a principled egoism.

The debate between those who view Rand's egoism as 'survivalist', as rooted in the life-and-death struggle of the organism, versus those who view it as 'flourishing', in which the standard of morality is not *mere* life, but *human* life, with all the constituents this entails, is one that has preoccupied Rand scholars for many years. (Indeed, it is regrettable that Smith, Badhwar, and others do not connect their own eudaimonistic views of Rand's ethics to those, like Den Uyl and Rasmussen, who argued the case more than fifteen years earlier in *Philosophic Thought of Ayn Rand*.) Neera K. Badhwar's *Is Virtue Only a Means to Happiness?*, a monograph in The Objectivist Center's *Objectivist Studies* series, centres on this debate, and features commentaries by Jay Friedenberg, Lester H. Hunt, and David Kelley, as well as a reply by the author.

*Objectivist Studies* publishes works that advance the theoretical development or critical study of the philosophy. Whereas the first two volumes were singular presentations of David Kelley's 'Evidence and Justification' (a reprint from *Reason Papers*) and Ken Livingston on the psychology of abstraction, the Badhwar and Long monographs are ripe with just the kind of philosophical give-and-take that is essential to the scholarly dissemination of Objectivism.

Badhwar asks: "Is virtue only a *means* to happiness, or also *constitutive* of it? If it is only a means, then happiness can be defined independently of virtue. If it is partly constitutive of happiness, then happiness must be defined partly in terms of virtue" (pp. 5–6). Badhwar argues that Rand sometimes equivocates on her use of the words 'life' and 'happiness' in her ethical writings—leading to confusion on this very question. Despite Rand's apparent 'survivalist'

6. See *The Aesthetics Symposium* for a comprehensive discussion of the Torres and Kamhi book.

view, in which happiness is “external to virtue” (p. 9), Badhwar maintains that Rand’s actual position is consistent with the ‘flourishing’ argument.

Badhwar presents what she believes is “a more adequate conception of virtue” (p. 12), one that pays attention to the “constitutive role of emotion in value” (p. 14) and that bridges the gap between instrumental and substantive rationality. Taking issue with Rand’s “hierarchical account of the emotions as programmed by an untouched intellect”, Badhwar draws upon Aristotle’s work to bolster the Objectivist view of the integrated person, whose “intellect and emotion grow and mature interdependently, each influencing the other . . .” (p. 23). This view, says Badhwar, is more prevalent in Rand’s fiction than in her non-fiction essays.

Each of Badhwar’s commentators offers an interesting retort. Friedenbergr draws from evolutionary theory. Hunt, who takes issue with the fiction/non-fiction bifurcation of Rand’s corpus, presents evidence that Rand’s view of emotion may be asymmetric—in deference to thought—but it is definitely not unidirectional (p. 58). Kelley, who has argued for a survivalist interpretation, presents Rand’s “ethics as a kind of human ethology; her concept of ‘man’s life qua man’ is really an ethological concept of man’s mode of life. As such, it incorporates both survival and flourishing” (p. 63).

Badhwar’s rejoinder, however, disputes any strict diremption between value and virtue. Rand once stated that “[v]alue is that which one acts to gain and/or keep—virtue is the act by which one gains and/or keeps it” (*Virtue of Selfishness*, p. 25). Rand identified the cardinal values as reason, purposefulness and self-esteem, and the cardinal virtues as rationality, productivity, and pride—but Badhwar doesn’t “really see how the virtue of rationality can be a means to the faculty of thought, since the virtue of rationality presupposes the faculty, and one doesn’t lose the faculty by lacking this virtue” (p. 85). For Badhwar, there is an internal relationship of reciprocity here: “valuing reason entails being rational (and being rational entails valuing reason)” (p. 86).

Given that so much of this discussion turns on the nature of internal and external relations, and their crucial importance to the debate over Rand’s dialectical orientation, the writers in this superb monograph could have benefited from a more explicit consideration of these underlying methodological issues.

The dialectical subtext is not obscured by Roderick T. Long, in his *Reason and Value: Aristotle versus Rand*, which features commentaries by Fred D. Miller, Jr. and Eyal Mozes, as well as a reply by the author. This *Objectivist Studies* monograph is as impressive as the Badhwar entry in the series. For Long, the dialectical orientation lies at the heart of Aristotle’s approach (p. 56, n. 4), but it is also “the key to much of Rand’s persuasive power”, insofar as she “expos[es] and eliminat[es] contradictions among the moral *endoxa*, and then incorporat[es] the surviving *endoxa* into a unified explanatory system” (p. 55). But Long criticises Rand for “her own version of foundationalist empiricism” (p. 101) and her curious embrace of conflicting viewpoints; he ascribes to her a Platonist view of theoretical rationality and a Humean view of practical rationality. Like Badhwar, Long believes that Rand’s approach is more Aristotelian (constitutive) in her fiction, and more Hobbesian (instrumentalist)

in her non-fiction (p. 34). The answer, for Long, lies in a fuller embrace of the Aristotelian moment in Rand's corpus.

Fred D. Miller, Jr. finds Long's interpretation "surprising" (p. 65), given Rand's long association with neo-Aristotelian philosophy. Rand herself credited Aristotle as her philosophic forebear; whatever her flirtations with Friedrich Nietzsche, who exerted a great influence over the Russian Silver Age of Rand's youth, it was to Aristotle that she expressed her "only philosophical debt" (*Atlas Shrugged*, 'About the Author'). Miller is particularly distressed at Long's omission of Rand's epistemological contextualism (p. 69). Eyal Mozes, who argues for the survivalist interpretation, tries to point toward a reconciliation of Long's Aristotelian 'flourishing' approach with survivalism.

Long's reply to Miller and Mozes raises certain questions for Rand's contextualism; he wonders whether Rand "makes *truth* context-relative" or whether she "only makes *justification* context-relative" (p. 107). Regardless of his specific criticisms, however, Long believes that "Rand's overall outlook is . . . remarkably on target. The reliability of her philosophical instincts on a vast range of issues—metaphysical, epistemological, psychological, ethical, political, sociological, and aesthetic—is impressive" (p. 116). Even if he is critical of her various "attempts to articulate reasons to support those instincts", he recognises that Rand has consummate "skill in presenting [her] ideas in such a powerfully attractive and inspiring way . . ." (p. 117).

What is important about all of these efforts is this: Rand may not have spoken the vernacular of contemporary analytic or continental philosophy. She did not write for academic journals and was an intellectual outsider. But for those scholars who remain impressed by her "powerfully attractive and inspiring" project—even for those scholars who criticise it—there is a great need to relate Rand's philosophic practice to contemporary categories in philosophy. The translation exercise is useful because it helps us to situate her in the contemporary continuum even as it helps us to see where she defies categorisation. As is the case with many radical thinkers, Rand asked us to go to the root; that scholars are finally delving into her philosophic roots is a telling sign. We are at the beginning of a major scholarly engagement that will benefit sympathetic and critical readers alike.

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