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# AYN RAND AND THE POSTHUMAN

## THE MIND-MADE FUTURE

BEN MURNANE

A THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

SCHOOL OF ENGLISH  
UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN, TRINITY COLLEGE

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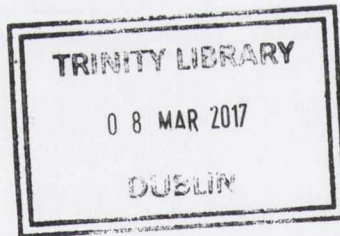
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## SUMMARY

American novelist Ayn Rand's documented influence on politicians, economists, and businesspeople, makes her work an ideal case study for fiction's impact on society. This thesis considers Rand's veneration of technological advancement, and how her work relates to various conceptions of the future—both fictional and nonfictional. In the process, I demonstrate Rand's connection to those with a "posthuman" vision, in which human and machine merge. Posthumanism is a concept of subjectivity driven by our continuing interdependence with technology; it is therefore likely to remain important as the twenty-first century continues. My thesis is an analysis of one of the twentieth century's most influential authors in the light of one of the major theories of twenty-first-century subjectivity.

Through her fiction, and several nonfiction texts, Rand presented a philosophy she called "Objectivism," a moral defence of individualism and capitalism. The central question of my dissertation is this: Does Rand's philosophy support posthumanism—that is, a vision of man existing beyond the "naturally produced" organic body? Through an analysis of Rand's work itself, an analysis of her connections with science fiction (which prefigures posthuman futures), and an exploration of her influence on those who create and who theorise technological progress, I argue that it does.

The thesis is divided into five chapters, an introduction, and an afterword. The introduction offers an overture on my theme and an overview of what's to come. Chapter one provides a critical and contextual briefing on Rand's fiction and her philosophy, while chapter two summarises Rand's vast influence—including within the technology sector, the industry from which posthuman futures emerge. It is within the wider contexts established by these chapters that my subsequent analysis is set. The third chapter opens up space for a posthuman reading of Rand by highlighting her promotion of technology and futurity, through an examination of her connections with science fiction—a genre of literature to which visions of the posthuman are also intrinsically linked. Chapter four examines the philosophical intersections between Objectivism and posthumanism, as well as Rand's direct influence on "transhumanism," a major branch of posthumanist thought. My final chapter discusses Rand's presence and portrayal in various examples of science fiction which also portray trans-/posthumanism.

The conclusion of this thesis is that Rand's work does support a posthuman vision, precisely because it has been used to support posthuman visions—those belonging to advocates of the transhuman as well as certain writers of science fiction. The significance of this is that it speaks to Ayn Rand's continuing relevance into the twenty-first century; it throws light on one aspect of how we continue to live in the legacy of Rand.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The idea for this thesis emerged out of conversations with a friend and former work colleague, Philip Pilkington. Phil reintroduced me to Ayn Rand and the breadth of her impact, and it became something I wanted to write about. I am enormously grateful for that foundational input. Early encouragement came from several others, friends who have been continual sources of advice and useful criticism throughout the process: Christopher Collins, Monica Insinga, Emma Eager, and Gabriel Graham. I am especially grateful to Monica, without whose support I may never have begun a PhD. In addition to these, more friends read the thesis in its final stages, and helped put it to bed: Hugh Doherty, John Douglas, Steve Ellerhoff, and Colman O'Sullivan. I must also acknowledge a singular website as a foundational resource: Andrew Sullivan's *The Dish* (<http://dish.andrewsullivan.com/>). The blog was a daily companion for many years, and its insights provided the spur for countless thoughts that made their way into the thesis.

My introduction to posthumanism came via Brenda Silver's Cybercultures module for the TCD MPhil in Popular Literature, 2009–10. That course has had a major impact on the dissertation, in particular its introduction and final two chapters. I could not have asked for a more supportive environment in which to complete this project than the School of English; I am especially grateful for a scholarship received in the 2014–15 academic year, which paid for my next-to-last term's fees. Bernice Murphy was the first staff member I spoke to in TCD about the possibility of a PhD on Rand; I am grateful to her for confirming it as a viable project, and for pointing me in the direction of my supervisor, Darryl Jones. Darryl's suggestions, criticism, and support have guided me through the whole process. His impact on the work has been immense and invaluable.

A more supportive fiancée than Sandra Cronin could never be found—thank you. Nor could two more steadfastly encouraging sisters than Ruth and Jess Murnane. Finally, and above all, I would like to thank my parents, Mai Byrne and Des Murnane. Their financial assistance and emotional guidance made this PhD happen. Without you, I would be nowhere.

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## INTRODUCTION

# A Posthuman Objective

Ayn Rand is one of the most divisive icons in America's divided cultural and political landscape. Ask a politically interested person from the United States what he or she thinks of Ayn Rand, and you will discover where on the ideological spectrum they sit. The Russian-American novelist and philosopher is fêted on the right for her exposition of what she called the morality of capitalism, while on the left she is vilified and satirised for the same.

Rand, born in St. Petersburg in 1905, immigrated to the United States at the age of 21, and went on to write four novels, plus a series of nonfiction books. Rand's fiction is a vessel for the delivery of her theories, and her nonfiction references her fiction to demonstrate its points. Rand developed a philosophy she called Objectivism, which holds that reality is fixed outside of us, "objective," and knowable through investigation. Objectivism venerates productivity: the turning of the physical material of the world into products useful for humanity. The role of the human mind is to transform physical reality. Rand's celebration of productivity, and her belief that every man is an end in himself—her individualism—made her a major supporter of capitalism, and thus a celebrant of America, at the height of the Cold War.

For a body of work developed over some half a century, between the 1920s and 1970s, Rand's corpus is remarkably thematically consistent. All her works are to a greater or lesser extent about what she termed the "virtue of selfishness," and the evils of altruism. Selfishness, for Rand, was a way of life centred on the rational achievement of one's goals. Altruism was negation of the self in favour of a mythical and unachievable "common good." Almost akin to a Tolkien, Rand manufactures an internally consistent secondary world, a world of absolutes, morally divided between heroic producers and the evil unproductive. In Rand's reality, businessmen, industry captains, self-created individuals, are valorised, while anyone who works for the interests of others or is seen not to be thinking for him- or herself is condemned.

Whatever one thinks of her politics or her fiction, Rand is surely one of the most influential writers of the twentieth century. In 1991, in a survey supported by the Library of Congress, American readers listed her 1957 magnum opus, *Atlas Shrugged*, as the second most influential book in their lives, the first being the Bible.<sup>1</sup> Historian Jennifer Burns sees

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<sup>1</sup> Anne C. Heller, *Ayn Rand and the World She Made* (New York: Anchor Books, 2009), xii; Michael S. Berliner, "The *Atlas Shrugged* Reviews," in *Essays on Ayn Rand's "Atlas Shrugged"*, ed. Robert Mayhew (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009), 142n12.



Rand as a principal figure in the modern American libertarian movement. Rand's reach goes deeper still: she has entered the heart of the political mainstream. In 1987, Maureen Dowd of the *New York Times* dubbed her the "novelist laureate" of the Reagan administration. Sociologist Niamh Hourigan names Rand as one of the three main influences on the dominant economic policymakers of the 1980s and 1990s, the others being Milton Friedman and Friedrich Hayek.<sup>2</sup>

Those who admit to being inspired by Rand include Alan Greenspan, chairman of the United States Federal Reserve for nineteen years, until 2006; Paul Ryan, vice presidential nominee of the Republican Party in the 2012 election; and Larry Ellison, co-founder and former CEO of Oracle, one of Silicon Valley's most powerful corporations. Rand has also inspired makers of art and literature, and especially popular culture—including Steve Ditko, co-creator of Marvel Comics' Spider-Man. The extent of Rand's direct influence on business leaders and creators of public policy, however, is perhaps unequalled by any other twentieth-century novelist.

During the 2010s and the centre-left presidency of Barack Obama, Rand's sales have only grown. Some thirty million copies of her books have been sold in total; she currently sells another three-quarters of a million every year.<sup>3</sup> And, though primarily an American phenomenon, her popularity is not confined to the United States. The *Economist* reports that, in India, Rand's sales outstrip those of Karl Marx by sixteen to one. The Swedish enterprise minister from 2011 to 2014, Annie Lööf, hailed Rand as "one of the greatest thinkers of the twentieth century."<sup>4</sup>

A 2012 article for the *Chronicle of Higher Education* succinctly expressed what we might call the traditional academic view of Ayn Rand. Outlining why we should spend little or no time studying her work, Alan Wolfe, professor of political science at Boston College, declared: "In the academy, she is a nonperson. Her theories are works of fiction. Her works of fiction are theories, and bad ones at that."<sup>5</sup> The problem with Wolfe's dismissal is that it overlooks a key element which must be central to the study of any writer: the influence of the writer on readers and on the wider culture. There can be no doubt that Rand delivered her

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<sup>2</sup> Jennifer Burns, *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 255, 258; Maureen Dowd, "Where *Atlas Shrugged* Is Still Read—Forthrightly," *New York Times*, September 13, 1987, quoted in Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 279; Niamh Hourigan, interview by John Murray, *John Murray Show*, RTE Radio 1, August 21, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Mayhew, preface to *Essays on Ayn Rand's "We the Living"*, 2nd ed., ed. Mayhew (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012), ix.

<sup>4</sup> "Who's Shrugging Now?," *Economist*, October 20, 2012, <http://www.economist.com/news/international/21564832-individualist-philosopher-has-fans-some-unlikely-countries>.

<sup>5</sup> Alan Wolfe, "The Ridiculous Rise of Ayn Rand," *The Conversation* (blog), *Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 19, 2012, [http://chronicle.com/blogs/conversation/2012/08/19/the-ridiculous-rise-of-ayn-rand/?cid=at&utm\\_source=at&utm\\_medium=en](http://chronicle.com/blogs/conversation/2012/08/19/the-ridiculous-rise-of-ayn-rand/?cid=at&utm_source=at&utm_medium=en).

ideas in a manner that has had enduring appeal and impact, both in the private sphere of readers' lives and the public spheres of culture and politics. This makes her a subject worthy of examination.

Rand's "nonperson" status within academia has been changing over the last several years. Two articles in the *Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* aptly highlight the growth in academic focus on Rand since her death in 1982. Mimi Reisel Gladstein makes a valid point when she notes that "the trajectory of Rand's critical reputation is not that different from many writers who challenge the mores and thinking of their times." She cites the early shunning of Faulkner, Hemingway, and Steinbeck as menaces to the community. Gladstein sees the turn of the millennium as a breakthrough period for literary scholarship on Rand, with the publication of the first book-length studies on each of her major novels, Douglas J. Den Uyl's "*The Fountainhead*": *An American Novel* (Twayne, 1999) and Gladstein's own "*Atlas Shrugged*": *Manifesto of the Mind* (Twayne, 2000). The year 1999 also saw the release of the critically important *Feminist Interpretations of Ayn Rand* (ed. Gladstein and Sciabarra, Pennsylvania State University Press) and the founding of the *Journal of Ayn Rand Studies*.<sup>6</sup> Chris Matthew Sciabarra notes the increasing frequency of scholarly references to Rand, and the diversity of publications in which she is mentioned: everything from *College English* to the *Harvard Journal of Law & Public Policy* to *Germano-Slavica*, a Canadian Journal of Germanic and Slavic comparative and interdisciplinary studies.<sup>7</sup> The number of essay collections devoted to Rand, and the number of important scholarly articles on her work, has continued to grow throughout the 2000s—as the references in this thesis will make clear.

Despite this, for someone with her level of influence, Ayn Rand remains understudied. While references to Rand pervade American popular culture, and journalism both promoting and excoriating her ideas abounds, most scholarship has been done by committed partisans. There is a single independent journal devoted to Rand, the *Journal of Ayn Rand Studies*. In 2009, Jennifer Burns of Stanford University broke new ground with a nonpartisan monograph covering Rand's influence on the American right, *Goddess of the Market*, published by Oxford University Press. The book included a call for further investigation of Rand's impact on cyber and computer culture, which has been "strikingly libertarian from the beginning."<sup>8</sup> This thesis responds to that call to a certain extent, by considering Rand's relationship with those operating in technological spheres, while also covering other ground. I look at the thematic relationship between Rand's fiction and various examples of twentieth- and twenty-first-

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<sup>6</sup> Mimi Reisel Gladstein, "Ayn Rand in the Scholarly Literature III: Ayn Rand Literary Criticism," *Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* 4, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 376–77, 384–85, 388, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41560226>.

<sup>7</sup> Chris Matthew Sciabarra, "The Illustrated Rand," *Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* 6, no. 1 (Fall 2004): 2, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41560268>.

<sup>8</sup> Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 263, 339n48.



century science fiction. In the process, the thesis addresses the relationship between Rand's work and one of the major theories of twenty-first-century subjectivity, posthumanism. The essential question of my thesis is this: Does Rand's philosophy support a posthuman vision—that is, a vision of man existing beyond the “naturally produced” organic body? Through an analysis of Rand's work itself, an analysis of her connections with science fiction (which prefigures posthuman futures), and an exploration of her influence on those who create and who theorise technological progress, I argue that it does.

### **Posthuman Beginnings**

The novel which truly made Rand famous was her third, 1943's *The Fountainhead*. Its hero is an uncompromising red-haired architect, Howard Roark; the story charts his career from his college expulsion until he becomes master of all he surveys. He will not design with others, will only design buildings in his own inimitable style. At the end, during a lengthy speech on the rights of man, individual, and the wrongs of men, collective, Roark polemicises: “Every great new invention was denounced. The first motor was considered foolish. The airplane was considered impossible. The power loom was considered vicious. Anesthesia was considered sinful. But the men of unborrowed vision went ahead [...]. The creator's concern is the conquest of nature.”<sup>9</sup>

Roark is a conduit for Rand's philosophy. Roark's, and Rand's, viewpoint, raises a question which can only now be explored in its full implications—and perhaps not even yet. If the concern of the creative mind “is the conquest of nature,” why not build a technological body, a human frame better than biology?

The posthuman is a concept of subjectivity, driven by a belief that the self is not limited to the individual organic human body. Philosophical posthumanism can take many forms: from ontological kinship with animals and the environment, to incorporating nonhuman facets into ideas of the self—whether it be an iPhone or a bionic limb. Posthumanism encompasses philosophical ideas about modern and emerging technology, as they relate to the human: artificial intelligence, genetically engineered bodies, cloning technology, potential machine bodies into which our minds could be placed (cyborgs). These are possibilities found in both science fiction and increasingly in scientific reality. How does the existence of these possibilities alter what it means to be human, alter how we think about ourselves as human beings? This is perhaps the central question of posthumanism.

Proponents of the “posthuman” futures I write about here, broadly speaking, seek to improve upon the organic human body, either by engineering it at the genetic level, or by fusing elements of the organic with mechanical and digital technology. The philosophy which

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<sup>9</sup> Ayn Rand, *The Fountainhead* (London: Penguin Books, 2007), 710–12.



advocates improving the human by substituting the technological for the organic is also known as transhumanism. The differences between the broader discourse of posthumanism and the specific field of transhumanism are commented upon further below.

The cyborg may be on the verge of becoming real. Scientists—the primary creators of posthuman futures, just as science fiction authors are the primary imaginers of them—have long been experimenting with technology’s ability to improve our bodies. Kevin Warwick, professor of cybernetics, has been involved in a number of cyborgian experiments, including having a one-hundred-electrode array implanted into the median nerve fibres of his left arm, with which he could operate a robotic hand. The array was also used to send neural signals, via the Internet, to electrodes implanted in his wife’s arm, resulting in stimulation of her nervous system.<sup>10</sup> Warwick has said: “I, for one, am looking forward to upgrading my own capabilities. [...] I want to have all sorts of different senses fed directly into my brain and to be able to communicate by thought signals alone”; “it’s a cyborg life for me!”<sup>11</sup> The cyborg is the posthuman par excellence, the fusion of human will and manmade limbs.

It is important to note that the posthuman does not necessarily entail a world devoid of humans; it implies the survival of something human, albeit in a revised form. N. Katherine Hayles writes that, “the posthuman should not be depicted as an apocalyptic break with the past. Rather, it exists in a relation of overlapping innovation and replication [...]. Technology as a strategy of survival and evolutionary fitness cannot be alien to the human.”<sup>12</sup> The “post-” in posthumanism can be treated in the same manner as Lyotard treats the prefix in postmodernism. The “post-” does not signify a simple division with modernism. Lyotard writes that the postmodern should be understood as a development beyond—but also something that comes from within—the modern; it is a process of “anamorphosis.”<sup>13</sup> The posthuman can be understood in the same way.

Overlapping circles can be drawn between Objectivism and posthumanist thought. Much of the twentieth century’s ideological and real conflict begins with arguments over the interests of society as against the interests of the self—with Rand at the vanguard of those promoting self-interest. In the twenty-first century, the philosophical ground is shifting to the battle of the self versus technology. Technology is increasingly the force which binds human society, by setting and expanding the limits of human connectedness, as well as expanding individual lifespan and capability. Posthuman theory will therefore become an ever-more

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<sup>10</sup> Kevin Warwick, et al., “Thought Communication and Control: A First Step Using Radiotelegraphy,” *IEE Proceedings—Communications* 151 (2004): 186–88.

<sup>11</sup> Kevin Warwick, “A Cyborg Life for Me,” in Kenan Malik et al., *What Is It to Be Human? What Science Can and Cannot Tell Us* (London: Academy of Ideas, 2001), 43–44.

<sup>12</sup> N. Katherine Hayles, “Afterword: The Human in the Posthuman,” *Cultural Critique*, no. 53 (Winter 2003): 134, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1354628>.

<sup>13</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, “Note on the Meaning of ‘Post-,’” in *Postmodernism: A Reader*, ed. Thomas Docherty (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 47–48, 50.

important way of analysing twenty-first-century culture and subjectivity. Objectivism and posthumanism are far from a perfect fit philosophically; there is tension, especially considering the Randian notion of man as heroic in himself (that is, without technological augmentation) and the democratic aspirations of much posthumanist thought (set against Rand's individual-alone). However, the strains are linked through facets such as a belief in the primacy of the mind, as well as a veneration of progress through technological advancement, a faith in a Nietzschean Superman, and a belief in the comparative dystopia of now. According to any directive philosophy for living, the future is a comparative utopia when the edicts of that particular philosophy are followed.

In Rand, the role of the mind as man's key asset—indeed, essence—is foregrounded. In *Atlas Shrugged*, her heroic protagonist, John Galt, reverses Descartes's famous assertion, declaring: "I am, therefore I'll think."<sup>14</sup> For Rand, thinking was not the first proof of existence. Rather, one existed, therefore thinking was needed to survive, and reasoned thought was a conscious choice. The creator is distinguished by his or her superior mental faculties; physical labour is secondary.

A similar belief in the mind as human essence underlies much posthumanist thought. As Hayles, one of the primary theorists of the posthuman, has pointed out, one of the first philosophical steps on the road to posthuman conception, is a grading of the body as subordinate to the will, ideas, and thoughts of the mind. The organic body becomes for posthumanists, mankind's "original prosthesis." It is therefore desirable to replace the organic body with a better prosthesis, one more able to fulfil the mind's wishes.<sup>15</sup>

Rand's belief system is marked at its core by an intellectual investment in technology—an assertion that man's progress is indicated by technological development; moreover, that technological progression is at the heart of humanity's worth. Rand's descriptions of technological creations as the physical embodiments of human thought—we could say its "offspring"—foreshadow Hans Moravec's concept of "mind children." Moravec, a robotics expert and transhumanist, writes of mind children as the technological creations of man's mind, which may come to take on lives of their own.<sup>16</sup>

Such descriptions by Rand come to the fore in her 1938 novella *Anthem*, a creation myth which conflates technological creation with the liberation of the individual. Set in a future dystopia where humankind has technologically regressed, its hero is Equality 7-2521, a rebel who rediscovers electricity. When Equality brings his creation, a lightbulb, to the World Council of Scholars, he appeals to them that "the future of mankind" lies with

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<sup>14</sup> Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* (London: Penguin Books, 2007), 1058.

<sup>15</sup> N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 3.

<sup>16</sup> Hans Moravec, *Mind Children: The Future of Robot and Human Intelligence* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 1.



electricity.<sup>17</sup> Instead of praising Equality, however, the scholars condemn him, vowing to suppress his invention so as not to make the candle-makers jobless.

From the standpoint of posthumanism, and how Rand buttresses a posthumanist philosophy, it is important to note that in *Anthem*, as elsewhere in Rand, human invention is framed as the conquest of nature: man's mind over the matter of the earth. Equality 7-2521's discovery of electricity is described as "[t]he power of the sky [...] made to do men's bidding"; it is "the key to the earth"—technology is that which "ease[s] the toil of men," and that is good.<sup>18</sup> There is no dividing line between the invention and the inventor; the invention is as much an extension of the inventor as his own body. Equality speaks of his creation, saying: "this wire is as a part of our body, as a vein torn from us, glowing with our blood. Are we proud of this thread of metal, or of our hands which made it, or is there a line to divide these two?" The technological creation is endowed with the features of organic life; it is "a living heart that gives us strength."<sup>19</sup>

In Rand, the self is integrated with the product of self. The implication everywhere is that the self is not limited to the organic. Technology and invention become extensions of the mind and body, just as the body itself is an agent of the ego.

### **Investing in Technology**

At the end of *Anthem*, Equality renames himself Prometheus, after "he [who] taught men to be gods." Prometheus vows to re-establish civilisation by having children with another rebel, Liberty 5-3000, whom he renames Gaea, as she is "to be the mother of a new kind of gods."<sup>20</sup>

Frankenstein, of course, was the Modern Prometheus, while technologies today which challenge our assumptions about life or manipulate the boundaries of life are frequently compared to the work of Mary Shelley's fictional life-creator. Rand, however, takes only a positive view of technological advancement and scientific experimentation, when in the hands of the individual and not the collective. Men should be gods, according to her, for their minds are creative.

In his book *The Fourth Discontinuity*, Bruce Mazlish makes the case for the "co-evolution" of humans and machines. Humans have always used tools, and machines have developed as we have developed; indeed, they have been key to our development and vice versa. Humans and machines belong to the same cycle of life. Humans are not simply products of evolution but also agents of it; as Mazlish states, in Darwinian terms, machine evolution is closer to domestic than natural selection. We are bringing the artificial to the point of

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<sup>17</sup> Ayn Rand, *Anthem* (New York: Signet, 2005), 70.

<sup>18</sup> Rand, *Anthem*, 60, 71

<sup>19</sup> Rand, *Anthem*, 61, 76.

<sup>20</sup> Rand, *Anthem*, 99.



sentience; whether machines will soon evolve independent of humans is “a pressing issue.”<sup>21</sup> In this scenario, men are gods of sorts, as Rand imagined.

Since the Industrial Revolution, according to Mazlish, human evolution has seemed to point in a new direction. This is “where humans pass, or begin to pass, the boundary between the animal and the mechanical. [...] Humans themselves become more mechanical.” And why wouldn’t we? Integration of machines into our lives extends our capacity exponentially; technological development is very much linked to our ability to be all we can be.<sup>22</sup> Rand likewise identifies the Industrial Revolution as man’s breaking point with his primitive past; it represents the ushering in of a new order based on progress and technological advancement, paving the way for the triumph of reason and, ultimately, Objectivism.<sup>23</sup> At least in this sense, posthumanist theorists and Objectivists view human historical trajectories in a similar manner.

As the above narrative suggests, Rand’s work itself provides a backdrop for technological futures and in turn posthumanism. A significant part of my case for the overlapping circles between Objectivism and posthumanism, however, is Rand’s real-world influence on the innovators who are forging our technological destiny, whose works constitute precursors to posthuman futures. Rand’s intellectual investment in technology has undoubtedly aided the acceptance of her ideas among technology entrepreneurs and libertarian transhumanists. Internet innovators such as PayPal founder Peter Thiel and Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales count Rand as an inspiration. Transhumanism’s libertarian element owes much to Rand. The founding principles of the libertarian-transhumanist Extropian movement stem in part from the writings of Rand and Hayek. The Extropians advocate “extropy”—the opposite of entropy. Their principles call for “a rational, action-based optimism” combined with a transcendence of natural limits through “intelligent technology.”<sup>24</sup> Patri Friedman, Milton Friedman’s grandson, Rand fan, and a well-known transhumanist, is co-founder of the Seasteading Institute, an organisation with the aim of establishing floating cities. These would be locations where innovators could experiment with new methods of social relations, free from the obstruction of existing governments. In *Atlas Shrugged*, the productive vanish from society to establish their own “Atlantis,” as Rand calls it, a pure-capitalist community hidden in a valley dubbed Galt’s Gulch. The similarities between seasteads and Galt’s Gulch have not

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<sup>21</sup> Bruce Mazlish, *The Fourth Discontinuity: The Co-Evolution of Humans and Machines* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 4–8.

<sup>22</sup> Mazlish, *Fourth Discontinuity*, 12, 10.

<sup>23</sup> “The professional businessman and the professional intellectual came into existence together, as brothers born of the industrial revolution.” Ayn Rand, “For the New Intellectual,” in *For the New Intellectual: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand* (New York: Signet, 1992), 13.

<sup>24</sup> Max More, “Extropian Principles,” quoted in James Hughes, *Citizen Cyborg: Why Democratic Societies Must Respond to the Redesigned Human of the Future* (Cambridge, MA: Westview, 2004), 166.

gone unnoticed. Seasteading and the Extropians are two examples which are further investigated through an Objectivist–posthumanist lens, in the course of my thesis.

The Nietzschean Superman, as I mentioned, informs both Rand’s ideal man and the posthuman; this connection is explored in the dissertation. The spectre of another Nietzschean concept hangs over Rand and posthumanism, however: the will to nothingness. Given that our current historical trajectory suggests that man may one day be superseded by his technological creations, does Rand’s intellectual investment in technology constitute an ultimate will to nothing for humanity? Can Rand’s work be considered a negation of the true organic self? This question is too large to be given much attention in this thesis, but the spectre of it remains present.

Objectivists, of course, would say that Rand’s philosophy does the opposite of negate the human; Objectivism exposes the true human self: the thinking individual mind. Yet, for all her valorisation of man, Rand herself was not always so sure that the human was the best form of life that there could be on earth. She wrote in her journal, on July 18, 1945: “Perhaps we are really in the process of evolving from apes to Supermen—and the rational faculty is the dominant characteristic of the better species, the Superman.”<sup>25</sup> If Supermen are to be made real on earth, they will likely be men of steel, technological bodies, posthumans. The future awaits, and it begins with Ayn Rand.

## Thesis Overview

This thesis is an introduction to the overlaps between the work of Ayn Rand and the sphere of the posthuman. It is an argument for Rand’s presence within the context of the posthuman; more widely conceived, it is also about ways of thinking about Objectivism and posthumanism together, relating the two fields to each other. Many dissertations on literature chart the evolution of a particular trope, considering its manifestations in various texts across time—that is not my aim here. This dissertation is not a comprehensive history of an idea or a trend; it is something more inchoate: an evidentiary statement, perhaps; an account of certain links and an elaboration upon them. My hope is that it may be a spur for future thought.

The thesis is not simply a study of Rand’s fiction as a product unto itself; it is as much or more about *where the fiction goes*. By this I mean: I consider the nature of the impetus Rand has provided to so many, and how her ideas have contributed towards certain ends. The thesis combines close textual analysis of Rand’s work with an examination of other sources and contextual factors; comparison between Rand’s fiction and other fiction illuminates much of

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<sup>25</sup> Ayn Rand, *Journals of Ayn Rand*, ed. David Harriman (New York: Plume, 1999), 285.



my argument. To avoid repetition of themes, my chapters are organised thematically, rather than separate chapters in turn dealing with each of Rand's works.

The thesis is ordered into five chapters. Chapters one and two may be considered an extension of the introduction. The first provides an initial engagement with Rand's work, as well as considering her biography and the historical environment in which she wrote, both of which are essential to a scholarly understanding of her fiction. Chapter two discusses the reach of Rand's influence; it is in this wider context that any analysis of Rand via posthumanism must be set. Chapter three furthers the argument for considering Rand in relation to the posthuman by comparing her novels with science fiction by her contemporaries. This elucidates what I term the "science-fictional imagination of Objectivism," a facet important to a posthuman reading.

Having established, therefore, the theoretical foundation for overlapping Objectivism with posthumanism in the introduction, and brought to bear, in chapters one to three, the multiple factors internal and external to Rand's writing which must be explored when advancing such an argument, chapters four and five move to a direct consideration of Rand in relation to the posthuman. I expand on the theoretical basis outlined above, analyse the impact Rand has already had within transhumanist and posthumanist culture, and address issues flagged in earlier chapters. The thesis ends with an afterword which offers some further comment on its various strands, and suggests the continuing relevance of both Ayn Rand and the posthuman.

## **Chapter One**

Rand's opposition to the Soviet system, and her embrace of Americanism, set the agenda for her life's work. In an early letter home, she wrote: "I am so Americanized that I can walk in the streets without raising my head to look at the skyscrapers [...]. The only thing that remains for me is to rise."<sup>26</sup> Rand cut her teeth as a writer during the 1930s, America's "Red Decade." Later, in 1947, she would appear as a friendly witness before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, to decry Soviet propaganda emanating from the US film industry. Rand's life story—from its realisation of the American dream, to the paranoia of her later years—is important to an understanding of the themes and tone of her writing. In addition to considering her four novels, my first chapter offers a biographical sketch, and overviews the Cold War context in which Rand developed her philosophy—a philosophy based on the opposition between collectivism and individualism.

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<sup>26</sup> Ayn Rand, letter to "Leo," August 28, 1926, in *Letters of Ayn Rand*, ed. Michael S. Berliner (New York: Plume, 1997), 1.

Despite a diversity of settings, Rand's four works of fiction—*We the Living* (1936), *Anthem* (1938), *The Fountainhead* (1943), and *Atlas Shrugged* (1957)—cover similar themes. Chapter one offers an initial assessment of the novels; further evidence from the novels, as well as Rand's nonfiction, will be brought to bear as appropriate throughout the thesis. This chapter provides an introduction to the fiction in terms of my theme. I examine the content of the books under headings appropriate to a posthuman reading, such as Rand's rhetoric of the sacred in human creation, and her veneration of capitalism. I also establish Rand's utopianism, making use of Karl Popper's definition of utopian social engineering. This will later be shown to be an important point as regards her influence on those imagining posthuman futures.

## **Chapter Two**

Having become a bestselling author and the leader of a cultural movement—many have called it a cult—Ayn Rand died in 1982, famous and infamous, lauded and condemned. But this is only the beginning of the story of her fiction; in terms of influence, her afterlife has been more successful than her life. Chapter one is about Rand's fiction; chapter two looks at how readers have responded to the fiction—specifically, at how it has served as a source of inspiration to so many, overwhelmingly Americans. Rand's writing is a starting point in several elements of Western culture, from the mid-twentieth century on. It would be a stretch to say that Rand is the *cause* of these elements—the laissez-faire policies of Alan Greenspan, for instance. Rather, Rand's works, especially *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*, provide a particular kind of inspiration, or inspiration to a particular kind of person; certain readers have directed their lives in particular ways, after reading Ayn Rand. Many Rand admirers have reached prominent positions in society. This phenomenon is examined here. I summarise the multiple strands of Rand's influence, focusing on the worlds of politics, business (especially the technology sector), and popular culture. It is in this broader context that my subsequent chapters are set.

## **Chapter Three**

Two of Rand's four novels are explicitly science fictional, *Anthem* and *Atlas Shrugged*. The spectre of science fiction hovers around her entire philosophy, however, given her utopian vision, her technological mindset, and her focus on the future. Chapter three outlines what I term the science-fictional imagination of Objectivism. Posthumanism, like Objectivism, is intrinsically linked with science fiction—a point expanded as the thesis progresses. The fact that both Rand's philosophy and the posthuman are attached to the sci-fi genre, in turn highlights their connection to each other.

Rand traced her artistic roots to the originating era of our modern understanding of the individual-creator: the Romantic age of the nineteenth century. The origins of the science fiction genre can also be found here. I consider in this chapter Rand's claim to being the "heir"



of the Romantics, and suggest how her view of Romanticism in art contributes to her utopian and science-fictional imagination.

By considering Rand's work in the context of the science fiction of her time, we can come to better understand her ideas. In spite of her utopian vision, Rand more often presented men struggling in dystopian conditions—attempting to attain their own utopias. Therefore, perhaps the sub-genre of SF that Rand has most in common with is dystopian fiction. The chapter concludes with a comparative analysis of her fiction and three twentieth-century dystopian novels: Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1931), George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953).

#### **Chapter Four**

Are we really headed towards a time in which human and machine merge, or where we are altered fundamentally by artificial genetic reconfiguration? To some who hold such a vision, of biology integrated with—or supplanted by—technology, Rand's work is part of the fire burning beneath the dream. In any case, Objectivism and posthumanism are linked philosophically, through facets such as a faith in man's reasoning mind, a veneration of technological advancement, and a glorification of superhuman ability.

Chapter four expands on the outline, given in the introduction, of Rand's writing in the context of theorists of the posthuman and the technological future. Authors whose work is used include N. Katherine Hayles, Donna Haraway, Max More, and Jeanine Thweatt-Bates. The chapter exposites Rand's views on technology, which lead towards posthuman conception. Two facets are described: (i) *man conquering nature is good, it is a true expression of man's unique value*; and (ii) *technology is an extension of human will and as such has immense value*. The chapter continues by outlining the two major strains of posthumanist thought, as identified by Thweatt-Bates, and overviewing their philosophical relationship to Rand: Donna Haraway's cyborg, and the transhuman.

Transhumanism is part of the broad discourse of posthumanism, but it also has a separate and more concrete meaning. The posthuman is a concept of subjectivity, and posthumanism a diverse philosophical field ruminating on the nature of modern and future life. While the posthuman can mean an enhanced human being, such as a cyborg, it is also more generally about *the relationship* between the human and the non-human (the machine). Hayles, for instance, writes that, because of how technology and new fields of science have changed how we *think* about ourselves, "even a biologically unaltered *Homo sapiens* counts as posthuman."<sup>27</sup> If the posthuman is a concept of subjectivity, the transhuman is a specific being—an enhancement over the "ordinary" biological human—and transhumanism is a

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<sup>27</sup> Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 4.

movement with definitive aims: life extension, immortality, expanded ability through genetic and technological augmentation. Transhumanism has far more in common with Rand than other philosophies of posthumanity. This fact is demonstrated by overviewing the similar relationship Objectivism and transhumanism hold with Nietzsche, as well as considering how transhumanism and Objectivism themselves interact.

## **Chapter Five**

In my final chapter, the consideration of Rand in the context of the trans-/posthuman turns to fiction. I explore Rand's relationship with the genre of posthumanist science fiction, and examine how her work has been put to use in three fictional representations of trans-/posthumanity. The first is *Andromeda* (2000–2005), a television show created by *Star Trek* originator Gene Roddenberry, which demonstrates the connections between Rand, Nietzsche, and the posthuman. The second is the videogame *BioShock* (2007), which consciously depicts a post-Objectivist dystopia. The game is set in an alternate-history 1960; in the real world, this was the period of Objectivism's gaining flight, after the publication of *Atlas Shrugged*. The game's action is played out in an underwater city, the mind child of megalomaniac Andrew Ryan—a near-homonym of “Ayn Rand.” In *BioShock*'s plot, Randian philosophy has resulted in a rigid class system and led to civil war; into the mix are thrown biotechnology and mechanical technology with the power to bestow superhuman capabilities. *BioShock* exemplifies the implicit and evident links between Ayn Rand and posthumanism. The third fictional text explored is Zoltan Istvan's novel, *The Transhumanist Wager* (2013). The book is, in many respects, a rewriting of Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*. Where Rand promoted capitalism, Istvan promotes transhumanism. *Wager*, and all the examples in this chapter, embody the argument of the thesis: the continuum between the work of Ayn Rand and the posthuman.



## Four Novels and a Philosophy

America has ended—and it is about to be reborn. The setting is Mulligan’s Valley, a small community in the mountains of Colorado. For years, the great creators have been gathering here: the entrepreneurs, the inventors, the best artists. Buckling under the weight of taxes, and constrained by regulation, one by one they chose to drop out of the American economy: to go on strike. Unable to sustain itself without brilliant men and women, the economy has collapsed, and with it the body politic. Chaos reigns.

But the time has come once more for order. The old world has consumed itself with its failure; the great creators are ready to return and shape the earth to their meaning. By lamplight at a table in his library, a judge of Mulligan’s Valley marks and crosses out the contradictions in the statements of the Constitution of the United States. He adds a new clause: “Congress shall make no law abridging the freedom of production and trade.” Across the valley, high on a mountain ledge, the leader of the striking entrepreneurs, John Galt, looks out upon the ruined landscape. “We are going back to the world,” he announces. He raises his hand and, over the scorched earth, traces in space the sign of the dollar.<sup>1</sup>

This ominous scene forms the conclusion to Ayn Rand’s 1,200-page 1957 magnum opus, *Atlas Shrugged*. Rand believed that civilisation was kept moving by a distinct elite. Not a racial elite, or patriarchy, or a highborn elite along traditional aristocratic lines—but an elite of the mind. In any one generation, there will be only a few who have the ideas that truly revolutionise human existence. In Rand’s lifetime, Thomas Edison and Robert Oppenheimer would have fitted the bill; in ours perhaps Steve Jobs. In *Atlas*, the author suggests that as few as 1,000 individual creators could collapse the American economy, and hence the global economy—collapse civilisation as we know it—simply by refusing to apply their genius.<sup>2</sup> One thousand Atlases holding aloft the world, and the rest of us the beneficiaries of their labour. Rand’s elitism should not be taken to mean that she didn’t want her work to have appeal to the man in the street. Her philosophy, Objectivism, venerates productivity. Everyone can be productive; it’s just that some will produce more of objective value than others.

The above is the endgame: society implodes, and the strikers return to the world at large. For the majority of *Atlas*’s text, however, Mulligan’s Valley and its inhabitants are defined in opposition to “the world at large.” The valley—more commonly called by its

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<sup>1</sup> Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* (London: Penguin Books, 2007), 1167–68.

<sup>2</sup> According to Frederick Cookinham, Rand estimated the population of Mulligan’s Valley to be no more than 1,000. Cookinham, *The Age of Rand: Imagining an Objectivist Future World* (New York: iUniverse, 2005), 157.

nickname, Galt's Gulch—is a fascinating fictional construct: a Randian paradise running counter to the socialistic implosion of America. Rand understandably refers to it in explicitly mythical terms, as “Atlantis.” It is the shining city beneath the hills, the city only of heroes; Rand's most complete expression of her ideal society, put into fictional action. The author herself calls the gulch a utopia. Objectivist scholar Shoshana Milgrim is forthright in describing it as a “genuine utopia.”<sup>3</sup> Any real-world Ayn Rand utopia would have to take this place as its blueprint. And indeed, many have been persuaded by *Atlas Shrugged* to work towards a future which resembles Rand's vision of Galt's Gulch, as we will see.

Only the worthy may enter Utopia. Kirsti Minsaas explains that the “key of admission” to Mulligan's Valley “is that one has grasped the code of rational egoism, cleansed of all altruistic impurities.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, one must have bought Rand's philosophy hook, line, and sinker. The inhabitants of the valley live entirely in accordance with Objectivist principles. We are introduced to Galt's Gulch in chapters appropriately entitled “Atlantis” and “The Utopia of Greed,” about two thirds of the way through the novel. Fearless railroad executive Dagny Taggart has pursued John Galt's plane into the Rocky Mountains. Dagny correctly believes that Galt is the “destroyer,” the man responsible for the disappearance of the “men of the mind” from the economy. Dagny crashes in the valley, and opens her eyes to find Galt kneeling beside her. This is Dagny's, and the reader's, first meeting with Rand's ultimate ideal man, who will now take us into Rand's ideal community. Milgrim writes: “The chapters in which Dagny visits Atlantis are, in narrative approach, somewhat like the ‘tours’ by which foreigners are introduced to utopian societies in such works as Thomas More's *Utopia*, Francis Bacon's *The New Atlantis*, and Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*.”<sup>5</sup> In the America outside, the government is applying new constraints on business with alarming continuity, and consequently the economy only contracts. But in Galt's Gulch, individual freedom—in an absolute capitalist sense—reigns supreme. The individualist nature of the community becomes clear from Dagny's first glimpses. Rand emphasises that it is not truly a “community” at all, but a series of private properties: “It was not a town, only a cluster of houses scattered at random.” At dinner, people do not gather together at a table but sit around the room on their own chairs with their own trays. This non-community nevertheless possesses

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<sup>3</sup> Shoshana Milgrim, “*Anthem* in the Context of Related Literary Works: ‘We Are Not Like Our Brothers,’” in *Essays on Ayn Rand's “Anthem,”* ed. Robert Mayhew (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 163.

<sup>4</sup> Kirsti Minsaas, “Ayn Rand's Recasting of Ancient Myths in *Atlas Shrugged*,” in *Ayn Rand's “Atlas Shrugged”: A Philosophical and Literary Companion*, ed. Edward W. Younkins (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007), 148.

<sup>5</sup> Milgrim, “*Anthem* in the Context of Related Literary Works,” in *Essays on Ayn Rand's “Anthem,”* ed. Mayhew, 163.



a defining monument: supported on a granite column, a three-foot-tall solid gold dollar sign, the town's "coat-of-arms, its trademark, its beacon."<sup>6</sup>

Here, the dollar is almighty. Everything must be paid for. Galt wishes to rent Midas Mulligan's car—Mulligan is the banker to whom the valley owes its name. Dagny is initially surprised that Mulligan, who is worth \$200 million, would not simply allow Galt to borrow the car as a courtesy, rather than have him rent it at twenty-five cents a day. Galt explains: "[W]e have no laws in this valley, no rules, no formal organization of any kind. We come here because we want to rest. But we have certain customs, which we all observe, because they pertain to the things we need to rest from. So I'll warn you now that there is one word which is forbidden in this valley: the word 'give.'" Galt subsequently informs Dagny that he will be charging her fifty cents a day for room and board, since "it is against our rules to provide the unearned sustenance of another human being." Dagny offers to work as Galt's housekeeper in lieu of paying rent, and Galt agrees.<sup>7</sup>

In the valley, ruthless competition in trade is encouraged and venerated. Andrew Stockton of Stockton Foundry remarks that he had to "ruin a competitor" before reaching his current position in the marketplace. The competitor is now making a grand living in a new profession: sculpture. Being put out of business allowed him to follow his true calling, since he could never have done "the kind of job" that Stockton does.<sup>8</sup> This scenario exemplifies Rand's dubious principle that there are no conflicts of interest among rational beings.<sup>9</sup> Two people are running the same type of business; one of them gains a greater market share than the other. According to the Randian view, the losing competitor—in a free market—could never have had that share, since his service is inferior. Because one could never have had what the other has, there is no conflict of interest.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 705–6, 736. It is important to note, as Alan Clardy does, that although Rand suggests that Galt's Gulch is something more akin to a voluntary association than a "community" or a "society," "there are deeper values, commitments, and obligations uniting these inhabitants that make this place a society more than an association." Alan Clardy, "Galt's Gulch: Ayn Rand's Utopian Delusion," *Utopian Studies* 23, no. 1 (2012): 246, [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/utopian\\_studies/v023/23.1.clardy.pdf](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/utopian_studies/v023/23.1.clardy.pdf). It is also the case that Rand uses the word "society" in the usual sense, for both her ideal and its opposite, throughout her work.

<sup>7</sup> Galt does clarify, in relation to family life in the valley: "Some of us have wives and children, but there is a mutual trade involved in that, and a mutual payment." Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 715, 760. Emphases in original.

<sup>8</sup> Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 723–24.

<sup>9</sup> Ayn Rand, "The 'Conflicts' of Men's Interests," in *The Virtue of Selfishness: A New Concept of Egoism* (New York: Signet, 2005), 57.

<sup>10</sup> Rand's "no-conflict thesis" clearly depends on an arbitrary view of what's rational. One could argue that the losing competitor's "rational self-interest" requires that he be able to make a good living, and that therefore the winner's share of the market does damage the loser's interests. James P. Sterba argues something similar in *From Rationality to Equality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 96–97. The scenario in which bankruptcy facilitates the pursuit of one's true passion—this is a utopian construct.

Ayn Rand is a utopian because she constructs a complete philosophical system which claims to resolve all contradictions and compromises in human action. More than this, every action taken in accordance with Objectivist beliefs has an ultimate end in mind: a world resembling, in essence, Galt's Gulch.

This first chapter of my thesis considers Rand's most important contribution, her four novels. I discuss Rand's fiction, in conjunction with her nonfiction, throughout the thesis. The literary analysis in this chapter should be thought of as an initial assessment of the novels, under headings germane to a posthuman reading—such as Rand's rhetoric of the sacred in human (as opposed to divine) creation. I also establish in this chapter Rand's utopianism. To do this, I make use of Karl Popper's definition of utopian social engineering. The utopian nature of Rand's thought is important because it is her *ideal* which is the source of the inspiration she has provided to so many. The vision of utopia is also germane to reading Rand as a science-fiction writer, which we will get to in chapter three. Rand's idealism regarding technology, a key point for a posthuman reading, is wrapped up in her broader utopian vision.

The four novels—*We the Living* (1936), *Anthem* (1938), *The Fountainhead* (1943), and *Atlas Shrugged* (1957)—all deal with similar issues, despite diverse settings. The events of Rand's first book come closest in her fiction to the events of her own life. *We the Living* is set in St. Petersburg/Petrograd/Leningrad in the years after the Bolshevik Revolution, and depicts the efforts of a young heroine to realise her dreams and finally to escape Russia. *Anthem*, a novella, is often compared to Huxley's *Brave New World* and Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*; it is a parable set in a future collectivist dystopia in which the concept of individuality has been eliminated. *The Fountainhead* offers Rand's first complete portrait of her ideal man: Howard Roark, an uncompromising architect, who fights all his life to build buildings the way he wants them built. Rand's final novel is her longest, her most complex, and most controversial. *Atlas Shrugged* is set in an alternate America, and centres around a mysterious "strike" by the world's great entrepreneurs, artists, and thinkers; slowly the absence of these individuals from productive life is bringing "the motor of the world" to a halt. This chapter takes all four novels into account, though I inevitably lend the most space to *Atlas*; others are given greater attention in later chapters. A "rediscovered" short novel by Rand, titled *Ideal*, was published in July 2015. This "new" novella is not discussed below, since a primary focus for this thesis is Rand's influence; as it went unpublished during her lifetime, *Ideal* cannot be considered under the same rubric as *Living*, *Anthem*, *The Fountainhead*, and *Atlas*. When I refer throughout the dissertation to Rand's four novels, I mean the quartet published in her lifetime.

Before taking account of the fiction as a thing in itself, it is necessary to contextualise it. I will therefore move first to a discussion of Rand's biography: the historical realities in which Rand was embedded, and how she responded to them; the external forces at work on



the novels. I also flag the notion of Rand as a specifically American and specifically popular author. Following this, I offer an analysis of the novels which might be thought of as Rand's "schema of civilisation," as found in the fiction. This forms the major bulk of the chapter. Finally, I explore briefly Rand's turn towards philosophy and writing nonfiction. Rand was always interested in conveying particular ideas through her writing, but it was only in the last part of her career that she came to explicitly call herself a philosopher, and to systematise the ideas found in the novels into "a philosophy for living on earth."

As will be explored further in chapter two, to this day, Rand continues to rise in the public consciousness. Fortuitously, then, 2009 brought the publication of two major biographies: *Ayn Rand and the World She Made* by Anne C. Heller (Random House / Anchor Books) and *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right* by Jennifer Burns (Oxford University Press). The two books were often reviewed together, and it is true that they complement and strengthen each other.<sup>11</sup> Burns is an historian, an assistant professor at Stanford University, while Heller is a long-time magazine editor and journalist. The books reflect their authors' respective skills. Heller illuminates in brilliant detail the multifaceted and often contradictory nature of Rand's life and psyche. In particular, via a research team in Russia, she brings to light much heretofore unknown information about Rand's Russian origins. Burns is better at spotlighting Rand's engagements with US politics, and the tentacle-like strands of her influence on American life. Where Heller tells a human story and offers psychological insight, Burns is scholarly in ambition. The books are significant in being the first independent full-length biography of Rand and the first independent academic monograph on Rand's life and influence, respectively. I am indebted to Heller and Burns for what follows in the biographical sketch below. My focus is the development of Rand's intellectual identity, resting on a few main points which provide important background for subsequent chapters. Rand's embrace of Americanism is an essential process to chart. We can see how she developed a distinctly (right-wing) American worldview; this would become embedded in her fiction, and finally systematised into her philosophy of Objectivism. Her appeal to a significant segment of the American public comes out of the manner in which she expressed this worldview. To understand the reach of her influence—including into the posthuman sphere—it is necessary to understand the nature of her appeal.

### **Alissa Rosenbaum**

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<sup>11</sup> The books are reviewed jointly in, amongst other places, *American Scholar* 29, no. 1 (Winter 2010); *Policy* 26, no. 1 (Autumn 2010); *New Republic*, September 14, 2009 (<http://www.tnr.com/article/books-and-arts/wealthcare-0>); *Washington Post*, December 27, 2009 (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/12/23/AR2009122301923.html>); *New York Times*, October 21, 2009 ([http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/22/books/22rand.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/22/books/22rand.html?_r=0)).

Ayn Rand was born on February 2, 1905, in St. Petersburg, Russia, in the midst of the 1905 revolution. She was not, then, named Ayn Rand, but Alissa Zinovievna Rosenbaum. Her parents, Zinovy and Anna, were secularised Russian Jews, living in “the capital city of the most anti-Semitic and politically divided nation on the European continent.”<sup>12</sup> Zinovy was a pharmacist who would eventually own his own chemist’s shop; Anna trained in dentistry but gave up professional work to be a wife and mother. Alissa was the first of three children, all girls. Before the revolution of 1917, they lived a life far more comfortable than many. Rand went to an excellent school, owned many toys, and the family vacationed in Western Europe.

Rand was by all accounts a bright child, and a child who liked to be by herself. Even at an early age, she was a being of passions, of violent likes and dislikes. Her likes included “certain European children’s stories and songs.”<sup>13</sup> Favourite reading included a children’s book on Catherine the Great, and Arthur Conan Doyle’s dinosaur adventure, *The Lost World*.<sup>14</sup> At age nine, Rand decided she would be a writer. At eleven, she had finished four novels. This was during the First World War, and one of the novels starred an English girl of Rand’s age, “who argued her way into the British Royal Navy and single-handedly machine-gunned down the entire German fleet.”<sup>15</sup> At age thirteen, Rand decided to be an atheist, since no one could prove that god exists. By sixteen, she chiefly admired Victor Hugo, and desired to write novels in his vein. She longed to grow older, to know more and to have more experience, to be able to develop her ideas more, so that she could improve her style.<sup>16</sup>

When she was nine, in 1914—around the time she began to jot down her own stories—Rand read one adventure that would shape her writing for decades to come. The story was *La vallée mystérieuse* (*The Mysterious Valley*) by Maurice Champagne, illustrated by René Giffey; it was serialised in a French children’s periodical to which her mother subscribed, *L’Écolier illustré*.<sup>17</sup> The serial’s setting is India, 1911; a cohort of British soldiers has been captured and brought to a hidden valley in the Himalayas, where they encounter an evil rajah and savage shamans, before finally making their escape. Jeff Britting writes that “the real attraction to Rand was the story’s main character,” the captain of the captured soldiers, Cyrus Paltons: “Paltons crystallized Rand’s vision of her male ideal.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Anne C. Heller, *Ayn Rand and the World She Made* (New York: Anchor Books, 2009), 2.

<sup>13</sup> Heller, *World She Made*, 6, 12.

<sup>14</sup> Jennifer Burns, *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 11–12.

<sup>15</sup> Heller, *World She Made*, 20.

<sup>16</sup> Jeff Britting, *Ayn Rand* (New York: Overlook Duckworth, 2004), 8; Heller, *World She Made*, 16, 19–21, 30, 36.

<sup>17</sup> Heller, *World She Made*, 12; Shoshana Milgrim, “Who Was John Galt? The Creation of Ayn Rand’s Ultimate Ideal Man,” in *Essays on Ayn Rand’s “Atlas Shrugged,”* ed. Robert Mayhew (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009), 53.

<sup>18</sup> Britting, *Ayn Rand*, 8.



Indeed, Giffey's illustrations of Paltons display him as, Rand would say decades later, "my present hero. Tall, long-legged [...] sleeves rolled at the elbows and hair falling down over one eye. [...] That whole expression which I carried thereafter of 'my kind of man' began with that story." Rand admitted that once she encountered Paltons, she was a girl in love. Most intriguingly, this love for a fictional character was "serious, metaphysical," she said looking back, a love as real as any in the real world: "There's nothing I can add in quality to any serious love later on that wasn't contained in that."<sup>19</sup> Rand honoured Cyrus Paltons by naming the heroine of her first novel after him. Kira in *We the Living* is in many ways a surrogate for Rand herself, but the name Kira is "the Russian female equivalent of Cyrus."<sup>20</sup>

The influence of Paltons on the "ideal men" Rand would later create, including Howard Roark and John Galt, is readily apparent; not only do they resemble him physically, but characteristically, demonstrating the bravery, defiance, and purpose that Paltons embodies. The formative impact of Champagne's story, however, seems to go deeper still. Milgrim makes a link between how Paltons first appears in *The Mysterious Valley* and the mystery surrounding John Galt in *Atlas Shrugged*:

We hear about Cyrus in the first chapter, but we do not meet him until close to the midpoint of the novel. He is described as the bravest of the brave, yet he is assumed, at the beginning of the story, to be dead and gone—actually, gone and dead, that is carried off by a tiger, and killed. We eventually learn, however, that the leader who disappeared did not die; he is discovered alive and kicking, along with his vanished companions, in a mysterious valley.<sup>21</sup>

This strongly suggests the predicament of Galt in *Atlas*. At the outset of the novel, Rand's hero is assumed to be long gone, if he ever even existed outside of myth; he does not appear in person until two-thirds of the way through the text, when we learn that he and his companions have been hiding out in a hidden valley.

From an early age, then, we see the importance of popular or pulp literature to Rand. This is not something she grows out of; she takes pulp fiction "seriously, metaphysically." Those childhood readings are not only formative but have echoes throughout her entire adult project. This phenomenon is something which is repeated among those who take Rand's own fiction metaphysically seriously: Rand's novels read in youth can guide the course of a life.

The world of Rand's imagination was as much a driver of her childhood as the external world. And yet, events in the external world set the course not only of her life but to a large degree of her thinking. Rand would become known as an American novelist, but the origins

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<sup>19</sup> Ayn Rand, quoted in Milgrim, "Who Was John Galt?," in *Essays on Ayn Rand's "Atlas Shrugged,"* ed. Mayhew, 53–54.

<sup>20</sup> Milgrim, "Who Was John Galt?," in *Essays on Ayn Rand's "Atlas Shrugged,"* ed. Mayhew, 53.

<sup>21</sup> Milgrim, "Who Was John Galt?," in *Essays on Ayn Rand's "Atlas Shrugged,"* ed. Mayhew, 54.

of her worldview, of her entire philosophy, are to be found firmly in Russia—in the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, and its aftermath.

Alissa was born into a country on the brink, about to enter one of the greatest failed experiments in history. Less than a fortnight before she came into the world, on Sunday, January 22, 1905, thousands of workers, students, women, and children had marched in St. Petersburg to Tsar Nicholas II's Winter Palace, appealing for improved work conditions and a say in the government. They were fired upon by the Tsar's troops; many were killed and injured in what became known as Russia's Bloody Sunday. Uprisings against imperial rule followed throughout the country, and limited reforms were enacted to appease: the Duma was created, and a new constitution enshrined. But Russia was riven by intractable inequality between the rulers and the ruled, and a reckoning could only be staved off for so long. The persistent problems of hunger and poverty were added to by massive Russian losses in World War I; in early 1917 the Duma took power from the Tsar, and Nicholas II abdicated. A liberal provisional government was formed, which would ultimately be headed by Aleksandr Kerensky as prime minister. This was a moment when, to borrow a Seamus Heaney phrase, hope and history seemed to rhyme for Russia—at least, this was how Rand recalled those brief few months of liberal-democratic-minded governance, before the Bolsheviks seized power in October/November.

The “Red Terror” brought with it the closure of many middle-class businesses such as Zinovy's, as the property of the bourgeoisie became fair game for seizure by the state and by the workers. What the Bolsheviks did to her family is key to understanding the psychology of Rand's writing. Burns sees the moment Rand's father's business is “seized in the name of the people,” in 1918, as essential to grasping the author's worldview:

Zinovy could at least be thankful the mad whirl of revolution had taken only his property, not his life. But his oldest daughter, [...] twelve at the time, burned with indignation. The shop was her father's; he had worked for it, studied long hours at university, dispensed valued advice and medicines to his customers. Now in an instant it was gone, taken to benefit nameless, faceless peasants, strangers who could offer her father nothing in return. The soldiers had come in boots, carrying guns, making clear that resistance would mean death. Yet they had spoken the language of fairness and equality, their goal to build a better society for all. Watching, listening, absorbing, [Alissa] knew one thing for certain: those who invoked such lofty ideals were not to be trusted. Talk about helping others was only a thin cover for force and power. It was a lesson she would never forget.<sup>22</sup>

The binary at the heart of Rand's thought—individualism is an absolute good while collectivism is an absolute evil—cannot be separated from the context of her life, from her losses under Sovietism and her gains once she reached America.

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<sup>22</sup> Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 9.



After fleeing for a time to Crimea during the Russian Civil War, the Rosenbaums returned to St. Petersburg in 1921. They returned to their old apartment, but could only occupy one room; the rest had been given over to others. Anna became the breadwinner, working as a teacher. Rand benefitted from the Communist policy of free education: she became a student at the Petrograd State University, where she majored in history and minored in philosophy. In 1923, she was purged from the university, along with thousands of other students, as part of a push to remove those from middle-class and non-Communist backgrounds. However, luckily, she was allowed to return and graduate.<sup>23</sup>

Even before she left Russia, Rand was drawn to Western ideals, both of a philosophical nature and those found in popular media. While at university, she read *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*; a cousin had told the individualistic and achievement-worshipping young atheist that Nietzsche had beaten her to all her ideas.<sup>24</sup> For the next two decades, Nietzsche's philosophy would form a sort of proving ground in which Rand's ideas came of age, taking on the characteristics of the mentor while at the same time becoming themselves. In maturity, Rand would say: "The only philosophical debt I can acknowledge is to Aristotle."<sup>25</sup> Perhaps Nietzsche had come too close to her own thinking for her to allow herself to acknowledge his influence. As she disagreed with much in Aristotle, Rand disagreed with much in Nietzsche, but both philosophers were formative in how her thought and writing developed. According to Britting, in his short biography of Rand sanctioned by the Ayn Rand Institute, the organisation founded by her estate: "Rand eagerly read *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, embracing Nietzsche's exaltation of the exceptional individual. But her enthusiasm diminished while reading his attack on rationality in *The Birth of Tragedy*."<sup>26</sup> Heller remarks on Nietzsche's impact more completely:

She responded to his heightened language, his brilliance, his bold critique of Christianity, and his principled admiration of Jewish thought. From this point on, her major characters would be more or less overtly Nietzschean—and, because of their Superman aura, would often be wrongly seen as fascistic by her critics. It wasn't until she was writing *The Fountainhead* that she was able to begin to loosen Nietzsche's seductive hold on her imagination.<sup>27</sup>

Initially, a quote from *Beyond Good and Evil* was to begin each section of *The Fountainhead*. Rand ultimately decided, however, that she did not wish to nail her colours to Nietzsche's

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<sup>23</sup> Apparently, "visiting foreign scientists [...] had complained about the purge," and so "the Soviet authorities let the purged students in their last year complete their degrees." Scott McConnell, "Parallel Lives: Models and Inspirations for Characters in *We the Living*," in *Essays on Ayn Rand's 'We the Living'*, 2nd ed., ed. Robert Mayhew (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012), 49.

<sup>24</sup> Britting, *Ayn Rand*, 22.

<sup>25</sup> Rand, quoted in "About the Author," *Atlas Shrugged*, 1171.

<sup>26</sup> Britting, *Ayn Rand*, 22.

<sup>27</sup> Heller, *World She Made*, 42.

mast.<sup>28</sup> There is more to be said about Rand and Nietzsche, especially as both relate to the posthuman, in chapter four. For now it is enough to note his influence.

Rand was drawn to portrayals of strength; Cyrus Paltons fitted this bill, as did Nietzsche—as did the heroes of black-and-white cinema. Rand watched more than a hundred movies before she emigrated, films by Fritz Lang, Cecil B. DeMille, and others. Early cinema, with its epic shots of the American metropolis, heavily affected her ambitions: “I remember there were some American movies where you could see New York, just shots, usually long shots, and I would sit through two shows just to catch it . . . it seemed completely incredible.”<sup>29</sup> Rand eventually decided she wanted to move to the US, to work in the film industry as a gateway to becoming a writer. The story goes that Anna Rosenbaum sold the last of her jewellery to pay for her daughter’s trip; relatives in Chicago also contributed.<sup>30</sup>

In January-February 1926, a six-month US visa under her belt, Rand travelled by train from St. Petersburg to Riga, and from Riga to Berlin, then to Paris and La Havre. From La Havre she sailed for America. Shortly after her twenty-first birthday, Ayn Rand first set foot in New York.

### **The Early Ayn Rand**

The precise origins of “Ayn Rand,” the name, are a mystery. It appears “Rand” at least was in use before Alissa departed Russia; she used it as an abbreviated form of Rosenbaum. A myth has developed that she named herself after her Remington-Rand typewriter, though this is not true, according to Burns. “Ayn,” writes Burns, was “inspired by a Finish writer,” who remains unidentified. In an early letter, Rand advised that her new forename was pronounced “I-n”—which may provide a clue as to why this ardent individualist favoured it. In any case, Rand’s new name allowed her to be shorn of her Jewish identity, and—in print—of her female identity; both shearings were conducive towards advancement in the movie industry and as a bestselling author.<sup>31</sup>

While the Rosenbaums were in Crimea, Rand had attended a private school. Here, she was introduced to and impressed by the Declaration of Independence. Many years later, after she had established herself as an American writer, Rand would call the Declaration not only “the greatest political document ever,” but “the greatest document in human history, both philosophically and literarily.”<sup>32</sup> Rand was eager for an American life before she departed

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<sup>28</sup> Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 87.

<sup>29</sup> Ayn Rand, quoted in Britting, *Ayn Rand*, 23.

<sup>30</sup> Heller, *World She Made*, 51.

<sup>31</sup> Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 19, 301n22; Ayn Rand, letter to Ev Suffens, April 6, 1936, in *Letters of Ayn Rand*, ed. Michael S. Berliner (New York: Plume, 1997), 27.

<sup>32</sup> Rand’s atheism is interesting here; she says of the Declaration: “There is, however, one minor fault on the level of fundamentals: the idea that men are endowed with rights by their Creator rather than by Nature. This is an issue of the choice of language. Philosophically, it doesn’t change the



Russia; once in the US, the process of Americanisation happened quickly. She wrote home: "I am so Americanized that I can walk in the streets without raising my head to look at the skyscrapers; I sit in a restaurant on very high chairs like in futuristic movie sets and use a straw to sip 'fruit cocktails' [...]. The only thing that remains for me is to rise." Notably, America represented lighthearted happiness to her, in contrast to Soviet utilitarianism: "Not taking anything too seriously is the chief rule Americans adhere to. Everybody makes fun of everybody else, not maliciously, but very wittily, and that is the essence of America."<sup>33</sup> After spending six months in Chicago, Rand moved to California, where she found work as a film extra, a junior screenwriter, and in the wardrobe department of RKO Pictures. While acting as an extra on *The King of Kings*, she met a fellow extra, the handsome and mild-mannered thespian who would become her husband, Frank O'Connor. Rand's marriage to O'Connor in 1929 put her on the fast-track to permanent residency. In 1931 she became a United States citizen.

There are many stories that could be told about Rand's initial years in America, anecdotes which reveal a little of the character she passed into her novels. There is one, however, which speaks volumes about her propensity to privilege the individual over the collective. In 1927, a nineteen-year-old named William Hickman murdered and dismembered a twelve-year-old girl. Rand's response was to decry "the ferocious rage of the *whole* society against *one* man." In her journal, she goes on: "No matter what the man did, there is always something loathsome in the 'virtuous' indignation and mass-hatred of the 'majority.'"<sup>34</sup> Hickman was an evident psychopath; as in, someone with an incapacity for empathy.<sup>35</sup> Rand identified with this. Observing Hickman's unrepentant attitude when caught, Rand describes the case as "the amazing picture of a man with no regard whatever for all that society holds sacred, and with a consciousness all of his own"; Hickman is "brilliant, unusual, exceptional." Rand does not condone Hickman's crime; she describes him as "a monster"—but she blames society for making him what he became, since it offers no paths to glory for the outstanding iconoclast: "What had society to offer him? A wretched, insane family as the ideal home, a

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declaration's meaning." Ayn Rand, *Ayn Rand Answers: The Best of Her Q & A*, ed. Robert Mayhew (New York: New American Library, 2005), 1.

<sup>33</sup> Rand, letter to Lev Bekkerman, August 28, 1926, in *Letters*, 1. In the *Letters*, the recipient is identified only as "Leo (last name unknown)"; however, Heller identifies him as Bekkerman, the unrequited love of Rand's youth. Heller, *World She Made*, 59.

<sup>34</sup> Ayn Rand, *Journals of Ayn Rand*, ed. David Harriman (New York: Plume, 1999), 36. Emphases in original.

<sup>35</sup> "[I]ndividuals with psychopathy present with notable empathic impairment." James Blair, Derek Mitchell, and Karina Blair, *The Psychopath: Emotion and the Brain* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 56.

YMCA club as social honour, and a bank job as ambition and career. [...] He was superior and wanted to live as such—and this is the one thing society does not permit.”<sup>36</sup>

Soviet collectivism was simple oppression for Rand. Yet, the American dream of a well-paying professional job, and a comfortable family life in an affluent community, was clearly not what she had in mind for her ideal, either. There is a yearning in Rand’s comments on Hickman for a life beyond human society. Rand planned a story inspired by the Hickman case, in which the main character was a version of Hickman “with a purpose” and “without the degeneracy.” Her version, named Danny Renahan, has “the true, innate psychology of a Superman.” In Nietzschean form, he desires to be above the mob, to give it orders, crush it under his feet. Rand references both Hickman and Nietzsche in her character description: “Hickman said: ‘I am like the state: what is good for me is right.’ That is this boy’s psychology. (The best and strongest expression of a real man’s psychology I ever heard.) [...] And, as Nietzsche said: ‘The noble soul has reverence for itself.’ He has a profound reverence for himself.”<sup>37</sup>

Rand is beginning to articulate her own philosophy here, a view of the horrors of groupthink and an uncompromising ideal of individuality. These aspects of her belief-system would remain present throughout her life, though she would temper her opinion of American society and give up any suggestions of support for murderers. Another feature essential to Rand’s work is apparent from this anecdote: her tendency to see human stories as battles between two ideological extremes. She is also concerned with a particularly American tension: that between outlying individualism and the care of the community.

Rand was not the only writer to believe the Hickman case held wider implications for society. Edgar Rice Burroughs covered Hickman’s trial for the *Los Angeles Examiner* and wrote that all such “moral imbeciles” should be put to death.<sup>38</sup> Rand was coming at it from the opposite point of view. Even though she placed herself on the opposite side of public opinion, however, Rand’s comments bring forth her pulp sensibility: the tendency to see the world in terms of heroes and villains.

Rand was, and saw herself as, an iconoclast. Her first instinct was to support the man she saw standing out on his own, rather than the mass of public opinion. Similarly, Rand was a writer both of her time and against the trends of her time. She arrived in America during the “roaring ’20s,” in the midst of a widespread economic boom, when it seemed the financial

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<sup>36</sup> Rand, *Journals*, 36–38. Details of the Hickman case and Rand’s response are given in Heller, *World She Made*, 70; Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 24–25.

<sup>37</sup> Rand, *Journals*, 26–29.

<sup>38</sup> Edgar Rice Burroughs, quoted in Benjamin Welton, “Fox or ‘Moral Imbecile’? William Hickman and the Murder of Marion Parker,” *Crime Magazine*, May 19, 2014, <http://www.crimemagazine.com/fox-or-%E2%80%9Cmoral-imbecile%E2%80%9D-william-edward-hickman-and-murder-marion-parker>.



industry could do no wrong. Her first writerly successes came in the 1930s, during the Great Depression following the 1929 stock market crash; she wrote passionately against the Soviet Union and any form of collectivism, during a period when the US was enacting an extensive programme of reform in favour of social protection, a period when there was a very real possibility that the US would turn Communist. Rand thought the Depression in America a cakewalk compared to life in St. Petersburg.<sup>39</sup>

And yet, notwithstanding the fact that she found herself on the opposite side of cultural trends throughout much of her life, there would prove to be something enduringly American, and ultimately enduringly popular, about Rand's celebration of iconoclasm: the idea that values worth valuing, justice, truth, etc., are embodied not in institutions of the moral majority (of which we are to be suspicious), but in heroic individuals, men of action who are prepared to act unilaterally. As John Shelton Lawrence and Robert Jewett put it in *The Myth of the American Superhero*, Americans especially "so often relish depictions of impotent democratic institutions that can be rescued only by extralegal superheroes."<sup>40</sup> The "superhero" here does not just entail caped crusaders, but any independent saviour. American popular fiction is replete with such heroes; Rand's main work was in the area of popular fiction, and her protagonists are firmly in this tradition.

The essentials Rand projected onto the Hickman case—the individual versus the collective—form the basis of every one of her fictional products, as well as her nonfiction. The first work Rand sold in America was a film treatment, *Red Pawn*, bought by Universal Pictures in 1932. Rand was by this point drafting *We the Living*. As her heir Leonard Peikoff points out, the plot of the movie original is essentially the same as that of the novel: a love triangle set in Soviet Russia, involving a fierce, determined, beautiful young heroine, and her two lovers, one a Communist and the other a hardy bourgeois.<sup>41</sup> Through loving the heroine, the "Red" comes to realise that he would have been better off working for ideals of individualism, not those of the Communists; the same dynamic plays out in *Living*. *Red Pawn* validates the desires of the self as being far more important than the needs of society. Its heroine, Joan Harding, proclaims the central theme: "One cannot be a traitor to anything [...] except to oneself."<sup>42</sup>

Rand's second professional work reproduces the dynamic she saw operating in the Hickman case: "the people" versus an outstanding "criminal" mind. *Night of January 16th*, Rand's sole produced play, was staged in Hollywood in 1934 and on Broadway in '35. It is

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<sup>39</sup> Heller, *World She Made*, 75.

<sup>40</sup> John Shelton Lawrence and Robert Jewett, *The Myth of the American Superhero* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2002), 7–8.

<sup>41</sup> Leonard Peikoff, preface to *Red Pawn*, in *The Early Ayn Rand: A Selection from Her Unpublished Fiction*, by Ayn Rand, rev. ed., ed. Peikoff (New York: Signet, 2005), 149–50.

<sup>42</sup> Rand, *Red Pawn*, in *Early Ayn Rand*, 192.

worthy of summary here, since it prefigures several of the tropes of her fiction. The three-act drama is modelled on a contemporary hit by Bayard Veiller, *The Trial of Mary Dugan* (1927), but its inspiration is the case of Ivar Kreuger, the Swedish mogul known as the Match King. In the 1920s, Kreuger had a monopoly on the market in matches throughout much of Europe and the Americas, as well as business interests in banking, mining, industry, and elsewhere. His financial empire proved to be a house of cards—he had supplied loans worth tens of millions of dollars to European and South American governments, and thanks to these loans received his match monopolies in those countries. With the onset of the Great Depression, his empire collapsed. Kreuger committed suicide in 1932. In a 2009 book, Frank Partnoy describes how Kreuger went from being “a high priest of business” to “the world’s greatest swindler” in terms of public opinion.<sup>43</sup>

Rand’s opinion of Kreuger, and the public reaction to his death and the revelations of his swindling, is worth quoting. In her introduction to a 1968 edition of *Night of January 16th*, she writes:

It was not his shady methods, his ruthlessness, his dishonesty that were being denounced, but his *ambition*. His ability, his self-confidence, the glamorous aura of his life and name were featured, exaggerated, overstressed [in the media], to serve as fodder for the hordes of envious mediocrities rejoicing at his downfall. It was a spree of gloating malice. Its leitmotif was not: “How did he fall?” but: “How did he dare to rise?” [...] In fact, Ivar Kreuger was a man of unusual ability who had, at first, made a fortune by legitimate means; it was his venture into politics—mixed-economy politics—that destroyed him.<sup>44</sup>

The last sentence is, of course, especially telling. It is not, for Rand, the individual capitalist who is ultimately to blame for his self-destructive actions in this case, but *society*—the social conditions of the mixed economy, where tributes to government must be offered in one form or another; the capitalist is not wholly free to make his own way on his own terms. Heller suggests that, in the years of her mature philosophy, *January 16th* became “an embarrassment” to Rand, because the sympathy in the play lies with white-collar criminals.<sup>45</sup> However, the heroic criminal, or freedom fighter for capitalism—he who commits anti-social or even violent acts for individualism—is a recurring character in Rand, from Steven Mallory, the gunman/sculptor in *The Fountainhead*, to Ragnar Danneskjöld, the Norwegian pirate in *Atlas*

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<sup>43</sup> Frank Partnoy, *The Match King: Ivar Kreuger and the Financial Scandal of the Century* (London: Profile Books, 2009), xii, 201. Partnoy is also interesting on the innovative Kreuger’s lasting impact on the financial sector: “For better and worse, this man is the father of today’s financial markets. Hedge fund managers and investment bankers employ many of the same techniques he invented. Major companies use the tools he pioneered. America’s securities laws were a direct response to his spectacular collapse.” *Match King*, xiv.

<sup>44</sup> Ayn Rand, introduction to *Night of January 16th*, in *Three Plays* (New York: Signet, 2005), 5. Emphasis in original.

<sup>45</sup> Heller, *World She Made*, 75.



*Shrugged* who steals what's been given to the poor through taxes on the rich and gives it back to the rich.

*Night of January 16th* asks its audience to side with a rich swindler in the Kreuger vein. The play asks members of the audience literally to take a side. The setting is a courtroom, and all the action part of a trial. Karen Andre, a beautiful, ambitious young woman, stands accused of murdering the "Penthouse Legend," Bjorn Faulkner, a financier of iron will, for whom Andre worked as a secretary and de facto business manager. Faulkner and Andre were also lovers. Initially, the story of the defence is that Faulkner committed suicide, though another possibility emerges in the course of the drama: that he was killed by the father of Faulkner's jealous wife. Rand weighted the evidence in the play pretty much equally for each side—either Andre is the murderer or it is the father in law. The major hook of the play was that, every night, a volunteer jury chosen from the audience would sit in judgement of Andre, deciding whether she was guilty or not guilty, with the drama's ending differing depending on the verdict—a fantastically populist device. Andre tells a tale of a man of superior ability and supreme force of will. She loved him passionately from their first encounter; they lived a life full of luxury and the joy of each other. They were conquering the world together, and she could never have killed him, she says. Faulkner's wife speaks of a wealthy man who wanted to turn his life around, to not be so selfish, who wanted to do more for others, do more for charity. *January 16th* was, in a certain respect, a way for Rand to sit in judgement of the American public. If the jury sided with Andre, they believed her narrative of Faulkner, and were in effect lauding his ambition and business achievements. If they condemned Andre, they were condemning the things Rand celebrated, and siding with the altruists who argued that pride comes before a fall, and men should work for the common good, not personal gain. In 1968 Rand described *January 16th* as a "sense-of-life play": "The jury has to choose which side to believe, and on this depends every juror's own sense of life."<sup>46</sup> The core theme of the play, then, is the difference between an individualistic and an altruistic sense of life—again, an issue Rand would return to repeatedly in her later work. Incidentally, Heller writes that the Hollywood juries "overwhelmingly found in favour of Karen Andre." Rand herself reports that during the New York run, two thirds of juries voted for acquittal, "according to the stage manager, who kept a tally."<sup>47</sup>

Rand would return to courtroom settings in *The Fountainhead*, with the trials of Howard Roark. There is something else in *January 16th* which also recurs in Rand's first bestselling novel—a "rape." That is, sex between a man and a woman in which the woman says she doesn't want it, but she secretly does—and we know she does only because we are

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<sup>46</sup> Rand, introduction to *Night of January 16th*, in *Three Plays*, 3, 6.

<sup>47</sup> Heller, *World She Made*, 76; Rand, introduction to *Night of January 16th*, in *Three Plays*, 11.

privity to her inner narrative. The scene is described in the play in the manner below; Karen is recounting to her lawyer and the court her first meeting with Faulkner, when she interviewed for a stenographer's job:

KAREN. When did he first take me? That first day I met him.

STEVENS. How did that happen?

KAREN. He seemed to take a delight in giving me orders. He acted as if he were cracking a whip over an animal he wanted to break. And I was afraid.

STEVENS. Because you didn't like that?

KAREN. Because I liked it [...]. He said he'd give me a thousand kroner if I would go into the inner office and take my skirt off. I said I wouldn't. He said if I didn't, he'd take me. I said, try it. He did.<sup>48</sup>

The sadomasochistic quality to relations between men and women is one of Rand's most famous traits as a writer. With the exception of *Anthem*, where the characters are products of prolonged brainwashing, initial sexual attraction between heroes and heroines is usually expressed through insults and attempts to control and dominate. The intercourse itself is wild, primitive, sacred, joyous. Like Joan Harding, like Kira Argounova in *We the Living*, Dominique Francon in *The Fountainhead*, and Dagny Taggart in *Atlas Shrugged*, Karen Andre has more than one hard man who wishes to be her lover; the gangster Guts Regan also vies for her affections.

In the same month that *Night of January 16th* opened on Broadway, Rand's first novel was accepted for publication. A letter Rand penned around this time conveys what was important to her as an author: she wanted to be famous for her ideas, and for having an impact. Writing to screenwriter Gouverneur Morris about *We the Living*'s release, she comments: "I expect plenty of hell from our good Red reviewers," but "if the book reaches America and makes at least a few pause and question their Communist theories, I shall be satisfied."<sup>49</sup> The Russian emigrant's career as an American writer was underway.

### **The Cold War Context**

*We the Living* was published in April 1936 and had an initial print run of 3,000 copies; it was not a major success when it first appeared.<sup>50</sup> Michael S. Berliner notes, intriguingly, that it was "the most reviewed" and "certainly the most positively reviewed" of all her novels. Berliner calls this "surprising," given that it was released in the midst of America's Red Decade. Nonetheless, responses were mixed, with left-inclined reviewers, such as those at the

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<sup>48</sup> Rand, *Night of January 16th*, in *Three Plays*, 61.

<sup>49</sup> Rand, letter to Gouverneur Morris, April 14, 1936, in *Letters*, 27.

<sup>50</sup> Richard E. Ralston, "Publishing *We the Living*," in *Essays on Ayn Rand's "We the Living"*, ed. Mayhew, 169.



*New York Times* and the *Nation*, arguing Rand protested too much vis-à-vis Soviet injustices.<sup>51</sup> Rand revised and reissued her first novel in 1959, after the success of *Atlas Shrugged*. By the time *We the Living* appeared in spring 1936, Rand had already drafted significant notes for *The Fountainhead*. She wrote *Anthem* over three weeks in 1937, wanting to take a break from her work on *The Fountainhead*.<sup>52</sup> *Anthem* was first published in the UK in 1938.

After the publication of *Living*, Rand attempted to return to screenwriting, but no studio would hire her. The book was an anti-Soviet, semi-autobiographical portrait of St. Petersburg in the 1920s, and, in 1930s America, many in the intellectual and creative elite held distinct sympathy with the Soviet cause: “Far more than just a political party, [American] Communism was a whole climate of opinion”; in “educated, reform-minded circles” it had become “conventional wisdom that the United States would simply have to move toward Communism or, at the very least, socialism.”<sup>53</sup> Rand found herself effectively blacklisted for her anti-Communist views.<sup>54</sup>

*We the Living* did not bring Rand universal fame. What it did give her, however, would prove more lasting than mere fame: instant kudos with the American right. On the back of *Living*, she was drawn into conservative political circles; she was, Heller reports, “in demand as an anti-Soviet speaker.”<sup>55</sup> A pattern thus begins, with the left-wing literary-critical community having one response—negativity—to Rand, and the cheerleaders for her novels coming from outside that community, from the worlds of business and Republican Party politics.

Rand’s own politics evolved—that is to say, crystallised—during the course of her life in the United States. In 1932 she voted for Franklin Delano Roosevelt, not least because of his opposition to prohibition.<sup>56</sup> Rand’s support for what she considered to be individual freedom would be expressed in multiple ways over the next several decades, though this would mark the first and last time she backed a politician of the American left. She became aghast at the state-funded work programmes and wealth transfers of FDR’s New Deal.<sup>57</sup> Later, she volunteered for the failed presidential campaigns of Republican candidates Wendell Wilkie (1940) and Barry Goldwater (1964). There is a common trajectory to each of Rand’s forays into campaigning: she enters with idealistic passion; finally, she finds herself disillusioned

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<sup>51</sup> Michael S. Berliner, “Reviews of *We the Living*,” in *Essays on Ayn Rand’s “We the Living*,” ed. Mayhew, 173–74, 179.

<sup>52</sup> Heller, *World She Made*, 98, 102–3.

<sup>53</sup> Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 34–35.

<sup>54</sup> Heller, *World She Made*, 95–96.

<sup>55</sup> Heller, *World She Made*, 96.

<sup>56</sup> Heller, *World She Made*, 84.

<sup>57</sup> Heller, *World She Made*, 95; Britting, *Ayn Rand*, 57.

with the candidate.<sup>58</sup> Rand was not cut out for the compromise, of all kinds, required by electoral politics. She was better at imagining shining cities on hills.

After the Second World War, the world was about to divide itself in two—and for this global context, Rand’s no-compromise mentality was well suited. Rand had split humanity into a binary of individualism versus collectivism, even before America and the Soviet Union aligned themselves as opposing forces in a Cold War, their ideological division along similar lines. Rand’s 1968 introduction to *Night of January 16th* describes the work as a dramatisation of “two extremes, two opposite ways of facing existence: passionate self-assertiveness, self-confidence, ambition, audacity, independence—versus conventionality, servility, envy, hatred, power-lust.”<sup>59</sup> Those who celebrate individual achievement are heroic; those who claim to privilege the welfare of the masses, are envious cretins who seek power over men of greater ability. As I’ve said, this polarised imagining of humanity provides the basic conflict behind all of Rand’s plots.

Rand’s embrace of the United States was almost as forceful as her disdain for the Soviet Union. While Rand’s hatred of Communism was apparent from her first encounter with it, her love of capitalism as Communism’s opposite, and as an ideal, grew stronger and more codified as her career reached its pinnacle. Her career reached its pinnacle as the Cold War reached its height, in the 1950s and ’60s. Rand’s right-wing economic outlook was more absolutist than that of, for example, Friedrich Hayek and Ludwig von Mises, with whom she had many views in common. She called Hayek a “pernicious enemy” of her cause, since he saw a place for government-funded healthcare and social welfare payments; Mises angered her because his arguments for markets were based on their efficacy and had nothing to do with individual rights as a moral position.<sup>60</sup>

There is undoubtedly a siege mentality which emanates from Rand’s thought and writing, a sense that the world has turned and continues to turn in the wrong direction. She sought urgently to repel the forces from which she felt under siege. She wrote to her agent for *We the Living*, in 1934, that individualism versus collectivism was the “greatest problem” of the twentieth century.<sup>61</sup> The first of Rand’s two major novels, an epic paean to individualism, was published just a few years before a state of Cold War solidified between the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. *The Fountainhead* appeared on bookshelves in May 1943. That same year, the movie rights were sold to Warner Bros. The film, starring Gary Cooper and Patricia Neal, premiered three years later. In March 1946, Winston Churchill gave his speech declaring that an “iron curtain” was now dividing Europe, the east from the west.

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<sup>58</sup> Heller, *World She Made*, 132–33, 322–23.

<sup>59</sup> Rand, introduction to *Night of January 16th*, in *Three Plays*, 3–4.

<sup>60</sup> Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 104, 141.

<sup>61</sup> Rand, letter to Jean Wick, October 27, 1934, in *Letters*, 18.



In 1947, Rand appeared as a friendly witness before the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), to denounce Communist propaganda emanating from Hollywood.<sup>62</sup> She also produced a “Screen Guide for Americans,” whose “itemized recommendations” were first published in a conservative magazine and reprinted in the *New York Times*. When the major Hollywood studios worked to accommodate HUAC, “excising so-called un-American and overtly egalitarian content from their films”—ceasing the portrayal of businessmen as villains, for instance—Rand “took a measure of credit.”<sup>63</sup>

On one level, it is entirely understandable that someone with Rand’s politics would feel under siege. By 1953—in the midst of her penning her 1,200-page attack on collectivism, *Atlas Shrugged*—one third of the world’s territory and population was under the control of Communist or socialist regimes.<sup>64</sup> In the wake of World War II, Eastern Europe became Sovietised, and Western welfare states continued to grow. Rand viewed the twentieth-century turn towards social welfare as a precursor to Communism, rather than an attempt to stave it off, as others might have done.<sup>65</sup> Rand’s wholesale embrace of capitalism must be seen in the context of what the Communists did to her and her family. Her entire life’s work is a kind of extended personal response to the horrors of Soviet Russia. Though, this of course is far from the only interesting aspect of her corpus.

Ayn Rand and the binary politics of Cold War America operate in tandem. It is important to elucidate this context because of what comes after. Heller writes that *The Fountainhead* “almost single-handedly renewed popular interest in the cause of individualism,” while *Atlas Shrugged* “resurrected interest in American capitalism at a time when it was under pressure by both the liberal Left and the Christian Right.”<sup>66</sup> By her later life, Rand was both driving and catching a trend; Andrew Hoberek points out that *Atlas* was published a year after the number of white-collar workers first surpassed the number of blue-collar in the economy, and he credits Rand with helping cement the later dominance of white-collar morality, particularly in relation to intellectual property, “in which ideas rather than

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<sup>62</sup> Some 135 investigations into Communist infiltration of American life were conducted by Congress between 1945 and 1955, mostly by HUAC. Rand’s opinion was that Congress had a responsibility to expose Communist sympathisers, and that membership of the Communist Party amounted to participation in a criminal conspiracy to overthrow the United States government. This decidedly illiberal position, as Heller points out, “suggests a limited understanding of American jurisprudence.” Rand never changed her view on the right of Congress to conduct such investigations, though she did ultimately describe the hearings as “a disgusting spectacle.” Laura McEnaney, “Cold War Mobilisation and Domestic Politics: The United States,” in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, vol. 1, ed. Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 430; Heller, *World She Made*, 205–6.

<sup>63</sup> Heller, *World She Made*, 207.

<sup>64</sup> Vladimir O. Pechatnov, “The Soviet Union and the World, 1944–1953,” in *Cambridge History of the Cold War*, vol. 1, ed. Leffler and Westad, 111.

<sup>65</sup> Heller, *World She Made*, 131.

<sup>66</sup> Heller, *World She Made*, 245, 270.

things have become the characteristic object of production.”<sup>67</sup> Rand’s full-throated defence of individualism and of capitalism during the Cold War, her defence of property rights and the right to profit, would establish her legitimacy with the American right—making her work a central force in the pivot towards *laissez-faire* in the United States towards the end of the twentieth century. The *fin-de-siècle* climate of high capitalism is a precursor to many fictional and real-world imaginings of the posthuman future. The throughline from the ideas in Rand’s fiction to imaginings of posthumanism thus begins here, with Rand’s life in its Cold War context.

### A Schema of Civilisation

One thing Rand emphatically believed was that a work of literature could be at once serious and entertaining. Indeed, her life’s work is an integration of metaphysical dogma into thrilling plots. As such, Rand rejected the primary division within literary studies of Fiction into either Literature or Popular Fiction. For her, “the belief that if a literary work is ‘serious,’ it must bore people to death; and if it is ‘entertaining,’ it must not communicate anything of importance”—this was an example of the false “mind–body dichotomy” that dominated the twentieth century.<sup>68</sup> While Rand rejected a mind–body split, however, in actuality, her philosophy privileges the mind over the body, as we will see. Similarly, given that categorisation exists between Literature / Popular Fiction, it must be said that Rand’s fiction has much more in common philosophically with popular fiction than with great literature as it is typically critically understood.

Ken Gelder usefully defines the difference between what he calls Literature with a capital L, and popular fiction, in his singular study *Popular Fiction: The Logics and Practices of a Literary Field*. Literature is the work of, amongst many others, Jane Austen, George Eliot, James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, Flannery O’Connor, Toni Morrison, Jonathan Franzen. Pop fiction is the work of John Grisham, Michael Crichton, Anne Rice, Jackie Collins, J. R. R. Tolkien, et al. Gelder sketches the difference between the two in broad yet illuminating strokes:

Literature is complex, popular fiction is simple. The pleasures they each offer are built around these distinctive characteristics, which means that the experience of reading Literature will be substantially different in kind to the experience of reading popular fiction. Literature is intimately connected to life, while popular fiction gives itself over to fantasy. Literature is cerebral, but popular fiction is sensuous: caught up with “danger” and “intrigue.” Literature is restrained or discrete, popular fiction is

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<sup>67</sup> Andrew Hoberek, “Ayn Rand and the Politics of Property,” in *Cultures of Commerce: Representation and American Business Culture, 1877–1960*, ed. Elspeth H. Brown, Catherine Gudis, and Marina Moskowitz (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 321, 336.

<sup>68</sup> Rand, introduction to *Night of January 16th*, in *Three Plays*, 9.



excessive, exaggerated. Literature doesn't need a story or a plot, but popular fiction couldn't function without one. [...] Literature is "dull," while popular fiction is, simply (and perhaps simplistically, depending on your loyalties and point of view), exciting.

Gelder casts two other important differences between Literature and popular fiction: popular fiction divides itself into genres depending on specific tropes, where Literature eschews genre. The process of making Literature is often framed as being connected to transcendent creative forces, while popular fiction is framed as a craft involving "sheer hard work."<sup>69</sup>

Sales figures obviously help to define "the popular," but popular fiction, as Gelder identifies it, is also an aesthetic category with methodologies of its own. In the case of each of the above divisions, Rand's novels fall on the side of popular fiction and not that of Literature. The only possible exception is her first, *We the Living*, which strives to capture realistically the state of life in post-revolution Russia. Even here, however, Rand is concerned firstly with plot, and with characterisation as a means towards ideological ends:

*We the Living's* theme of the evil of totalitarianism is presented in its tightly integrated pattern of actions: every good character is destroyed, true to the nature of the collectivist state. The story's development of a true presentation of life under communism requires the heroine's death to achieve the novel's total thematic integration: to show how the nature of communism eliminates individual happiness, fulfilment, and ultimately life itself, even for the best like Kira, who fights most strongly against its self-sacrificial ethics.<sup>70</sup>

Rand would never hold with the view put forward by critic Curtis White, for example: "Art is most properly useful when it doesn't know exactly what it is about"; the "artistic imagination," writes Curtis, must not do its work through "self-certain didacticism, or 'meaning.'"<sup>71</sup> This is a view in support of the field of Literature, in Gelder's terms, as distinct from that of pop fiction—and it is utterly opposed to everything Rand's consciously didactic and declaratively logical aesthetics stand for.

At the height of her career, Rand worked actively to deconstruct the idea—not uncommon in literary circles—that the writing of Literature is some mystical process, intimately entwined with the deep unknowables of life. In advice to writers, she summarised: "What is colloquially known as 'inspiration'—namely, that you write without full knowledge of why you write as you do [...] is actually the subconscious summing up of the premises and intentions you have set yourself. [...] [Y]ou have to know where it comes from, why it

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<sup>69</sup> Ken Gelder, *Popular Fiction: The Logics and Practices of a Literary Field* (London: Routledge, 2004), 11–20.

<sup>70</sup> Jena Trammell, "Red Pawn: Ayn Rand's Other Story of Soviet Russia," in *Essays on Ayn Rand's "We the Living,"* ed. Mayhew, 294.

<sup>71</sup> Curtis White, *The Middle Mind: Why Consumer Culture is Turning Us into the Living Dead* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 190–91.

happens, and how to make it happen to *you*.”<sup>72</sup> For Rand, plot is “*the crucial attribute of a novel.*” Literature which has a “plot structure” implicitly validates volition, Rand writes; hence its importance to her philosophically. She defined plot as “*a purposeful progression of logically connected events leading to the resolution of a climax.*”<sup>73</sup> This definition fits easily with a genre such as the thriller. Characters, for Rand, are embodiments of morality, or its lack; they should be “abstract projections in terms of essentials,” with clearly identifiable motivations.<sup>74</sup> Again, this definition does not sit easily with Literature, but it matches up very well with the heroes and villains of popular culture. Rand’s views on creating fiction are inherently bound-up with her own philosophy. It is not a stretch, therefore, to say that her beliefs on plot and characterisation are indicative of her belief in the possibility of an ordered human universe, and in turn suggestive of her utopianism.

Some of the extreme characters, events, and plot points in Rand’s novels include: a newspaper columnist who wants to rule men’s souls (Ellsworth M. Toohey, *The Fountainhead*); an architect who blows up his own work when he doesn’t get his way (Howard Roark); a future where the word “I” has ceased to exist (*Anthem*); a hidden valley that holds the key to saving the world (*Atlas Shrugged*); a secret government weapon of mass destruction codenamed Project X (*Atlas*). There is a melodramatic quality Rand picked up, perhaps from her youthful fiction-reading and cinema-going, which never left her writing. The villains are invariably ugly and uncouth, while the heroes are Adonises. Randian heroines are svelte and gorgeous, with supreme bodily and mental confidence. It was part of Rand’s project to symbolically associate beauty with what she labelled as moral good, and ugliness with its opposite. In Rand’s novels, the heroes and the heroines always partner up, and—with only one exception—they experience a happy ending: another facet of her pop-fictional imagination. (*We the Living* is the exception, again.) Indeed, Rand’s gloss on relations between men and women gives her work a quality of the popular romance genre—a quality that has long been part of her appeal, particularly to women.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Ayn Rand, *The Art of Fiction: A Guide for Writers and Readers*, ed. Tore Boeckmann (New York: Plume, 2000), 2. Emphasis in original

<sup>73</sup> Ayn Rand, *The Romantic Manifesto: A Philosophy of Literature*, rev. ed. (New York: Signet, 2005), 73, 100. Emphases in original. Throughout this dissertation, I reference *The Romantic Manifesto* as a whole, rather than specific essays within the book, as I do with other nonfiction works by Rand. This is because my use of the book is as a single work with importance to the development of my argument (especially in chapter three). When I quote other nonfiction books by Rand, the title of a particular essay may help indicate its relevance to the subject matter at hand.

<sup>74</sup> Rand, *Romantic Manifesto*, 99–100, 79–80.

<sup>75</sup> Even the highly controversial “rape” in *The Fountainhead*, “became one of the most popular [...] parts of the book,” writes Burns. Citing Janice Radway’s important study, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (1984), Burns compares Rand’s work to popular romance novels, which often feature similar relations between the sexes. Indeed, an article at left-wing commentary site *Naked Capitalism* draws parallels between the sexual exploits in Rand and those in *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2011), E. L. James’s novel of sadomasochistic erotica, which became the fastest selling paperback in history. Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 86, 310–11, n35; Lynn Parramore, “Fifty



Rand was also a generic writer in other ways. *Atlas Shrugged* has elements of the mystery or detective story, as well as elements of science fiction. *Anthem* is solidly science fiction. These facts are covered further below, and in subsequent chapters. *The Fountainhead* is less generic, but is still firmly focused on a battle of good against evil—which for Rand means individualism versus collectivism—with clearly demarcated heroes and villains, and little grey in between. The plot of *The Fountainhead* is brought into my analysis as the thesis progresses.

Rand systematised her view of art in her nonfiction volume *The Romantic Manifesto*. Her views on the thriller genre, recounted there, also illuminate one of the major draws of her own novels. Rand opines on Ian Fleming's James Bond books and the Mike Hammer stories of Mickey Spillane. At core, such works validate heroism, she writes, validate man as a rational being who can achieve his goals. Rand argues that common criticisms of the novels of Fleming, et al.—such as “life is not like that”—miss the point entirely:

Nobody takes thrillers literally, nor cares about their specific events, nor harbors any frustrated desire to become a secret agent or a private eye. Thrillers are taken symbolically; they dramatize one of the widest and most crucial abstractions: the abstraction of *moral conflict*.

What people seek in thrillers is the spectacle of man's *efficacy*: of his ability to fight for his values and to achieve them. What they see is a condensed, simplified pattern, reduced to its essentials: a man fighting for a vital goal—overcoming one obstacle after another—facing terrible dangers and risks—persisting through an excruciating struggle—and winning. Far from suggesting an easy or “unrealistic” view of life, a thriller suggests the necessity of a difficult struggle; if the hero is “larger than life,” so are the villains and the dangers. [...]

[...] The obstacles confronting an average man are, to him, as formidable as Bond's adversaries; but what the image of Bond tells him is: “It can be done.”

[...]

[...] Inspired by James Bond, a man may find the courage to rebel against the impositions of his in-laws—or to ask for a deserved raise—or to change his job—or to propose to the girl he loves—or to embark on the career he wants—or to defy the whole world for the sake of his new invention.

*This is what Naturalistic art can never give him.*

A more realistic portrayal of life's struggles would not be as engaging or, crucially, as inspiring: “In the privacy of his own soul, nobody identifies with the folks next door, unless he has given up.”<sup>76</sup> People want to be heroes.

This aspect of struggling to achieve one's aims against overwhelming odds is central to Rand's plots. There is one vital difference between popular fiction as it is generally

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Shades of Capitalism: Pain and Bondage in the American Workplace,” *Naked Capitalism*, July 13, 2012, <http://www.nakedcapitalism.com/2012/07/fifty-shades-of-capitalism-pain-and-bondage-in-the-american-workplace.html#OCEWoCujiBEilzm1.99>; Vanessa Thorpe, “Why Does *Fifty Shades of Grey* Turn British Women On?,” *Guardian*, June 30, 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2012/jun/30/fifty-shades-grey-women-sadomasochism>.

<sup>76</sup> Rand, *Romantic Manifesto*, 132–33. Emphases in original.

conceived, and Rand's fiction, however. Popular writers typically *assume* certain values—those of the dominant culture—where Rand actively *constructs* a value system, which happens to be in large part commensurate with a right-wing American narrative. Rand wrote in an accessible medium. But, beginning with *The Fountainhead*, she articulates a complete ethical vision, claiming to base itself on the immutability of reality. (Her earlier works evidence an outlining of beliefs, but not an entire ethical system.) Rand's is a deeper exercise. Her skill is in holding the two elements together, able to maintain the appeal of popular fiction while explaining a detailed "philosophy" for living which she herself worked out from first principles. This twinned aspect helps explain the rise of Rand's work to a central place in public and political life. Rand wrote page-turner melodrama, yet her full-throated defence of the individual and of capital had a characteristic of intellectual rigour: her work therefore crossed barriers and cemented its influence where the work of others could not.

Much of the culture that Rand enjoyed, and was formative in her thinking, was popular: Champagne's *Mysterious Valley*, early Hollywood cinema. At the same time, she celebrated certain popular forms, and she herself wrote popular fiction. That said, both Rand herself and the Objectivist movement generally, maintain a relationship with popular culture that is on the whole marked by ambivalence. Rand was keen that she be considered in line with canonical figures such as Hugo and Dostoevsky, and not just seen as a writer who was popular (a point further discussed in my third chapter). By her mid-life, Rand considered the popular literature of her day, such as detective stories, to be superior to the "serious literature" of the time, since "[t]oday, whether what you write is literature is determined by [...] being so inarticulate that each person can read what he wants into your book."<sup>77</sup> In her *Manifesto*, she calls upon the public to "demand the repeal of the Joyce-Kafka Amendment, which prohibits the sale of clean drinking water, unless denatured by humor, while unconscionable rotgut is being sold and drunk at every bookstore counter."<sup>78</sup> At least popular literature didn't view the hero as a dead concept.

Rand vociferously and repeatedly attacked academia and contemporary cultural critics as morally bankrupt—and yet she also sought legitimacy through the intellectual elite. According to one-time Rand associate Barbara Branden, the author once said (Branden paraphrases): "When Objectivism descends from the philosophers' ivory tower to intellectuals to the popular culture, and finally reaches the comic books, we shall know that we are winning the battle."<sup>79</sup> Ironically, Objectivism's battle has been in the opposite direction: it began with Rand's works of popular literature, has influenced comic book writers, businesspeople and

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<sup>77</sup> Rand, *Ayn Rand Answers*, 221.

<sup>78</sup> Rand, *Romantic Manifesto*, 134.

<sup>79</sup> Barbara Branden, "Holding Court—Metaphysics, Steve Ditko, *Star Trek*, and 'Objectivism,'" *Rebirth of Reason*, July 5, 2005, [http://rebirthofreason.com/Articles/Branden/Holding\\_Court\\_-\\_Metaphysics,\\_Steve\\_Ditko,\\_Star\\_Trek,\\_and\\_Objectivism.shtml](http://rebirthofreason.com/Articles/Branden/Holding_Court_-_Metaphysics,_Steve_Ditko,_Star_Trek,_and_Objectivism.shtml).



politicians, and is still trying to be taken seriously in the academy. When Objectivist scholars defend or advocate for Rand's writings, they invariably do so with reference to her popularity, claiming that the broad swathe of enlightened public opinion is with them. In his article, "A Tale of Two Novels," Harry Binswanger writes that "[t]he culture wars, correctly conceived, actually reflect the clash between the intellectual establishment and the American people." He cites as evidence the fact that a panel of experts at Random House's Modern Library division chose Joyce's *Ulysses* as the greatest novel of the twentieth century, while, in an online poll also run by Modern Library, the public chose *Atlas Shrugged* as the century's greatest novel. While the meaning of *Atlas* is "vividly clear to any rational mind," and Rand's vision of heroic man has inspired many lives, *Ulysses* has "snob appeal" only because it is "practically impossible to read"—it has no discernible meaning except to a self-appointed elite.<sup>80</sup> In *What Art Is: The Esthetic Theory of Ayn Rand*, Louis Torres and Michelle Marder Kamhi align Rand's theories of art with public opinion in rejecting modernism and postmodernism as art qua art. Traditional forms of art, which have narrative integrity and espouse values, are not valid purely because they have endured; rather, traditional forms have endured precisely because "they are the only forms consonant with essential features of human nature, both physical and psychological."<sup>81</sup>

Objectivists stake a claim for Rand's legitimacy through her popularity. At the same time, they seek establishment legitimacy for her work as "serious literature," and not just fiction that is popular. Hence the proliferation of affirmatively Objectivist academic-essay collections. The 2000s have seen the publication of volumes on all of Rand's novels, supported by the Ayn Rand Institute, all edited by Robert Mayhew.

If Rand's attitude to "the popular" is forked, also more complex than it may appear is her relationship with America. Rand came to wholeheartedly embrace her chosen country. However, her vocal defence of American values in her mature fiction masks certain disconnects, which will be covered as the chapter progresses. For now, let us put forward the ways in which what Rand espouses is distinctly American. A fruitful exercise in this regard is to look at the values the United States describes to itself as its own—and to state that they are also evinced by Rand's fiction, propagandistic as it is. *American Ways* is a common educational textbook published by Pearson, billed as "an introduction to American culture." The book lists "six basic values that have become traditional American values": individual freedom, equality of opportunity, material wealth, self-reliance, competition, and hard work.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Harry Binswanger, "A Tale of Two Novels," in *Essays on Ayn Rand's "Atlas Shrugged,"* ed. Mayhew, 192–93.

<sup>81</sup> Louis Torres and Michelle Marder Kamhi, *What Art Is: The Esthetic Theory of Ayn Rand* (Chicago: Open Court, 2000), 15.

<sup>82</sup> Maryanne Kearny Datesman, JoAnn Crandall, and Edward N. Kearny, *American Ways: An Introduction to American Culture*, 3rd ed. (White Plains, NY: Pearson Longman, 2005), 28–29.

The only problematic point here from a Randian position is “equality of opportunity”; otherwise, Rand’s novels put forward these secular maxims of the US as an unquestionable good, values to be internalised and to live by—as will become clear through my discussion of the fiction, below.

Rand honed her style as she progressed as a writer, and so her ideals, of heroic beings and capitalist economics, find their fullest expression in *Atlas*. Her fiction as a whole, however, conveys a consistent set of ideas about humanity and reality: the right of the individual to pursue happiness, divorced from obligations to others’ needs; man’s reasoning mind as the core of his existence; and the idea that man should be celebrated because he creates new things and pushes physical boundaries. The consistency of Rand’s vision, its representation of a complete view of the world that can be “lived,” has undoubtedly helped cement her political impact. It is not that readers necessarily followed her every edict, but she presented a world that seemed to many as the world should be.

The analysis below offers what might be thought of as a schema of Rand’s vision of civilisation, as found in the fiction. This will take us to the threshold of a posthuman reading, a baton that will be picked up as the thesis continues. There are several distinct yet related points wrapped up in the analysis, numbered here for convenience. The schema can be summarised as follows. The Randian image of civilisation begins with what I term (i) *the individual primitive as prerequisite*. This is the individual alone in the wilderness, forced to confront nature to survive. For Rand, civilisation is born from man’s confrontation with nature: it is here he realises that he must think in order to live, and from thinking comes creativity: the shaping of the physical world to one’s needs and one’s vision. This ability to shape our conditions of existence, which comes first from our mental ability, is what differentiates humankind from all other species on earth; and for Rand it is what makes a man a being worthy of reverence. This, then, is the second element in the Randian schema: (ii) *the human as sacred*, or what Rand herself calls “man-worship.”<sup>83</sup> I provide below examples of Rand’s language of the human sacred. Since, in Rand’s view, every man is an end in himself,<sup>84</sup> (iii) *the self is sacrosanct*, which means that (iv) *capitalism is the only acceptable political-economic order*, as it allows an individual to profit from his own ideas to the greatest possible extent. These are the primary points in Rand’s schema of humanity. Stemming from them are two further points, with particular applicability to my thesis: (I) *man conquering nature is good, it is a true expression of man’s unique value*—i.e. the power of his mind and body to reshape material reality; consequently, (II) *technology is an extension of human will and as such has immense value*. The first four elements are elaborated in this chapter; the latter two

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<sup>83</sup> Ayn Rand, introduction to *The Fountainhead* (London: Penguin Books, 2007), xi.

<sup>84</sup> Ayn Rand, *We the Living* (London: Signet, 1983), 392; *The Fountainhead*, ix; *Atlas Shrugged*, 1014.



come into what's covered here, but receive full attention in chapter four, when the discussion turns explicitly to posthumanism.

### **The Primitive and the Sacred**

The nineteenth century is where mankind comes into its own: this is the Randian view of history. Rand valorised the nineteenth century to the point of mythologising it and fetishising it, even calling it “a fiction-Utopia” in comparison to the rest of human history: “The greatest, unprecedented, undreamed of events and achievements were taking place before men’s eyes [...]. I am speaking of the industrial revolution, of the United States and of capitalism.” Rand writes that in this period, “men discovered science and political freedom.” In tandem with this was the Industrial Revolution, wherein, “[f]or the first time in history, men gained control over physical nature.” In sum: “If life on earth is one’s standard of value, then the nineteenth century moved mankind forward more than all the other centuries combined.”<sup>85</sup> Rand is perhaps thinking of a continuum of events from the Enlightenment, through the late eighteenth century and into the nineteenth, though she explicitly names just the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, the philosophical point stands.

Notwithstanding this emphasis on the emergence of modernity, Rand very much sees a place for the primitive in the birth of civilisation. She condemns all forms of primitive tribalism—from mystical totem-worship to modern racism—associating it with loyalty to a collective rather than use of a reasoning individual mind.<sup>86</sup> However, the individual alone against nature—the individual primitive—is a necessary prerequisite to a society based on productive achievement and individual rights. Indeed, Randian civilisation begins with men alone in the wilderness. This point is brought home at the opening of the fourth section of *The Fountainhead*. A boy is cycling on his own in the woods; he is a young man with good individualist premises, and feels set apart in society as it is:

He had not liked the things taught to him in college. He had been taught a great deal about social responsibility, about a life of service and self-sacrifice. Everybody had said it was beautiful and inspiring. Only he had not felt inspired. He had felt nothing at all.

He could not name the thing he wanted of life. He felt it here, in this wild loneliness. But he did not face nature with the joy of a healthy animal—as a proper and final setting; he faced it with the joy of a healthy man—as a challenge; as tools, means and material.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Ayn Rand, “Faith and Force: The Destroyers of the Modern World,” in *Philosophy: Who Needs It* (New York: Signet, 2005), 65. This lecture was originally delivered at Yale University, February 17, 1960.

<sup>86</sup> Rand refers to “jungle savages” and behaviour performed by primitive “savage” groups as exemplars of human backwardness. See, for example, *The Fountainhead*, 351, 462; *Atlas Shrugged*, 825, 933. On racism, she says it is “the lowest, most crudely primitive form of collectivism.” Rand, “Racism,” *Virtue of Selfishness*, 147.

<sup>87</sup> Rand, *The Fountainhead*, 528.

The human, then, is discontinuous with the animals, and with inanimate nature. Nature is tools and material for our survival and betterment, first for our mud huts and then for our skyscrapers. This attitude towards nature is codified by Howard Roark in his speech on the proper state of existence for man, towards the end of the book: “Nothing is given to man on earth. Everything he needs has to be produced. And here man faces his basic alternative: he can survive in only one of two ways—by the independent work of his own mind or as a parasite fed by the minds of others. The creator originates. The parasite borrows. *The creator faces nature alone*. The parasite faces nature through an intermediary.” It is alone against nature that man realises his mind is his means of survival. Hence, it becomes clear the mind is at the core of what constitutes human life:

Man cannot survive except through his mind. [...] Animals obtain food by force. Man has no claws, no fangs, no horns, no great strength of muscle. He must plant his food or hunt it. To plant, he needs a process of thought. To hunt, he needs weapons, and to make weapons—a process of thought. From this simplest necessity to the highest religious abstraction, from the wheel to the skyscraper, everything we are and everything we have comes from a single attribute of man—the function of his reasoning mind.<sup>88</sup>

This attitude towards nature—taming the wilderness—is entirely commensurate with the ideology of the frontier, a normative American belief. Tocqueville wrote in *Democracy in America* (1835) that the “magnificent image” of individuals “subduing nature” was of vital import to the then-young nation; Americans “may be said not to perceive the mighty forests which surround them till they fall beneath the hatchet.”<sup>89</sup> This is exactly the attitude of Roark: “He looked at a tree. To be split and made into rafters.”<sup>90</sup> All Rand’s heroes have this attitude. Richard Slotkin describes the “Myth of the Frontier” as America’s “oldest and most characteristic myth”: “According to this myth-historiography, the conquest of the wilderness and the subjugation or displacement of the native Americans who originally inhabited it have been the means to our achievement of a national identity, a democratic polity, an ever-expanding economy, and a phenomenally dynamic and ‘progressive’ civilization.”<sup>91</sup> The aforementioned *American Ways* similarly notes the importance of the frontier in shaping American values. Individual freedom in the American sense was forged on the frontier, where there were few laws and political institutions, and men faced nature alone. The American celebration of the entrepreneur is seen as an update of the frontiersman archetype; both are

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<sup>88</sup> Rand, *The Fountainhead*, 711–12. My emphasis.

<sup>89</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 2, Project Gutenberg, February 7, 2013, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/816/816-h/816-h.htm>.

<sup>90</sup> Rand, *The Fountainhead*, 4.

<sup>91</sup> Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 10.



lauded for their ability to create wealth—the frontiersman makes material goods from inanimate nature; the entrepreneur’s ideas create value where previously there was nothing.<sup>92</sup> Rand likewise reinforces the continuity between the frontier and the entrepreneur.

The individual alone against nature, as a precursor to an individualist civilisation, is mythically illustrated in *Anthem*. In each of her novels, Rand places the individual protagonist against society-as-antagonist. The antagonistic nature of the society depends on the novel: *We the Living* is intended as a faithful portrait of the individual-crushing USSR; American society in *The Fountainhead* values altruistic and collectivist principles to a dangerous degree; in *Atlas Shrugged*, taxes and regulations are strangling the life out of the creative geniuses. *Anthem* is Rand’s most stylised vision of the individual–collective dichotomy, its setting the most separated from actual conditions of existence. The science-fictional parable is a memoir by the character Equality 7-2521, who lives in a future primitive dystopia where the word “I” has passed out of use. Human beings are bred by society and assigned generic titles such as “Equality” and “Fraternity” followed by numbers. A Council of Eugenics determines mating between members of society at an assigned time, and children are raised collectively in a Home of Infants. Each member of the society refers to him- or herself as “we,” with no distinction recognised between the individual and the collective. A stark contrast is made between the primitive moment of now and the glorious civilisation of the past—a civilisation in which there were skyscrapers, cars and electric lights: in the “Unmentionable Times,” there were “towers which rose to the sky,” “wagons which moved without horses,” and “lights which burned without flame.” Now people believe the earth is flat and the world’s newest innovation, the candle, was invented one hundred years before.<sup>93</sup> In a world where “there is no transgression blacker than to do or think alone,” Equality 7-2521 realises that he is different: “we are not like our brothers.”<sup>94</sup> The story is his discovery of himself as an individual. Our hero finds an underground tunnel from the Unmentionable Times. Here he steals away every night to toil alone and in secret; eventually he rediscovers electricity and creates a lightbulb. Equality brings his work to the World Council of Scholars, appealing to them that “the future of mankind” lies with electricity and his invention. The scholars do not laud Equality, however: they excoriate him, saying that he may think he has discovered a new power, but “[w]hat is not thought by all men cannot be true”; they will suppress his invention so as not to cause unemployment for candle-makers.<sup>95</sup>

After his rejection by the scholars, Equality 7-2521 flees. Alone in the Uncharted Forest—on the frontier—he must fend for himself, making a bow and arrows to knock birds

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<sup>92</sup> Datesman, Crandall, and Kearny, *American Ways*, 73–78, 120.

<sup>93</sup> Ayn Rand, *Anthem* (New York: Signet, 2005), 19, 23–24.

<sup>94</sup> Rand, *Anthem*, 17, 20.

<sup>95</sup> Rand, *Anthem*, 70, 73–74.

from the sky to eat, and building fires to ward off beasts. In the process he discovers independence and begins to celebrate himself as an individual: “we thought suddenly that there was a great satisfaction to be found in the food which we need and obtain by our own hand.”<sup>96</sup> This return to the primal is presented as necessary for the re-founding of civilisation without dependency: the individual primitive as prerequisite.

There is another respect in which the primitive or primal forms an important element in Rand’s worldview. It is not present only as external event (man against nature), but also within the characters of her heroes. Primitive impulses, such as violence, controlled by a reasoning mind, form a crucial component of the Randian heroic. The civilised (non-violence, reason) surpasses and commands the primal, though the primal is present as base. And, of course, her heroes can hold their own in a fight if they must. In *We the Living*, Leo Kovalensky is introduced as having a mouth like that of “an ancient chieftain who could order men to die, and his eyes were such as could watch it.”<sup>97</sup> Leo becomes the lover of the novel’s heroine, Kira Argounova, a would-be engineer whose ambitions are crushed because everyone in Soviet society must do what the state thinks is best. Kira too is described in fierce pre-modern terms. On the very first page of the novel, returning to St. Petersburg with her family, she has the “look of a warrior who is entering a strange city and is not quite sure whether he is entering it as a conqueror or a captive.” Kira’s demeanour is contrasted with those around her, “humans [...] bundled in ragged overcoats and shawls”; “[d]ust had engraved wrinkles on the dry, cracked skin of faces that had lost all expression.” Later, Kira is compared to “a Valkyrie with lance and winged helmet in the sweep of battle”; she has a face which “suggests[s] an unfinished promise.” We also learn that Kira’s only hero is a “Viking whose story she had read as a child”: “a Viking whose eyes never looked farther than the point of his sword, but there was no boundary for the point of his sword; a Viking who walked through life, breaking barriers and reaping victories, who walked through ruins while the sun made a crown over his head [...] a Viking who laughed at kings, who laughed at priests [...] a Viking who lived but for the joy and the wonder and the glory of the god that was himself.”<sup>98</sup> It is important to reinforce that Rand is explicit in stating that Kira’s “ideas, her convictions, her values” are Rand’s own.<sup>99</sup> As are the ideas, convictions, and values held by all Randian heroes—since they are the same.

The suggestion of the violent primal checked by reason is evident through Rand’s four novels. In *The Fountainhead*, Howard Roark’s very presence suggests violence, disruption—though he has shown no inclination towards assault. He makes his landlady uncomfortable,

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<sup>96</sup> Rand, *Anthem*, 79.

<sup>97</sup> Rand, *We the Living*, 52.

<sup>98</sup> Rand, *We the Living*, 11, 36, 40.

<sup>99</sup> Rand, foreword to *We the Living*, ix.



“as if she were waiting to see him swing out suddenly and smash her coffee tables [...]. She kept expecting it, without knowing why.” As he constructs his first building, an enormity of pride sporadically fills Roark like “a wave of some physical violence,” though all the while he carries on calmly with his work. When he gains an office and places on the door, “Howard Roark, Architect,” “it’s like those mottoes men carved over the entrance of a castle and died for.” When Gail Wynand, a newspaper magnate, prepares to defend Roark against his critics, he is motivated by an impulse “to kill”—though all he will be doing is writing editorials.<sup>100</sup> John Galt in *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand’s ultimate ideal man, admits his propensity to violence towards those who oppose his values: “Ever since I can remember, I had felt that I would kill the man who’d claim that I exist for the sake of his need—and I had known that *this* was the highest moral feeling.”<sup>101</sup> Galt does not kill those who oppose him. At least, he does not do so directly; he does not use violence. The strike he organises, however, does result in the implosion of the existing political–economic order, and the deaths of many who would lay a claim of need on Galt’s life.

The primitive and the pre-modern, from the self-sustaining hunter-gatherer to the conquering warrior, form an important part of Rand’s conception of the human ideal. This is of note especially since her worldview is otherwise concerned with futurity. Rand charts a throughline from the individual in the wilderness to an incomparably technologically advanced society.

Rand makes a fairly uncontroversial distinction between mankind and the rest of the animal kingdom. Far more controversial, especially among her own supporters on the American right, has been her belief that the human is the highest of all beings: that there is nothing above us and man is his own god. Throughout her novels, Rand uses religious language and symbolism to portray the good in man—production, achievement, beauty—as worthy of worship. As worthy, indeed, of being the final object of worship, in an atheistic conception of the universe. Rand comments on her endeavour in the 1968 introduction to *The Fountainhead*:

Just as religion has pre-empted the field of ethics, turning morality *against* man [by invoking a higher power], so it has usurped the highest moral concepts of our language, placing them outside this earth and beyond man’s reach. “Exaltation” is usually taken to mean an emotional state evoked by contemplating the supernatural. “Worship” means the emotional experience of loyalty and dedication to something higher than man. “Reverence” means the emotion of a sacred respect, to be experienced on one’s knees. “Sacred” means superior to and not-to-be-touched-by any concerns of man or of this earth. Etc.

But such concepts do name actual emotions, even though no supernatural dimension exists, and these emotions are experienced as uplifting and ennobling,

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<sup>100</sup> Rand, *The Fountainhead*, 6, 130, 129, 648.

<sup>101</sup> Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 745. Emphasis in original.

without the self-abasement required by religious definitions. What, then, is their source or referent in reality? It is the entire emotional realm of man's dedication to a moral ideal. [...]

It is this highest level of man's emotions that has to be redeemed from the murk of mysticism and redirected at its proper object: man.

It is in this sense, with this meaning and intention, that I would identify the sense of life dramatized in *The Fountainhead* as *man-worship*.<sup>102</sup>

All of Rand's novels carry the same "sense of life."

A note about gender: When Rand speaks of man-worship, she is referencing reverence for the human and conjuring a masculine ideal. The heroines in Rand's fiction are supremely competent women of action, beholden to no one. However, the ideal is that such dominant women will fall in love with men who are even more dominant. Dominique Francon in *The Fountainhead* is a determined iconoclast, but she is no producer of great buildings like her lover Howard Roark. Dagny Taggart in *Atlas Shrugged* runs America's greatest railroad company, but she cannot make the world infinitely better thanks to everlasting, cheap, clean power—the way her lover John Galt, inventor of a new kind of motor, can. Of all Rand's controversial arguments, one of the most revealing is her statement on why she would not want to see a woman president of the United States: "For a woman *qua* woman, the essence of femininity is hero-worship—the desire to look up to man."<sup>103</sup> Rand's views lead to an uneasy relationship between the author and feminism, to say the least. A little more is said about this in chapter four.

The heroines in Rand are producers of great value, but the finest men produce greater things yet. Production, the creation of wealth or value, is a moral imperative in Rand. The relationship between production and morality is elaborated upon in a speech on money by heroic copper magnate Francisco d'Anconia, in *Atlas Shrugged*. The speech echoes Howard Roark's points above regarding the mind as man's tool of survival and the role of the mind at the root of civilisation. Rand also makes explicit here her attack on Marx's labour theory of value. Burns notes that this speech, in particular, was greeted by corporate America as a semi-Biblical revelation.<sup>104</sup> D'Anconia says:

So you think that money is the root of all evil? [...] Have you ever asked what is the root of money? [...] Money is made possible only by men who produce. [...]

[...]

Have you ever looked for the root of production? Take a look at an electric generator and dare tell yourself that it was created by the muscular effort of unthinking brutes. [...] Try to obtain food by means of nothing but physical motions—and you'll

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<sup>102</sup> Rand, introduction to *The Fountainhead*, xi. Emphases in original.

<sup>103</sup> Ayn Rand, "An Answer to Readers (About a Woman President)," *Objectivist*, December 1968, 1, quoted at *The Ayn Rand Lexicon: Objectivism from A to Z*, ed. Harry Binswanger, accessed September 13, 2014, <http://aynrandlexicon.com/lexicon/femininity.html>.

<sup>104</sup> Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 170–71.



learn that man's mind is the root of all the goods produced and of all the wealth that has ever existed on earth.

[...]

[...] Money is *made* [...] by the effort of every honest man, each to the extent of his ability. An honest man is one who knows that he can't consume more than he has produced.

[...]

[...] [M]oney is the root of all good [...].<sup>105</sup>

A moral life is a productive one. This is a point hammered home by Rand in a sixty-page radio address by John Galt towards the end of *Atlas*. She spent more than two years working on the speech, and it serves as the core document of Objectivism.<sup>106</sup> Galt emphasises once again how human life, qua human life, emerges from the individual interacting with nature in a primitive setting; from this emerges the first and most important philosophical question: To live or not to live?

You who prattle that morality is social and that man would need no morality on a desert island—it is on a desert island that he would need it most. Let him try to claim, when there are no victims to pay for it, that a rock is a house, that sand is clothing, that food will drop into his mouth without cause or effort [...] and reality will wipe him out, as he deserves; reality will show him that life is a value to be bought and that thinking is the only coin noble enough to buy it.

[...]

My morality, the morality of reason, is contained in a single axiom: existence exists—and in a single choice: to live. The rest proceeds from these.

From here Galt expounds at length on the value of a productive life:

Productiveness is your acceptance of morality, your recognition of the fact that you choose to live—that productive work is the process by which man's consciousness controls his existence, a constant process of acquiring knowledge and shaping matter to fit one's purpose, of translating an idea into physical form, of remaking the earth in the image of one's values—that *all* work is creative work if done by a thinking mind, and no work is creative if done by a blank who repeats in uncritical stupor a routine he has learned from others—that your work is yours to choose, and the choice is as wide as your mind, that nothing more is possible to you and nothing less is human—that to cheat your way into a job bigger than your mind can handle is to become a fear-corroded ape on borrowed motions and borrowed time, and to settle down into a job that requires less than your mind's full capacity is to cut your motor and sentence yourself to another kind of motion: decay—that your work is the process of achieving your values, and to lose your ambition for values is to lose your ambition to live—that your body is a machine, but your mind is its driver, and you must drive as far as your mind will take you, with achievement as the goal of your road—that the man who has no purpose is a machine that coasts downhill at the mercy of any boulder to crash in the first chance ditch, that the man who stifles his mind is a stalled machine slowly going to rust, that the man who lets a leader prescribe his course is a wreck being towed to the scrap heap, and the man who makes another man his goal is a

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<sup>105</sup> Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 410–15.

<sup>106</sup> Heller, *World She Made*, 259–60.

hitchhiker no driver should ever pick up—that your work is the purpose of your life, and you must speed past any killer who assumes the right to stop you, that any value you might find outside your work, any other loyalty or love, can be only travelers you choose to share your journey and must be travelers going on their own power in the same direction.

Since every man is an end in himself, the proper relationship between individuals is as traders: “[T]he moral symbol of respect for human beings is *the trader*. [...] A trader is a man who earns what he gets and does not give or take the undeserved.”<sup>107</sup> This of course is a typically Western view of social life—“contractual man”—with roots in secular Enlightenment thought.<sup>108</sup>

Rand, then, turns a Christian morality on its head: your duty is not to a higher power, or to the poorest or weakest, not to any god or any other human being. Your duty is to yourself and to the fulfilment of your own happiness, through productive work and mutually beneficial relationships. Rand’s reinvention of morality is reinforced by her language of the human sacred, her appeal via the familiar (the language of the sacred) to the new (man as a being to be worshipped, not God). *We the Living*’s Andrei Taganov, the Communist who learns the value of individualism through loving the heroine, comes to call Kira his “highest reverence.” He says that human life should awaken “the kind of feeling that a temple does.” Kira calls Leo her “highest reverence.”<sup>109</sup> Howard Roark decides to become an architect “because I’ve never believed in God,” “[b]ecause I love this earth. [...] I don’t like the shape of things on earth. I want to change them.” Man displaces God as creator. Roark experiences the kind of “rapture” at his own creative work that most people only experience in dreams. Those of a proper philosophical bent, like Dominique Francon, approach Roark’s work as religious worshippers. Dominique, on viewing a house designed by Roark, has “the kind of face one should expect to see in church at Easter.”<sup>110</sup>

Dagny Taggart in *Atlas Shrugged* is a good atheist like any true Randian hero. Yet, her reverent gaze on a statue of Nathaniel Taggart, her great-great grandfather and founder of Taggart Transcontinental, is like a “form of prayer.” Francisco d’Anconia is described as having “the miraculous power of the saints—only it was not the power to heal, but the power to produce.” The day when the old country implodes, and Galt, et al. return to the world, is

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<sup>107</sup> Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 1018, 1020, 1022. Emphases in original.

<sup>108</sup> Dengjian Jin writes that the Western work-culture paradigm is “contractual man,” emphasizing individual rights, with individuals as “the sole source of all values”; “groups exist not for any transcendent values imbedded in themselves but only as a result of consensual social contracts that serve the needs of individuals.” Western individualism was elaborated in the Enlightenment but can be traced back at least as far as the Roman legal system. In contrast to this, Japanese culture, for instance, privileges connectedness, the “interdependence of individuals within a connected structure,” contributing to a larger whole. Dengjian Jin, *The Dynamics of Knowledge Regimes: Technology, Culture and National Competitiveness in the USA and Japan* (London: Continuum, 2001), 74, 76–77.

<sup>109</sup> Rand, *We the Living*, 343, 265, 348.

<sup>110</sup> Rand, *The Fountainhead*, 39, 315, 293.



referred to as “the day of deliverance.” Galt, on preparing to return to the world, traces in space the sign of the dollar—like a sign of the cross.<sup>111</sup> These are just a few of the many, many examples of Rand’s language and symbolism of the human sacred in her three full-length novels. *Anthem*, as a novella, is structured in itself like a biblical story: a man is born into a world of darkness; he discovers the light (literally—he invents a lightbulb); he vows to share the light with those who are worthy, those who think like him. The novella deliberately employs stilted, biblical language. It even begins, with its opening line, by invoking religion: “It is a sin to write this.”<sup>112</sup>

Among the broad community of her enthusiasts, Rand’s rejection of God is the least accepted part of her belief system; so much so, that there are now self-described “Christian Objectivists.”<sup>113</sup> This is despite the fact that, for the keepers of Rand’s philosophical legacy in the Ayn Rand Institute, atheism is inseparable from Objectivism; it is compatible with reason where religion is not. Charity and love towards all are not moral ideals in a philosophy focused on the ego.<sup>114</sup> Right-wing commentator, Christian, and Rand advocate Katie Kieffer, however, argues that Rand’s atheism is “a mere distraction”; for Kieffer, the most useful aspect of Rand is her promotion of capitalism, and capitalism itself is entirely compatible with Christianity.<sup>115</sup> Regarding Rand, Kieffer’s is a position many on the US right share. Indeed, this is the American tradition: Christ and capital, hand in glove. An undeniable factor in Rand’s success has been her ability to integrate a from-first-principles defence of normative American values into thrilling plots. If we think about the six basic values of the United States listed in *American Ways*, it is evident that Rand pushes at least five of them: individual freedom, material wealth, self-reliance, competition, and hard work. “Equality of opportunity” is certainly problematic from the Randian point of view.<sup>116</sup> But another value of traditional

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<sup>111</sup> Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 59, 93, 581, 1168.

<sup>112</sup> Rand, *Anthem*, 17.

<sup>113</sup> Gary Weiss, *Ayn Rand Nation: The Hidden Struggle for America’s Soul* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2013), 82.

<sup>114</sup> Onkar Ghatge, a senior fellow at the Ayn Rand Institute, says: “I don’t think what Ayn Rand advocates in *Atlas Shrugged* and what Jesus teaches in the Sermon on the Mount are compatible. She’s an egoist and therefore an individualist. Jesus is advocating altruism and collectivism.” Quoted in John Blake, “Jesus or Ayn Rand—Can Conservatives Claim Both?,” *CNN Belief Blog*, June 29, 2011, <http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2011/06/29/jesus-or-ayn-rand-can-conservatives-claim-both/>.

<sup>115</sup> Katie Kieffer, “Christianity Is Compatible with Ayn Rand,” *Town Hall*, September 10, 2012, [http://townhall.com/columnists/katiekiewer/2012/09/10/christianity\\_is\\_compatible\\_with\\_ayn\\_rand/page/full/](http://townhall.com/columnists/katiekiewer/2012/09/10/christianity_is_compatible_with_ayn_rand/page/full/).

<sup>116</sup> Objectivists firmly believe in equality before the law; however, the notion of “equality of opportunity” is farcical, according to Yaron Brook, executive director of the Ayn Rand Institute—it is a goal that is simply not implementable. In a podcast on the subject, Brook argues the following: He wasn’t born with the same talent for basketball as Michael Jordan; he didn’t practise basketball in his youth. Does he have an equal right to be picked for an NBA team? A person born to a rich family wants to advance in business; so does a person from a poor family. Can you take the contacts the rich person has by virtue of who his parents are, and give them to the poor person? No. The only way to level the playing field is to take from one individual and give to another, and that is anathema for Objectivists. Brook, “Yaron Answers: Should We Promote Equality of Opportunity?,” YouTube

American life, religion, is also problematic for Rand—and so it has not been embraced, where her arguments regarding individualism and laissez-faire have been.

### **Capitalism: A Love Story**

The individual self is inviolable; this edict is at the centre of Rand’s philosophy. The individual mind and body form an indivisible whole. Galt tells his listener: “You are an indivisible entity of matter and consciousness.” The mind, however, is the driver of the body, as indicated in the quote above from Galt on productivity; without the mind the body is a rudderless vessel. The mind, then, is prime. The point of Galt’s strike is to give the world its wish: a world without “man’s mind”; specifically, without the best minds of the time. Deprived of these minds, civilisation is grinding to a halt.<sup>117</sup>

Thinking occurs individually—all communal activity is secondary, as Howard Roark explains:

[T]he mind is an attribute of the individual. There is no such thing as a collective brain. There is no such thing as a collective thought. 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 functions of body and spirit are private. They cannot be shared or transferred.

We inherit the products of the thought of other men. We inherit the wheel. We make a cart. The cart becomes an automobile. The automobile becomes an airplane. But all through the process what we receive from others is only the end product of their thinking. The moving force is the creative faculty which takes the product as material, uses it and originates the next step. This creative faculty cannot be given or received, shared or borrowed. It belongs to single, individual men.<sup>118</sup>

Rand says next to nothing specifically about capitalism in her first three novels. The capitalist is lurking by implication: in her fierce condemnation of the USSR in *We the Living*, in her celebration of American individualism in *The Fountainhead*. Rand’s first focus as a writer was promoting individualism; her paean to capitalism in her magnum opus is a natural outgrowth of that. *Atlas Shrugged* is all about capitalism: the plot is a strike by those with massive earning power, the “men of the mind,” which brings the global economy to its knees; the theme is the necessity of a capitalist system for a civilisation of technological progress and individual rights. A summary of the book will illustrate how the theme is integrated with the plot.

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video, 4:57, posted by the Ayn Rand Institute, June 9, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y9X0Hgr6C04>.

<sup>117</sup> Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 1029, 1010.

<sup>118</sup> Rand, *The Fountainhead*, 711.



*Atlas Shrugged* is a mystery, and like all mysteries, it begins with a question: “Who is John Galt?” In the reality of the novel, this phrase has become a commonplace expression. It is a version of “Who knows?”; a way of shrugging at life. People say it when faced with imponderables. And the current state of the world is an imponderable: something has gone awfully wrong; a malaise envelops every aspect of social life, though nobody seems to know its source. The world is in decline.

Dagny Taggart, Taggart Transcontinental’s Vice-President in Charge of Operation—the woman who makes the trains run on time—thinks that “an unknown destroyer” is “draining the brains of the world.” One by one, the most talented, the most productive individuals in the country are simply vanishing; men who work in the oil industry, in engineering, on the railroad—friends of Dagny’s. The government, meanwhile, is forever increasing taxes and controls on business; wealth seems to be drying up and resources are becoming scarce. In these dystopian conditions, Dagny decides to do something heroic: she must fix the railroad coming out of Colorado, America’s last promising hub of industry. She teams up with Hank Rearden, owner of Rearden Steel and inventor of a new alloy. Tougher, cheaper, and longer-lasting than steel, Rearden Metal is, in Dagny’s words, “the greatest thing ever put on the market.” No one else is yet using the alloy; everyone claims it is untested. Dagny’s brother James, nominal President of Taggart Transcontinental, voices the opinion of the establishment: nothing is good unless it is backed by a consensus: “[I]f it were any good, somebody would have used it.” Dagny knows the truth; she looks at the engineering data to know whether the metal will work or not: “When I see things, I see them.” With her business acumen and his incredible invention, Dagny and Rearden build the “John Galt Line”—named as a snub to others’ imponderables. The line opens to fanfare and celebration. For a moment, the world seems revitalised.<sup>119</sup>

But only for a moment. Flush from their success, Rearden and Dagny begin an affair, in defiance of his marriage vows. They head on holiday together, go exploring. In an abandoned factory in Starnesville, Wisconsin, once belonging to the Twentieth Century Motor Company, Dagny finds the remnant of an experimental motor and some accompanying blueprints. She is breathless: “Hank, do you understand? Those men, long ago, tried to invent a motor that would draw static electricity from the atmosphere, convert it and create its own power as it went along. They couldn’t do it. They gave it up. [...] But there it is.”<sup>120</sup> Dagny and Hank return to find their businesses in peril. The government and the “looters,” those who fear competition and hard work, yet want a piece of everyone else’s pie, are in cahoots to take down Taggart Transcontinental and Rearden Steel: “The Union of Locomotive Engineers was

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<sup>119</sup> Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 379, 439, 21.

<sup>120</sup> Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 288–89.

demanding that the maximum speed of all trains on the John Galt Line be reduced to sixty miles an hour. [...] A group [...] was demanding the passage of a Preservation of Livelihood Law, which would limit the production of Rearden Metal to an amount equal to the output of any other steel mill of equal plant capacity.”<sup>121</sup>

Dagny secretly employs Quentin Daniels, a young physicist, to attempt the motor’s reconstruction. When Daniels announces he is quitting—he declares that he will not work as “a slave,” in a world where the state can appropriate his work for its own ends—Dagny races across the country to plead with him to keep working.<sup>122</sup> Travelling on one of her own trains, she encounters, mid-journey, a tramp hiding in the vestibule of her car. The tramp tells her his story. There was a time when he worked for the Twentieth Century Motor Company. When ownership passed from the founder to his children, the new bosses decided to try an experiment. They would run the organisation according to the Marxist maxim, “From each according to his ability, to each according to his need.” Every employee received a basic minimum salary; increments were given on the basis of need, as decided by a general vote: “[W]e got what we asked for. [...] The best men among us left the factory in the first week of the plan. [...] We kept losing our men, they kept escaping from the factory like from a pesthole—till we had nothing left except the men of need, but none of the men of ability.” As the tramp relates his tale, he slips into a long soliloquy against the principles of Communism—and one can hear Rand decrying her own experiences in the Soviet Union:

[T]his was the moral law that the professors and leaders and thinkers had wanted to establish all over the earth. If this is what it did in a single small town where we all knew one another, do you care to think what it would do on a world scale? Do you care to imagine what it would be like, if you had to live and to work, when you’re tied to all the disasters and all the malingering of the globe? To work—and whenever men failed anywhere, it’s you who would have to make up for it. To work—with no chance to rise, with your meals and your clothes and your home and your pleasure depending on any swindle, any famine, any pestilence anywhere on earth. To work—with no chance for an extra ration, till the Cambodians have been fed and the Patagonians have been sent through college. To work—on a blank check held by every creature born, by men whom you’ll never see, whose needs you’ll never know [...] *This*—a moral ideal?<sup>123</sup>

Ayn Rand is one of the staunchest Cold War critics of collectivism, since she sought to reframe morality as not primarily about the relationship of a human being to other human beings, but the relationship of a human being to him- or herself. She supplies a self-centric moral vocabulary: Your need is not a claim on my life.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 299.

<sup>122</sup> Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 381, 644, 647.

<sup>123</sup> Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 668–69. Emphasis in original.

<sup>124</sup> Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 1059–60.



At the meeting of employees where the new policy was agreed, one man stood up to say no, the tramp tells us. The man announced that he was leaving the Twentieth Century Motor Company, and he promised not only that its doors would shut; he declared that he would “stop the motor of the world.”<sup>125</sup> Twelve years since that meeting, and the earth has almost ground to a halt. The protestor’s name was John Galt. Dagny comes to realise that Galt is both the creator of the mysterious motor and the “unknown destroyer.” Because he could not profit from his motor, Galt left it to rust. He marshalled others to his cause. He organised a strike of the wealth creators, since those who create wealth should not be forced to give it up to benefit others. This is his, and Rand’s, moral imperative.

### **An American Bestseller**

The plot-theme of *Atlas* demonstrates the individual mind at the core of productive and technologically progressive existence. No one else could work what Galt invented. The minds of the supremely talented—Dagny, Rearden, et al.—keep the human world moving forward, by virtue of their striving for the best. Without Dagny’s ability to run things, there would be no intercontinental railroad, which opens up opportunities for commerce and leisure to millions. Rearden’s wanting to outdo the past, with a metal to surpass all others, means we are gifted with safer, faster railroads, cars, aeroplanes. They don’t do it for us, for the rest of humanity; they do it because they want accomplishments to their name. Yet, because they care about accomplishment, the Dagnys, Reardens, and Galts improve all our lives by their work. They are the best of what’s human, and carry the world on their shoulders. *Atlas* posits capitalism as not just the only workable system, but the only *moral* system, in terms of securing individual rights. A person’s mind and body is his own inviolable property. Whomsoever has an idea—an invention, an artwork, a business—it is his to keep and to profit from. It is not the government’s to tax so that it may feed other citizens; it is not the property of any workers employed to put that idea into practice: these second-handers come after the primary fact that an individual has had an idea and it is his. Galt goes on strike because he will not live in a world where he cannot profit to the greatest possible extent from his own work. Rand’s message is that we cannot live in a world without him.

Rand’s final novel has proved to be her most controversial. *Atlas* was published in October 1957, and the reviews were typically scathing: “the Left was appalled by its blatant pro-capitalism; the religious right rebelled against its rejection of religion. Most reviewers were dismayed by its immoderation, that is, its absolutism.”<sup>126</sup> The most memorable attack came from a conservative outlet, *National Review*. The religious right of the day, spearheaded

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<sup>125</sup> Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 671.

<sup>126</sup> Michael S. Berliner, “The *Atlas Shrugged* Reviews,” in *Essays on Ayn Rand’s “Atlas Shrugged,”* ed. Mayhew, 134.

by *Review* founder and editor William F. Buckley, was determined that Rand's atheistic notion of capitalism should not gain traction. Buckley made sure to deploy a reviewer with the credentials to take on Rand: Whittaker Chambers, a former Soviet spy turned right-wing Quaker. In an essay entitled "Big Sister Is Watching You," in the issue dated December 28, 1957, Chambers wrote: "From almost any page of *Atlas Shrugged*, a voice can be heard, from painful necessity, commanding, 'To a gas chamber—go!'"<sup>127</sup> Berliner summarises the reason *Atlas* polarised to the extent it did: "By 1957, Ayn Rand had become an uncompromising advocate of reason, egoism, and laissez-faire capitalism, and an uncompromising opponent of altruism, collectivism, and mysticism (including religion). With her three previous works, there may have been some doubts about where she stood philosophically; with *Atlas Shrugged*, there could be no doubts."<sup>128</sup>

In spite of the critical response, Rand's thrilling adventure about industrial titans battling evil socialism, soon became a hit. It helped sell capitalism to a generation, and remains a bestseller today. Indeed, as of this writing, the top three years for sales of *Atlas Shrugged*, since its publication in 1957, are 2009, 2011, and 2012.<sup>129</sup>

The critical response to her magnum opus depressed Rand. Though an iconoclast, she wanted her ideas to be taken seriously by the establishment.<sup>130</sup> Whatever legitimacy Rand gained as an intellectual, would come from outside the typical avenues of university tenure and newspapers of record. *Atlas Shrugged* became a real part of 1960s counter-culture. This was not the same counter-culture, of course, as that kindled by the left and the hippie movement, but a burgeoning libertarianism, which would become a significant force on the American political scene during the next several decades. If the hippies sought to re-align America to the left, Rand and her followers fought to re-align it to the right. Rand's rise in the culture is talked about in more detail in the next chapter.

One might have thought that, in the debate over what constitutes the Great American Novel (and if such a thing exists), *Atlas Shrugged* would be to the fore. It is, after all, distinctly American in its form and subject-matter. It has had unique appeal and influence within America. Its staying power as a vehicle for ideas—as we have seen and will see—is undeniable. Its influence, however, has mostly not been literary—at least, not within the

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<sup>127</sup> Whittaker Chambers, "Big Sister is Watching You," *National Review*, December 28, 1957, quoted in Berliner, "The *Atlas Shrugged* Reviews," in *Essays on Ayn Rand's "Atlas Shrugged"*, ed. Mayhew, 138; also quoted in Heller, *World She Made*, 284.

<sup>128</sup> Berliner, "The *Atlas Shrugged* Reviews," in *Essays on Ayn Rand's "Atlas Shrugged"*, ed. Mayhew, 133.

<sup>129</sup> "Ayn Rand Hits a Million ... Again!," Ayn Rand Institute press release (email received by author), May 14, 2013. The press release also highlights how average annual sales of *Atlas Shrugged* have risen in each of the last four decades, from 74,300 per year in the 1980s to 303,523 per year in the 2010s thus far.

<sup>130</sup> Cookinham, *Age of Rand*, 37.



realms of high literature. And its ideas are hardly likely to garner wide appeal among the left-wing high-critical establishment (recall Alan Wolfe's views chronicled in the introduction to this thesis). Authoritative sources on the American canon—such as Magill Surveys' *American Novel* (1981), *The Cambridge History of the American Novel* (2011), *The Cambridge Companion to American Fiction after 1945* (2012), the Wiley-Blackwell *Companion to the American Novel* (2012), and Christopher MacGowan's *Twentieth Century American Fiction Handbook* (2011)—make no mention of *Atlas* at all.<sup>131</sup>

The novel is, however, an *American* novel. Its thriller plot, with played-up mystery, melodrama, twists; its characters who are more role-players in a story than three-dimensional beings—these facets are not just redolent of popular fiction, but suggest another medium popularised by America, the medium in which Rand got her start as a writer: cinema. Ironically, *Atlas Shrugged* as it is would never work as a movie, or even a series of movies, as attempts to make one have proven. It is “too full of philosophy,” as one Hollywood producer put it:<sup>132</sup> a philosophy expounded in lengthy speeches which, combined with the morality-tale plot, constitute the novel's impact for what it is. The directness of the ideas and the tightness of the plotting can keep us turning the pages, at our own pace. I'm not sure they could keep us glued to a screen, at whatever pace a director deemed fit.

*Atlas* is a novel *about* America—an epic treatment of American decline, after the country abandons the free-market ideals that are held up as manifestly American. Its form is a vehicle for an idea of a renewed country. And yet, it is precisely because of the radicalism of her free-market views that Rand's Americanism is not beyond dispute. As Douglas J. Den Uyl puts it, it can be argued that “Rand effectively advocates a political order that is new and only partially reflective of the essential nature of America.”<sup>133</sup> During the 2012 election, the

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<sup>131</sup> *The Cambridge History of the American Novel* does include two mentions of Rand, though none of *Atlas*. David A. Zimmerman's chapter, “Novels of American Business, Industry, and Consumerism,” has a curious reference to “Ayn Rand's favourite novel,” Henry K. Webster and Samuel Merwin's *Calumet “K”* (1901), but no mention of Rand's works or even an explanation of who she is. The implication is that everyone knows who Rand is, but there is no point in discussing her work, presumably because it is not perceived as canonical, due to lack of innovation or sophistication. A more interesting reference is made in Robert Chodat's chapter, “Philosophy of the American Novel.” *The Fountainhead* is named as a bestseller which engages with philosophy; yet, because Objectivism is a “marginal” philosophy, Rand apparently merits no further discussion. Incidentally, Heller confirms that *Calumet “K,”* “a charming turn-of-the-century novel of engineering prowess and conventional anti-unionism,” became Rand's “lifelong favourite novel.” The book was given to her as a present by Cecil B. DeMille. Leonard Cassuto, Clare Virginia Eby, and Benjamin Reiss, eds., *The Cambridge History of the American Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 419, 655; Heller, *World She Made*, 69.

<sup>132</sup> Michael Jaffe, quoted in Jeff Britting, “Adapting *Atlas Shrugged* to Film,” in *Essays on Ayn Rand's “Atlas Shrugged,”* ed. Mayhew, 195.

<sup>133</sup> Douglas J. Den Uyl, “A Note on Rand's Americanism,” in *Ayn Rand's “Atlas Shrugged,”* ed. Younkins, 361.

President of the United States himself labelled Rand's vision "not one that [...] describes what's best in America."<sup>134</sup>

Rand's patriotic touches are self-evident. Roark calls the United States "[t]he noblest country in the history of men," since it was founded on the principle of individual happiness; it is "[t]he country of greatest achievement, greatest prosperity, greatest freedom." Galt accuses the looters, moochers, and mystics of betraying "this greatest of countries."<sup>135</sup> Den Uyl, however, elaborates a vital point. Rand's defence is of "values" that are supposedly especially American. In her non-fiction, for instance, she praises Americans' instinctive initiative and common sense, contrasted with Europeans' instinctive conformity and obedience.<sup>136</sup> Rand advocates what can generally be termed a liberal social order, which is also what America is; in Den Uyl's definition: "A liberal social order is one that leaves people generally free to pursue their own ends and to associate with whom they please." He argues that liberalism in this sense is usually defended by one of two methods, a values defence or a diversity defence. A values perspective "sees liberalism in terms of the instantiation of certain values among the citizens of the liberal order [...] the most familiar form of this would be the encouragement of toleration and autonomy." He goes on:

The values approach is rather different from what I shall call the "diversity" perspective. On the diversity way of defending liberalism the main focus is that people have diverse interests, values, and life goals, and in order to avoid conflict we allow maximum possible freedom under institutions set up for adjudicating disputes and to prevent abuses of power. The diversity defense cares little about what people are like, what values they have, whether their souls are constituted like that of Wesley Mouch [a collectivist bureaucrat in *Atlas*] or Hank Rearden. This defense is therefore structural and procedural.

In Rand's novels, "[t]he importance of liberty politically is depicted as a function of *the kind of people* it will not only allow to flourish, but encourage to flourish":

The problem with this approach to establishing a liberal order is that liberty also protects those who are not interested in heroic individualist lifestyles. Indeed, the more diversity of ends one allows, the less heroic individualism seems to have to do with the defense of liberty. [...] It may be that the defense of liberalism depends as much on considering the lifestyle of the altruistic monk who lives for his religious order as it does the heroic individuals depicted in Rand's novels.

Den Uyl concludes: "America is a country, at least in its political conception of itself, much more in line with the diversity approach than the value[s] one." He cites as evidence the nature

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<sup>134</sup> Barack Obama, quoted in Douglas Brinkley, "Obama and the Road Ahead: The *Rolling Stone* Interview," *Rolling Stone*, November 8, 2012, <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/obama-and-the-road-ahead-the-rolling-stone-interview-20121025?print=true>.

<sup>135</sup> Rand, *The Fountainhead*, 715; *Atlas Shrugged*, 1055.

<sup>136</sup> Den Uyl, "Rand's Americanism," in *Ayn Rand's "Atlas Shrugged"*, ed. Younkins, 363.



of how citizens' rights are framed—liberty *and* equality—as well as the checks-and-balances set-up of American governance. Therefore, Rand's understanding of what America *is*—as a political entity for which she advocates—is only partial.<sup>137</sup>

Rand's emphasis on the "values" of a polity, what we might otherwise call its philosophical or spiritual essence, feeds into her utopianism. Rand's adherence is to an ideal—the ideal type of person and the ideal conditions in which he can flourish: "The motive and purpose of my writing *is the projection of an ideal man*":<sup>138</sup> "Since man acts among and deals with other men, I had to present the kind of social system that makes it possible for ideal men to exist and to function—a free, productive, rational system which demands and rewards the best in every man, and which is, obviously, *laissez-faire capitalism*."<sup>139</sup> Den Uyl points out that when the denizens of Galt's Gulch defend their activities—living by their own code, even minting their own money—they do so with the claim that they are adhering to the philosophical essence of America; they do not reference any extant law or institution: all these they consider corrupted.<sup>140</sup> In short, they view themselves as the *real* Americans.

There is nothing wrong, in itself, with utopian thought. Such thought has a long history in political discourse. Indeed, imagining an ideal world can be a vital prompt for bettering real social conditions. The problem comes when enacting a fixed ideal takes precedence over bettering actual conditions of existence. This is why, I think, Karl Popper's definition of "utopian social engineering" is useful when considering utopia as it relates to Rand. It is important to remember in the discussion below that Rand's vision of the ideal, as found in her fiction, is not meant only to stand on its own, as an image for its own sake: it has a pedagogical function. Rand actively promoted the enactment of her political-economic vision during her lifetime. Today, the Ayn Rand Institute, the advocacy group funded by her continuing book sales, has a 100- to 120-year plan to make Objectivism "the dominant secular philosophy in the United States," in the words of its executive director.<sup>141</sup> The organisation sees itself engaged in a long struggle towards the enactment of Rand's ideals. It is also important to remember, in the discussion below, that one person's utopia is another's dystopia. Rand's insistence on her ideal of the heroic is therefore a potential threat to the plurality—the "diversity" referenced by Den Uyl—which is becoming of liberal democracies. That is, the "utopia of greed" is an existential threat to plurality if made policy, in the same way that legal adherence to any exclusionary set of values—radical Islam, doctrinal Catholicism, Soviet-style socialism—is manifestly not compatible with the practice of a liberal democracy.

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<sup>137</sup> Den Uyl, "Rand's Americanism," in *Ayn Rand's "Atlas Shrugged,"* ed. Younkins, 368–70, 365. My emphasis.

<sup>138</sup> Rand, *Romantic Manifesto*, 155. Emphasis in original.

<sup>139</sup> Rand, introduction to *The Fountainhead*, ix.

<sup>140</sup> Den Uyl, "Rand's Americanism," in *Ayn Rand's "Atlas Shrugged,"* ed. Younkins, 364–65.

<sup>141</sup> Yaron Brook, quoted in Gary Weiss, *Ayn Rand Nation*, 247.

## The Utopia of Greed

The train that Dagny is taking to reach Daniels halts mid-trip and is abandoned by its driver and crew. This has been happening of late: workers leaving their posts in protest at what civilisation has become. With an airfield nearby, the operating VP of Taggart Transcontinental hires and pilots a plane; flying towards her destination, she finds another aircraft taking off: the destroyer has reached Quentin Daniels. Dagny chases the second plane into the mountains of Colorado, as it flees towards the horizon. Then the destroyer's plane vanishes—seemingly off the face of the earth. Dagny tries to follow its path—and crash lands, through a protective holographic screen, into Mulligan's Valley, Galt's Gulch: "When she opened her eyes, she saw sunlight, green leaves and a man's face. This was the world as she had expected to see it at sixteen—and now she had reached it—and it seemed so simple, so astonishing, that the thing she felt was like a blessing pronounced upon the universe by means of three words: But of course."<sup>142</sup>

The valley gives Dagny a taste of life as it could and should be; what's outside is only a nightmare—what's here is what is really real. The fugitives from the outside world, Galt's strikers, are free to use their minds, without the efforts of their work being stolen. People run businesses without government interference. A self-sufficient community has been built up, with its own water and power supply, even its own bank. The bank mints gold and silver coins, since precious metal can be the only true currency: a definite, valuable resource, as opposed to paper which can be printed endlessly.

Galt and the strikers gather here for one month every summer, and live their true lives. Galt's motor powers the valley, and he also invented the holo-projector which hides the gulch's location. He is the valley's handyman, fixing whatever problems arise with the infrastructure. The important thing is: his mind is in play. In the world beyond, he now works only as a day labourer: he will perform tasks with his body for a wage, but he will not use the mental ability that is solely his. This is how the strikers operate. Since Galt's Gulch is only "a small-scale model" of a Randian ideal world,<sup>143</sup> there is one thing lacking here which would be needed in a larger model: a formal government. Rand has inspired those who would do away with the state entirely, but she herself did believe government was an ultimate necessity, though its functions would be limited essentially to keeping the peace and resolving contract disputes. In other words, to a police force, a military, and a court system. Taxes would be replaced by direct payments for services provided.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 701.

<sup>143</sup> Milgrim, "Anthem in the Context of Related Literary Works," in *Essays on Ayn Rand's "Anthem,"* ed. Mayhew, 163.

<sup>144</sup> "In a fully free society, taxation—or, to be exact, payment for government services—would be *voluntary*. Since the proper services of a government—the police, the armed forces, the law courts—



The utopia of Mulligan's Valley is not simply a fantastical fictional construct. As Alan Clardy notes, it—along with *Atlas* as a whole—is intended to inspire real-world, right-wing political action, and it has done so. It is therefore imperative that Galt's Gulch be critiqued in terms of its viability as an actual entity. Clardy engages in such a critique, and finds Rand's utopia wanting on a number of fronts, including “the soundness of its psychological and sociological underpinnings.” Rand's model is not repeatable in reality, and is certainly not viable as a model for a large-scale civilisation, in substantial part due to how the author “grossly caricatures and distorts the full range of human diversity.”<sup>145</sup> The individuals in *Atlas* are grouped into three broad types: the productive geniuses who are oppressed by the tax-and-redistribute structure of the world as it is; the malevolent forces who, consciously or not, seek to destroy the best in human life by dragging everyone to a common denominator; and the ungifted masses who will go along with whatever social order is prevalent—or, as Clardy calls them, “Supermen, looters, and sheep.” Rand's ideal is that everyone will adopt her “rational ethics” and then all conflict will dissolve: “[U]nlike Hobbes's version of primeval human nature, where the existence of others meant a competition for power and resources that required a state to bring about order, for Rand, individuals would naturally balance into order and peace by the miracle of economic transactions”:

Naively, this perspective ignores or is blind to the potential for the natural accumulation and concentration of power in the unelected hands of a few as well as the positive role that government can play in protecting the individual liberties for all against the abuses of uncontrolled economic power. Social stratification and economic classes do not vanish, under either Marxist or libertarian doctrines, and neither do the class conflicts embedded in the differential distribution of power, prestige, and resources.<sup>146</sup>

In addition, Rand's ideal that everyone on earth would adopt her particular “rational code” is on its face hopelessly unrealistic, and creates within itself the potential for human conflict: “What would happen [...] if a member of this [society] simply goes crazy or suffers a religious or ideological conversion and ignores—or even worse, repudiates” the few rules the society would have? In sum: “[Rand's] utopian vision is so consumed with being ideologically pure that it misses being human by a wide mark.”<sup>147</sup> This critique could be made of all utopian

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are demonstrably needed by individual citizens [...] the citizens would (and should) be willing to pay for such services, as they pay for insurance.” Rand goes on to say that it is not the job of a political philosopher such as herself to detail how this system would work in practice; that is a matter for legal scholars. In any case, she suggests, discussions about implementation are premature, given how far the world still is from having “a *fully* free society.” Rand, “Government Financing in a Free Society,” *Virtue of Selfishness*, 135. Emphases in original.

<sup>145</sup> Clardy, “Galt's Gulch,” 238, 259.

<sup>146</sup> Clardy, “Galt's Gulch,” 246, 259.

<sup>147</sup> Clardy, “Galt's Gulch,” 246, 255.

visions, perhaps. But this is precisely the point: the fact that it applies specifically to Rand highlights her connection to the general sphere of unrealistic utopian thinking.

There is another manner in which Rand evinces utopianism, and that is the existence itself of an image of a perfect society. There is an enormous distinction between setting a goal of an ideal life for oneself, and shaping a vision of an ideal world which is as good as it gets for everyone. The spirit-lifting aspect of Rand's writing: its inspirational view of human ability; the impulse it provides to go and work hard, achieve your dreams, be your best self—there's a lot to be said for that. The political ideology in which Rand wrapped her view of the human, however, is a form of extremism, and a form of utopianism, which must be countered.

Karl Popper's *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945) is a tour-de-force against historicism; in Popper's definition, the belief that "the laws of history" are discoverable and therefore it is possible to "prophesy the course of historical events." Popper's central thesis is a philosophical defence of the "open society," liberal democracy, against a rival tendency in Western thought: the "closed" tribal-totalitarian society. Popper traces the latter tendency to Plato's insistence on the possibility of a world of perfect forms. Popper argues that Plato's philosophy constitutes the basis of historical determinism: the view that history has a meaning and a destination. Popper charts this tendency right up to Marx, and his dialectical assertion that capitalism contains within itself its own inevitable destruction; this allows Marx to *insist on an endpoint* of political struggle, i.e. the socialist state. A conviction that the ideal state can be realised allows all manner of atrocities to be committed on the road to getting there, for the purpose of the alleged greater good; this conviction is thus a foundation for dictatorship. Popper's core argument is that there is no end, there is no meaning to history, other than the ends and meanings we give it. The push and pull of a liberal democracy, with its imperfect institutions, its pluralism of peoples and opinions, is far from an ordered utopia—and we should be thankful that it is. The open society is that which "sets free the critical powers of man." We must realise: "we may become the makers of our fate when we have ceased to pose as its prophets."<sup>148</sup>

Within this framework, Popper defines two approaches to solving societal problems: utopian social engineering, which is Platonic and dangerous, and piecemeal social engineering, a decidedly better method. Each would make a claim to being a rational approach to socio-political issues, though only the latter is "methodologically sound," in Popper's view:

The Utopian approach may be described as follows. Any rational action must have a certain aim. It is rational in the same degree as it pursues its aim consciously and consistently, and as it determines its means according to this end. To choose the end is therefore the first thing we have to do if we wish to act rationally. [...] These

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<sup>148</sup> Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, new one-volume ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), xli, xliii.



principles, if applied to the realm of political activity, demand that we must determine our ultimate political aim, or the Ideal State, before taking any political action.

The piecemeal engineer, in contrast, will not begin with the premise that the Ideal State is realisable. He will search for the causes of the worst suffering, and attempt to rectify them, rather than assume any enactment of the “greatest ultimate good” is possible.<sup>149</sup>

At first glances, Rand’s philosophy and Popper’s anti-determinist thesis have much in common. Rand emphatically did not believe that anything other than individual men and women determine the course of history. She, too, condemned Plato—indeed, saw him at the base of fundamental errors in Western thought, and his work as a model for dictatorship.<sup>150</sup> Rand is nominally in favour of an “open society,” one which, as Popper puts it, “sets free the critical powers of man”—in other words, sets free his capacity to think and to create, to go as far as his mind will take him. Yet, Rand’s ideal society, as found in the fiction, does not look like a liberal democracy. Democracy as such has nothing to do with it; it is about the rights of heroic individuals to achieve their life-goals unhampered by social responsibility. Her advocacy of the titanic in man discounts the possibility of a pluralist defence of liberalism, as noted by Den Uyl; so does the simplicity of her “types” of people, noted by Clardy. Rand’s insistence that all human affairs can be governed by knowable absolutes akin to the laws of physics—such as her doctrine that there are no conflicts of interest between rational men—is a form of unrealisable idealism, just as potentially destructive as anything from the Platonic line. Moreover, Rand’s conception denies the very idea that economic power could be coercive.<sup>151</sup> Therefore, in supporting unregulated capitalism, in the name of absolute freedom, Rand glosses over—to paraphrase Clardy’s point from above—the potential for the accumulation of coercive economic power in the hands of an unelected few. This power, under Randian law, would not be balanced by anything in the democratic political system. Rand’s stated aim is to do away with the regulated capitalist economy, which is at the heart of what liberal democracy is.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Popper, *Open Society*, 147–48.

<sup>150</sup> In her *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology* (1979), Rand writes: “[T]he Platonist school begins [...] by reversing the relationship of consciousness to existence, by assuming that reality must conform to the content of consciousness, not the other way around [...] it distorts reality into a mystical construct in order to extort its sanction and validate subjectivism.” The author once wrote to a fan who had compared *The Fountainhead* to *The Republic*: “I hope you meant no comparison in philosophical content [...]. Plato’s *Republic* is the archetype and granddaddy of all the collectivist schemes that have plagued mankind since.” Rand, *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, 2nd ed., ed. Harry Binswanger and Leonard Peikoff (New York: Meridian, 1990), 53–54; letter to O. W. Kracht, March 4, 1945, in *Letters*, 221.

<sup>151</sup> “Man’s rights can only be violated by physical force”; “In a capitalist society, all human relationships are *voluntary*.” Rand, “The Nature of Government,” *Virtue of Selfishness*, 126; “What Is Capitalism?,” in *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal* (New York: Signet, 2005), 11. Emphasis in original.

<sup>152</sup> In a 1959 interview with Rand, her first for television, Mike Wallace says: “Let me start by quoting from a review of this novel, *Atlas Shrugged*, that appeared in *Newsweek*. It said that you are out to destroy almost every edifice in the contemporary American way of life: our Judeo-Christian

The Randian approach to social engineering also fits Popper's description of the utopian. The end—an earth without the mixed economy—is decided in advance, and the path determined by the end. Make no mistake: it is social engineering that Objectivists are engaged in; theirs is the realm of political activity. Convinced that American universities are dominated by the left, the Ayn Rand Institute (ARI) has targeted high schools. The group's executive director, Yaron Brook, boasts that every high school English teacher in the US gets an offer: We will give you as many free copies of Rand's books as you need, if you will teach them in your classroom. Over 350,000 free books are delivered every year, along with teaching materials produced by the ARI. This is not, needless to say, benevolence. It is an open attempt to instil support for Rand's ideas in the next generation.<sup>153</sup> In 2013, twice a month, the Ayn Rand Center for Individual Rights, a subsidiary of the ARI, held briefings in Washington for staffers of the House of Representatives and the US Senate. In 2012, institute members made 228 radio and television appearances, and wrote seventeen opinion pieces for newspapers.<sup>154</sup> An "Atlas Venture Fund" has been set up to fund Objectivist projects.<sup>155</sup> The ARI has a century-long plan to make America better-resemble Galt's Gulch.

The approach of the strikers in the fiction of *Atlas Shrugged* is also to engage in utopian social engineering. They decide on their Ideal State, and decide not to engage with the political structure as-it-is in order to bring it about. Rather, they take measures to precipitate the collapse of the existing structure, so that they may have their new world. What happens to those left in the wake of the collapse is of no concern: realising a heroic ideal is what matters.

As Dagny spends her month in Mulligan's Valley, she falls in love with John Galt. The strikers make their case that she should join them, but she is not yet ready to give up on the world. She returns to her old job, her old life. The country, however, continues to get worse as she takes part in the charade of the looters. At the moment when collapse seems imminent, Galt hijacks the airwaves to make a three-hour speech about the proper way to live. Agents of the regime succeed in kidnapping Galt, torturing him in an effort to turn him into an "economic dictator" who will save the economy. But he has only one message: "Get the hell out of my

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religion, our modified government-regulated capitalism, our rule by the majority will [...]. Are these accurate criticisms?" Rand replies: "Uh, yes. I agree with the facts but not the estimate of this criticism. Namely, if I am challenging the base of all these institutions, I am challenging the moral code of altruism." "Ayn Rand First Interview 1959 (Full)," YouTube video, 27:07, posted by "TruthTube1111," May 25, 2011, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ooKsv\\_SX4Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ooKsv_SX4Y).

<sup>153</sup> "Yaron Brook: The Virtue of Inequality," YouTube video, 18:36, posted by Patrick Black, December 9, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VJaWNFWcUs4>; Weiss, *Ayn Rand Nation*, 56–57; "ARI, Education, and Hope for the Future," Ayn Rand Institute letter to subscribers (email received by author), June 15, 2013.

<sup>154</sup> "The Ayn Rand Center—The Voice for Objectivist Politics in Washington," Ayn Rand Institute letter to subscribers (email received by author), April 23, 2013.

<sup>155</sup> "The Atlas Venture Fund," *Impact Weekly* (Ayn Rand Institute email newsletter, received by author), September 25, 2014.



way!”<sup>156</sup> Everything falls apart. Civil war wreaks havoc. Remnants of the old unleash a government weapon, Project X, which blasts an area of one hundred miles—across four states—into wasteland. Where once there were trains and automobiles, people have gone back to the horse and carriage. The earth is again a blank canvass upon which the able may draw their dreams. High on a clifftop in the valley named for him, Galt declares: “We are going back.” And so Ayn Rand’s ideal men go forth into the world.

The rebirth of the frontier is the final vista of Rand’s magnum opus: nature waiting to be conquered, few people or institutions to get in the way. In the real world, the American frontier is gone forever: “Never again can human beings discover such a large area of rich, unfarmed land, with such a small population and such great undeveloped natural resources.”<sup>157</sup> Except, of course, science is making possible new frontiers: settlements on and underneath the ocean; habitats in space; the remoulding of the human body itself. The frontier ideology of Rand—push the boundaries and create value where once there was little—is both a marker of the author’s Americanism and a reason for her continued appeal, especially within America, and especially within the technological communities who deal in new frontiers.

### **From Fiction to Philosophy**

In the television movie of Rand’s life starring Helen Mirren and Peter Fonda, *The Passion of Ayn Rand*—based on Barbara Branden’s book of the same name—there is one critical moment. Ayn (Mirren) announces that, after twelve years, she has finished writing *Atlas Shrugged*. Her husband, Frank (Fonda), takes her hand, and they dance around the room to some lighthearted music, using their pet names for each other, “Cubby” (O’Connor) and “Fluff” (Rand). Meanwhile, another figure looks on. A young man: Nathaniel Branden (Eric Stoltz). He raises a glass in honour of the happy couple.<sup>158</sup>

In the years between *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*, the defining relationship of Objectivism was founded: that between Ayn Rand and Nathaniel Branden. It was after *The Fountainhead*’s publication that Rand began to acquire a following of worshippers. One young fan who wrote to her was Nathan Blumenthal. After an exchange of letters, in spring 1950, Nathan visited Rand at her home in Chatsworth, California. The next week, he brought a one-time lover and friend, also an admirer of Rand, to visit the author—Barbara Weidman. Blumenthal and Weidman would later marry, and change their names to Nathaniel and Barbara Branden. “Branden” is an anagram of “ben Rand,” Hebrew for “son of Rand.”

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<sup>156</sup> Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 1125.

<sup>157</sup> Datesman, Crandall, and Kearny, *American Ways*, 94.

<sup>158</sup> The 1999 movie, directed by Chris Menaul, won Mirren a Best Actress Emmy for her role, and won Fonda a Golden Globe for Best Supporting Actor. These were Rand’s and O’Connor’s real pet names for each other. Heller, *World She Made*, 101; Rand, *Letters*, 36–37.

Though, the couple have always denied they chose the name for this reason.<sup>159</sup> In any case, Nathaniel and Barbara became effectively Rand's philosophical children: the vanguard of the next generation that would carry on her ideas.

While working on *Atlas*, Rand moved to her beloved New York City. Here, a group of young devotees, associates of the Brandens and others, gathered around her. Ironically calling themselves the Collective, the group met every week at Rand's home to hear new sections from her tome-in-progress. Among the Collective was the man who would end up as Rand's heir, Leonard Peikoff, and the man who would become—in terms of raw political clout—her most powerful disciple, economist Alan Greenspan. With the consent of Frank and Barbara—though secret to the outside world—in 1955, Ayn and Nathaniel began a sexual relationship. Rand's affair, writes Burns, “shaped her mature career.” Heller writes that it “provided [...] deep fulfilment at a crucial [...] moment in her writing life”: as she tackled the sixty-page speech towards the end of *Atlas Shrugged*, which expounds the mechanics of her philosophy. Rand called Branden her “reward” for her life's work.<sup>160</sup> She would come to promote the irrepressibly handsome, intelligent, ambitious man as—in Branden's own words—the “most consistent embodiment” of her philosophy.<sup>161</sup>

Rand was always more interested in *ideas*, in the first principles behind individual lives and societal structures, than she was in fiction qua fiction; penning fiction for her was a means of putting forward philosophical points. The points she wished to advance remained essentially consistent throughout her career. *Atlas Shrugged* was written to encapsulate and promote an entire way of life, both for the individual and for society, based on ideas of individualism, capitalism, and atheism. It should not surprise us, then, that Rand sought to name the system she was inaugurating. Heller describes how Rand and Branden arrived at the name in the run-up to the publication of *Atlas*: “She liked ‘existentialism,’ [...] because it echoed Aristotle's maxim that ‘existence exists.’ But Jean-Paul Sartre and his band of ‘bad guys’ had beaten them to it. [...] ‘Objectivism’ [was] intended as an homage to the immutability of objective reality and the competence of perception and reason to grasp and understand it. It also conveyed an urgent emphasis on the scientific method, Rand thought.”<sup>162</sup>

In the wake of *Atlas*'s success, Branden and Rand established a series of lecture courses for those interested in her ideas, which she was now promoting as a full-service philosophy. Rand would term her system “a philosophy for living on earth,” emphasising its practicality but also its atheism: There is no afterlife, there is no salvation in helping others; you must seek your happiness here, now, by your own means and by productive

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<sup>159</sup> Heller, *World She Made*, 219–23, 254; Cookinham, *Age of Rand*, 25.

<sup>160</sup> Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 4; Heller, *World She Made*, 259, 261.

<sup>161</sup> Nathaniel Branden, *My Years with Ayn Rand* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 1.

<sup>162</sup> Heller, *World She Made*, 278.



achievement.<sup>163</sup> Asked at a publishers' sales conference to summarise her philosophy while standing on one foot, Rand came up with the following: "Metaphysics: objective reality. Epistemology: reason. Ethics: self-interest. Politics: capitalism."<sup>164</sup> In the "About the Author" segment of *Atlas*, she condenses it this way: "My philosophy, in essence, is the concept of man as a heroic being, with his own happiness as the moral purpose of his life, with productive achievement as his noblest activity, and reason as his only absolute."<sup>165</sup>

Rand's first nonfiction volume was *For the New Intellectual* (1961). This contained a lengthy essay wherein she set her thought against recent intellectual history, along with extracts from her fiction divided by philosophical topic. Rand's entry into nonfiction was primarily concerned with identifying two archetypes she saw in evidence throughout human history. The "Attila" and the "Witch Doctor," in various forms, "rebel" against humanity's unique faculties, our ability to reason and to transform our environment (with canals, bridges, trains, or the US Constitution). The Attila is found among fascists, socialists, Communists, et al.: he does not understand how wealth and progress are created (by independent minds working for their chosen reasons), and consequently only understands rule by force, by one group over another; he sees men as means to an end and "never thinks of creating, only of *taking over*." The Witch Doctor believes that wisdom is to be found in evading conceptual thought and denying anthropocentrism (i.e. the legacies of the Enlightenment); Rand identifies the intellectual currents of her day—the era of the New Left and the beginnings of postmodernism—with this archetype:

If all the manufacturers of railroad engines suddenly went irrational and began to manufacture covered wagons instead, nobody would accept the claim that this is a progressive innovation or that the iron horse has failed; and many men would step into the industrial vacuum to start manufacturing railroad engines. But when this happens in philosophy—when we are offered Zen Buddhism and its equivalents as the latest word in human thought—nobody, so far, has chosen to step into the intellectual vacuum to carry on the work of man's mind.<sup>166</sup>

A 1962 review in the *Financial Analysts Journal* described *For the New Intellectual* as "must reading for businessmen," and greeted with joy Rand's pro-profit mentality: "The businessman's costly error was in completely turning the realm of ideas over to the

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<sup>163</sup> Ayn Rand, "Philosophy: Who Needs It," in *Philosophy: Who Needs It* (New York: Signet, 2005), 10.

<sup>164</sup> Rand, "Introducing Objectivism," *Objectivist Newsletter*, August 1962, quoted at *Ayn Rand Lexicon*, ed. Binswanger, accessed March 13, 2015, <http://aynrandlexicon.com/lexicon/objectivism.html>; Heller, *World She Made*, 281–82.

<sup>165</sup> Rand, quoted in "About the Author," *Atlas Shrugged*, 1170–71.

<sup>166</sup> Ayn Rand, "For the New Intellectual," in *For the New Intellectual: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand* (New York: Signet, 1992), 12–16. Emphasis in original.

intellectuals.”<sup>167</sup> Rand’s is a defence of intellectualism contra current intellectuals, a call for a cultural studies that embraces the empiricism of both the scientist and the entrepreneur. In this respect, she could be named in the tradition of, for example, Popper and Steven Pinker, other prominent thinkers who emphasise classically liberal methodologies. However, Rand was blind to her own form of anti-empirical idealistic thinking. The main method of Rand’s nonfiction, like the long speeches in her fiction, was rhetoric leavened with logic; she never wrote research-driven scholarship. Her arguments did not impact the intellectual leadership of the time, but they reached a middle-class eager for its own ethical groundings.

The powerhouses of Objectivism, Rand and Branden, established a subscription periodical, the *Objectivist Newsletter* (1962–65), later entitled the *Objectivist* (1966–71). Articles in the periodical were reprinted in subsequent nonfiction books, which included elucidations of her ethical vision (*The Virtue of Selfishness*, 1964; including articles by Branden), her economic views (*Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal*, 1966; including articles by Branden, Greenspan, and Robert Hessen), and her literary philosophy (*The Romantic Manifesto*, 1969). During the last two decades of her life, Rand gained fame as a public speaker, giving invited talks on university campuses and at other public fora. Her most complex theoretical work appeared some twenty years after her last novel: *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology* (1979).

There is a hardcore of Objectivist intellectuals at work today, the most prominent affiliated with the Ayn Rand Institute, which is based in Irvine, California. The last several years, in particular, have seen a surfeit of books published, which update Rand’s vision for a new audience. These include Yaron Brook and Don Watkins’s *Free Market Revolution: How Ayn Rand’s Ideas Can End Big Government* (2012), *The Moral Case for Fossil Fuels* (2014) by Alex Epstein, and Peter Schwartz’s *In Defence of Selfishness* (2015). *Fossil Fuels* takes its cue from Rand’s opinions on the environmentalist movement. In a 1971 essay covering climate change, Rand argued that demands to curb energy usage were both unrealistic and immoral, denying human life its own value.<sup>168</sup> As well as books aimed at a broad audience, there are more strictly academic or specialist titles which use Objectivism as a basis; topics include everything from mathematics to knowledge-acquisition to how to write clearly.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> M. R. Lefkoe, review of *For the New Intellectual: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand*, by Ayn Rand, *Financial Analysts Journal* 18, no. 2 (March–April 1962): 95, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4469330>.

<sup>168</sup> “Consider the fate of a human being, a woman, who is to become once again a substitute for washing machines, garbage disposal units and blenders.” Only continual technological innovation, not restrictions, Rand wrote, could both secure civilised life and prevent environmental hazards. Ayn Rand, “The Anti-Industrial Revolution,” in Rand, *Return of the Primitive: The Anti-Industrial Revolution*, ed. Peter Schwartz (New York: Meridian, 1999), 276. *Return of the Primitive* is an updated edition of Rand’s 1971 essay collection with the same subtitle, *The New Left*, including new material by Schwartz.

<sup>169</sup> These titles include *Mathematics Is About the World: How Ayn Rand’s Theory of Concepts Unlocks the False Alternatives Between Plato’s Mathematical Universe and Hilbert’s Game of Symbols* by Robert E. Knapp (2014); *How We Know: Epistemology on an Objectivist Foundation* by



The basis of Objectivism is that each of us is fundamentally alone, unto ourselves, in the universe; from this arises its morality and its right-wing politics: “There is only *one* fundamental right (all the others are its consequences or corollaries): a man’s right to his own life. [...] The right to life is the source of all rights—and the right to property is their only implementation. [...] The man who produces while others dispose of his product, is a slave.”<sup>170</sup> This passage, from Rand’s essay “Man’s Rights,” could by itself be used to delegitimise public ownership and governments’ taxation powers, two of Rand’s *bête noires*.

As it applies to the individual life, Objectivism is in essence a philosophy of self-help, which in part explains its appeal. Objectivism is about surviving and thriving as an individual actor in a world of *laissez-faire* capitalism. The definitive one-volume guide to the system was not produced until after Rand’s death; Peikoff published *Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand* in 1991. The “primary choice” in life is here described as “the choice to focus or not”; free will is simply the ability to make choices: “A course of thought or action is ‘free’ if it is selected from two or more courses possible under the circumstances.”<sup>171</sup> This is how goals are pursued—by making decisions based on the options available to you.

Aspects of Objectivist doctrine are brought into the argument of this dissertation as appropriate; evidence is brought to bear from Rand’s fiction and nonfiction. However, my particular focus and argument do not rely on the doctrinal vocabulary of the philosophy so much as on the “schema of civilisation,” as found in the novels, described above. As will be seen further in chapter two, many of those most prominently influenced by Rand are nonetheless not complete followers of her dogma. Therefore, a detailed introduction to the epistemological jargon of Objectivism would here be redundant and a distraction; Rand’s views on any topic at hand should be apparent from my discussion.<sup>172</sup> It is important to note that Objectivism as a complete way of life has had far less impact than Rand’s moral ideals

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Harry Binswanger (2015); *Teaching Johnny to Think: A Philosophy of Education Based on the Principles of Ayn Rand’s Objectivism* by Leonard Peikoff and Marlene Trollope (2014); and *Objective Communication: Speaking, Writing, and Arguing* by Peikoff (2013).

<sup>170</sup> Rand, “Man’s Rights,” *Virtue of Selfishness*, 110. Emphasis in original.

<sup>171</sup> Leonard Peikoff, *Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand* (New York: Dutton, 1991), 55.

<sup>172</sup> A further note on the works bearing Rand’s name put to use in this thesis: The philosopher’s intellectual heirs have spent the time since her death collecting together material from her archives; volumes of letters, journals, early unprinted fiction, and a compilation of question-and-answer sessions from various events, have all been published posthumously; so have two informal courses Rand gave to associates on the art of writing fiction and nonfiction, and other material. Burns cautions that the scholar must be wary in relation to these, since the desire of the editors to produce clear narratives often means significant edits are made to what Rand actually wrote or said at the time (“Essay on Sources,” *Goddess of the Market*, 291–93). I can certainly understand how this makes the sources highly problematic from an historian’s point of view. However, the fact that they are intended to reflect a “definitive Ayn Rand line” is useful in its own way. Since the focus of my thesis is Rand’s legacy, I believe judicious citation is justified, and have used these books to support certain points where appropriate.

conceived more generally, as found in the fiction—i.e. her promotion of individualism and capitalism. It is with this that I am more concerned.<sup>173</sup>

As Rand's ideas grew more widespread in the world, in the 1960s, the world around the author became more insular. The inner circle of Objectivism was at this point hierarchical and truly cult-like. Rand and Branden presided over a system of "mock trials," in which followers were interrogated for their supposed irrationalities, and either assigned to atone or expelled from the movement.<sup>174</sup> The acrimonious break in Objectivism came in 1968, when Rand severed contact with the Brandens, after discovering Nathaniel's relationship with another woman. Nathaniel and Barbara also divorced in that year. Rand noted in the *Objectivist* that she had cut off ties to her one-time intellectual heir. Her affair with Nathaniel did not become public knowledge until the publication of Barbara's memoir in 1986, after Rand's death. Nathaniel went on to become a highly accomplished psychotherapist, known now as the founder of the self-esteem movement.<sup>175</sup>

A heavy smoker all her life, Rand was diagnosed with lung cancer in 1974. By her final years, she could not abide being in touch with any kind of dissent. In a televised interview with Phil Donohue in 1980, she lambasts an audience member who dares to challenge her worldview, saying flatly: "My policy is, I don't deal with those who disagree." Recently widowed, Rand says of O'Connor: "I lost my top value, I'm not too interested in anything else. But I'll survive it, because I do love the world in general, and I do love ideas." An atheist to the end, she tells Donohue that if she thought there was even a chance of Heaven, she would commit suicide right away, to stand beside her husband before St. Peter at the Pearly Gates.<sup>176</sup> Rand died in 1982, on March 6. "Ayn Rand O'Connor," as her headstone names her, was buried beside her husband.

One year after Rand's death, on a summer's day, Barbara Branden visited the grave. In her memoir, she reflects on the author's turbulent life and times:

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<sup>173</sup> A further note on my use of the term "Objectivism": I use it to refer to both the ideas found in Rand's novels, and the philosophical system she formulated—out of the ideas in her novels—later in life. As an English student, my concern is firstly with the ideas in the fiction, rather than with philosophical doctrine. However, the fiction represents the best portrayal of Rand's philosophy in action; the two are intrinsically related. Though the word Objectivism does not appear anywhere in the main text of the novels, when she came to systematise it as a way of life, in her nonfiction, Rand frequently referred back to the fiction. I have capitalised "Objectivism" throughout the thesis, including in quotes from third parties where it may not have been capitalised in the original. Following Burns, I use "Objectivist" to refer not only to those who see themselves as advocates of everything Rand taught, but also "loosely to encompass a range of persons who identified Rand as an important influence in their thought" (*Goddess of the Market*, 4).

<sup>174</sup> Heller, *World She Made*, 267; Weiss, *Ayn Rand Nation*, 44–45.

<sup>175</sup> Heller, *World She Made*, 411.

<sup>176</sup> "Ayn Rand Phil Donohue Interview," YouTube video, 46:21, posted by Men's Business Association Education, November 2, 2012, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rydsea\\_Y8xI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rydsea_Y8xI).



As I stood remembering, I thought that I had often grieved for Ayn's unhappiness in her last years. And yet, was grief appropriate? In the life of Ayn Rand, I had seen something I had never seen before nor ever heard or read of. Ayn had begun life with a single passionate goal—to create her ideal world and her ideal man. And at the end of her life—despite the odds against her, despite the pain and the losses, despite illness and anguish and death—it was done. Perhaps it is for the rest of mankind that one should grieve.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Barbara Branden, *The Passion of Ayn Rand* (London: W. H. Allen, 1987), 404.

## A Culture That Is Rand

During the 2012 election cycle, the president of the United States was asked if he had ever read Ayn Rand. “Sure,” Barack Obama told *Rolling Stone*. The Democratic president went on:

Ayn Rand is one of those things that a lot of us, when we were 17 or 18 and feeling misunderstood, we’d pick up. Then, as we get older, we realize that a world in which we’re only thinking about ourselves and not thinking about anybody else, in which we’re considering the entire project of developing ourselves as more important than our relationships to other people and making sure that everybody else has opportunity—that that’s a pretty narrow vision. It’s not one that, I think, describes what’s best in America.<sup>1</sup>

Rand had been brought front and centre in the campaign for president, thanks to Paul Ryan’s presence on the Republican ticket. Ryan had uttered in the past many complimentary things about the controversial Russian-American novelist. In 2005, in a speech hosted by a Rand advocacy organisation, the Atlas Society, the Wisconsin congressman and future vice-presidential nominee had said:

I grew up reading Ayn Rand and it taught me quite a bit about who I am and what my value systems are, and what my beliefs are. It’s inspired me so much that it’s required reading in my office for all my interns and my staff. [...] [T]he reason I got involved in public service, by and large, if I had to credit one thinker, one person, it would be Ayn Rand. And the fight we are in here, make no mistake about it, is a fight of individualism versus collectivism.<sup>2</sup>

In these two revealing quotes, the fault lines of American politics are exposed, through opposing views of Rand’s work. But the most significant thing about these juxtaposed quotes is that, taken together—and quite apart from espoused ideologies—they demonstrate that Rand is a normal part of the American experience, and particularly the American adolescent experience. Since *The Fountainhead*, Rand has been read avidly by teenagers and college students especially; those whose identities are forming.<sup>3</sup> Though she was absent from literary

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<sup>1</sup> Barack Obama, quoted in Douglas Brinkley, “Obama and the Road Ahead: The *Rolling Stone* Interview,” *Rolling Stone*, November 8, 2012, <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/obama-and-the-road-ahead-the-rolling-stone-interview-20121025?print=true>.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Ryan, quoted in “Paul Ryan and Ayn Rand’s Ideas: In the Hot Seat Again,” Atlas Society, April 30, 2012, <http://www.atlassociety.org/ele/blog/2012/04/30/paul-ryan-and-ayn-rands-ideas-hot-seat-again>.

<sup>3</sup> Will Stockton suggests that, “[m]easured in terms of political influence [...] *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged* are the most important works of young adult fiction in modern America.” Stockton argues that “the adolescent popularity” of both novels is aided by the fact that they “indirectly



canons, throughout the twentieth century, the novelist remained part of what Burns calls “the underground curriculum of American adolescence.”<sup>4</sup> Today, Rand is read in many formal educational settings, thanks to the Ayn Rand Institute’s books-to-schools programme.

In 2012, Barack Obama was running for re-election. He was inaugurated in 2009, at the outset of a landmark year for American politics. Not only was 2009 the year in which the first African-American president took office, it would also see the emergence of the Tea Party movement, a group of loosely connected forces promoting radical cuts in government spending and lower taxes. To supporters of the Tea Party—named after the “Boston Tea Party” of 1773, which precipitated the American Revolution—Ayn Rand was a hero. At Tea Party gatherings, attendees held placards declaring “Ayn Rand Was Right,” and asking, “Who is John Galt?”<sup>5</sup> This is the question which begins and which drives the mystery at the heart of *Atlas Shrugged*. Rand’s vision of limited government, her opposition to state-provided social services, and her celebration of the free individual, are commensurate with the Tea Party worldview. The Tea Party reinvigorated interest in and commentary on Rand, from both the left and the right. This came to a head during the 2012 election, with the vice-presidential candidacy of Tea Party favourite, Paul Ryan.

Slavoj Žižek writes: “Rand fits into the line of ‘overconformist’ authors who undermine the ruling ideological edifice by their very excessive identification with it.”<sup>6</sup> This is wishful thinking on the part of the Marxist critic. Rand’s foundational impact on right-wing politics and on business over the last several decades is documented in recent books by Anne Heller (*Ayn Rand and the World She Made*, 2009), Jennifer Burns (*Goddess of the Market*, 2009), and Gary Weiss (*Ayn Rand Nation*, 2012).

Žižek does bring up, however, an interesting issue: To what extent does Rand actually identify with—to what extent is she maybe even a foundational element in—our current “ruling ideological edifice,” i.e. what Žižek would term “neoliberalism”? And, counter to that, to what extent is our current political–economic structure not aligned along Randian principles at all, as her supporters in the Ayn Rand Institute argue; to reference again Douglas J. Den Uyl’s point from chapter one, to what extent does Rand advocate an ideological order that is

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appropriate the mid-twentieth-century figure of the rebel.” Yet, Rand’s works also go beyond this, because of their portrayal of entirely self-assured heroes; Rand’s prime movers are “figures who invite their reader into the fantasy of a life lived without adolescence’s defining identity crisis.” Stockton, “*The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged* as Young Adult Literature,” *Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* 13, no. 1 (July 2013): 26, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/jaynrandstud.13.1.0026>.

<sup>4</sup> Jennifer Burns, *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 282.

<sup>5</sup> Jennifer Burns, “Ayn Rand’s Long Journey to the Heart of American Politics,” *New Republic*, August 14, 2012, <http://www.tnr.com/blog/plank/106176/ayn-rands-long-journey-1960s-cult-leader-the-gops-leading-philosopher>; Gary Weiss, *Ayn Rand Nation: The Hidden Struggle for America’s Soul* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2013), 17, 96.

<sup>6</sup> Slavoj Žižek, “The Actuality of Ayn Rand,” *Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* 3, no. 2 (Spring 2002): 215, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41560187>.

new? The answer can be, of course, “a bit of both.” Rand identified with the capitalist system in twentieth-century America; she thought it was certainly more moral than what prevailed in the USSR. At the same time, she thought that any form of mixed economy did not go far enough: entirely unregulated capitalism was her ideal, and no such thing has ever been. Under a Randian system, *all* economic activity must be private, with government existing only as an “objective” enforcer of contracts and protector of individuals from violence.<sup>7</sup>

On the level of individual behaviour, we could also ask: To what extent is Rand simply describing or codifying a state of affairs that evidently exists; and, to what extent is she inaugurating a new *philosophy*? She is hardly the first to suggest that self-interest, or what she proudly terms “selfishness,” plays an important role in human behaviour, and especially in the growth of economies; this has been part of economic theory since Adam Smith. However, the idea that what one does for others should play no role whatsoever in a *moral* judgement of one’s life—this does fly in the face of millennia of Western Judeo-Christian tradition; it flies in the face of “altruistic” moral ideals the world over.<sup>8</sup> It is not for nothing that Anton LaVey, founder of the Church of Satan and author of the hedonistic *Satanic Bible* (1969), says that he offers, “Ayn Rand with trappings,” “just Ayn Rand’s philosophy with ceremony and ritual added.”<sup>9</sup>

Rand’s death in 1982 is only the beginning of the story of her fiction. In terms of influence, her afterlife has been more successful than her life. The first chapter of my thesis looked at some of the influences on Rand and at her fiction as a product unto itself. If chapter one was about the ideas in Rand’s novels, chapter two is about how people have taken those ideas. This chapter looks at how readers have responded to the fiction—specifically, at how it

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<sup>7</sup> Ayn Rand, “What Is Capitalism?,” “America’s Persecuted Minority: Big Business,” in *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal* (New York: Signet, 2005), 10–11, 45; “Collectivized ‘Rights,’” “The Nature of Government,” in *The Virtue of Selfishness: A New Concept of Egoism* (New York: Signet, 2005), 122, 126–28.

<sup>8</sup> It should be said: Rand venerated productivity, and thought that the fruits of individual production would benefit the community at large. However, *morally*, production is an end in itself—it is moral when something is produced. The benefits to those other than the producer are a secondary consequence.

<sup>9</sup> Anton LaVey, quoted in Jesper Aagaard Peterson, “Introduction: Embracing Satanism,” and James R. Lewis, “Infernal Legitimacy,” in Jesper Aagaard Peterson, ed., *Contemporary Religious Satanism: A Critical Anthology* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), 2, 50. Despite LaVey’s claims, Satanism is not merely ritualised Objectivism, and Rand would have been horrified at the thought that it was. Satanism, for instance, celebrates pleasure and gratification as ends in themselves, while Rand viewed genuine happiness as a consequence of productive achievement. Also: Satanism regards domination of the weak by the strong as inevitable and thus ethical; it has no problem with one bringing other human beings under one’s control, whereas Rand regarded initiating force as a grave crime. Therefore, as Lewis writes, “it would be more proper to say that [LaVey] was *inspired* by Rand,” rather than that he adapted her philosophy (50, emphasis in original). Nevertheless, an article on the official website of the Church of Satan notes that, given Rand’s rejection of God and her self-centric morals, “Satanism has far more in common with Objectivism than with any other religion or philosophy.” “Nemo” (author), “Satanism and Objectivism,” Church of Satan, accessed October 3, 2013, <http://www.churchofsatan.com/satanism-and-objectivism.php>.



has served as a source of inspiration to so many, overwhelmingly Americans. It is not an exaggeration to say that Rand has had influence in areas as diverse as politics, economics, business, popular fiction, and religion. I deal firstly with her impact in the spheres of politics and business; the nature of her reach here is important to bear in mind as the thesis progresses. The chapter concludes with an exploration of Rand's impact on, and absorption into, popular culture. This is also, of course, an indication and a function of her wider influence in society. As well as prefiguring the next chapter, the discussion provides background to chapters four and five, which consider Rand's relationship to elements of posthumanist culture and various pop-media products.

### **From Edge to Centre**

The nature of influence and of impact is a hard thing to pin down, especially within the humanities. In the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, much attention focused on Alan Greenspan, chairman of the United States Federal Reserve from 1987 to 2006. Greenspan presided over a period of light-touch regulation and runaway economic growth, and his policies were blamed for the subsequent crash. His history as a member of Rand's inner circle was highlighted; he had frequently said that Rand turned him towards the *morality* of capitalism, above and beyond its simple efficacy. Rand was blamed for Greenspan and Greenspan for the recession.<sup>10</sup> Can we really claim, however, that Rand is the *sine qua non* of 2008—especially when her followers suggest that the Fed chairman never pursued Randian policies? Indeed, Rand disagreed with the very existence of a federal reserve; she blamed all economic breakdowns on government interference.<sup>11</sup> There were periods of roaring growth, followed by periods of severe contraction, long before Ayn Rand appeared on the scene. The events of the 1920s and 1930s spring to mind. What we can say with certainty is that Rand gave supporters of free-market economics a hook to hang their hats on, and that she has inspired many to go down particular paths. People have been inspired by Rand's philosophy, but they have also done with that inspiration things which Rand would not have approved of.

Unusually for someone whose major works are novels, Rand's primary impact has not been literary or aesthetic; her primary impact, as Burns points out, has been as a political philosopher.<sup>12</sup> But it must also be said: the breadth of Rand's impact as a political philosopher has surely been aided by the fact that she was a novelist. She wrote page-turner fiction, the

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<sup>10</sup> Anne C. Heller, *Ayn Rand and the World She Made* (New York: Anchor Books, 2009), 275–76; Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 283.

<sup>11</sup> Yaron Brook and Don Watkins, *Free Market Revolution: How Ayn Rand's Ideas Can End Big Government* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 229n1; "Ayn Rand First Interview 1959 (Full)," YouTube video, 27:07, posted by "TruthTube1111," May 25, 2011, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ooKsv\\_SX4Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ooKsv_SX4Y).

<sup>12</sup> Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 4.

plots of which “proved” her philosophical points; she did not engage in esoteric scholarship which could only be understood by experts. The remainder of this chapter is an introduction to the spheres of Rand’s influence. As the thesis goes forward, it is important to keep in mind her pervasiveness in the culture.

Objectivism gained a reputation as a cult, in the latter part of Rand’s life. In 1968, Albert Ellis, a celebrated psychologist, published *Is Objectivism a Religion?*, one of the earliest in-depth critiques. The book was updated in 2006. Ellis argues that Rand’s utopianism and absolutism facilitate closed-mindedness and invective, making her philosophy a kind of religious fanaticism. “Rand’s picture of the capitalist producer and trader is ideal; and it is an ideal so far removed from social and biological reality that it probably never will be realized,” Ellis writes. “Worse, she deludes herself that her ideal is reality, that people are the way she pictures them.”<sup>13</sup> Burns argues that Rand’s break with her one-time heir apparent, Nathaniel Branden, “had an invigorating effect on the spread of Objectivism, broadly considered.” The Nathaniel Branden Institute, which, with Rand’s support, ran courses in Objectivism from 1958 to 1968, had been dogmatically promoting her system as an inviolable whole. Its closure and the waning prominence of its figureheads allowed for more diffuse interpretations of her work: “those who liked Rand were free to call themselves Objectivists or libertarians. They could follow the logic of antistatism all the way to the newly popular position of anarchism or, with a nod to Rand, anarcho-capitalism.” The Libertarian Party was founded in 1971 by a Rand admirer, David Nolan. Especially in the party’s infancy, Rand’s works were a vital driving and binding force—even if the philosopher herself denounced libertarians in general, and the Libertarian Party, as thieves; they had stolen her ideas and mangled her meaning, she argued. Burns describes Rand’s writings as “a sort of ur-text” for modern American libertarianism: “They could be challenged, interpreted, reinterpreted, adopted, celebrated—but never ignored.”<sup>14</sup>

Electorally, the Libertarian Party is dwarfed by the dominance of the Republicans and the Democrats—though it remains America’s third largest political party. More broadly conceived, libertarianism has had a far wider impact within the United States. Libertarian economic ideas, i.e. laissez-faire capitalism, married to Christian conservatism, powered the Reagan revolution. It is here that Rand enters the heart of institutional politics. By the 1980s, those who had come of age reading *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged* were first coming to power in Washington. Burns summarises:

When Rand died in 1982, her old enemies were quick to declare victory. “Ayn Rand is dead. So, incidentally, is the philosophy she sought to launch dead; it died still

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<sup>13</sup> Albert Ellis, *Are Capitalism, Objectivism, and Libertarianism Religions? Yes!* (Santa Barbara, CA: Walden Three, 2006), 101, quoted in Weiss, *Ayn Rand Nation*, 102.

<sup>14</sup> Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 247, 258, 266–68.



born,” William F. Buckley Jr. announced [...]. Buckley’s dismissal of Rand was overconfident by any standard. Only a year before, George Gilder had recognized Rand as an important influence in *Wealth and Poverty*, a book soon known as the bible of the Reagan administration. Two years after her death another of her admirers, Charles Murray, would light the conservative world aflame with his attack on welfare, *Losing Ground*. Along with *A Time for Truth*, written by former Treasury Secretary William Simon and former [member of Rand’s Collective] Edith Efron, these books suggested that Rand’s influence was just beginning to be felt in policy circles. The *New York Times* would even dub Rand the “novelist laureate” of the Reagan administration, citing her influence on Alan Greenspan, [senior economic advisor] Martin Anderson, and several others.

Rand’s rise in credibility under Reagan is ironic given that, in one of her last published articles, she had urged readers not to support his candidacy in the 1976 Republican primaries. Reagan was the worst kind of conservative, she wrote; she denounced his anti-individualist stance on abortion, his overt Christianity, and his support for a mixed economy.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, Rand was good for Reaganism, and Reaganism was good for Rand’s institutional respectability. Her work was part of the fire burning beneath the rise of laissez-faire in the 1980s—just as much as that of economists Milton Friedman and Friedrich Hayek.<sup>16</sup> The new consensus in favour of free markets was not altered under the presidency of centrist Democrat Bill Clinton, during which Alan Greenspan continued as Fed chairman. Indeed, the political left was pulled to the right throughout America and Europe in the 1990s, after the fall of the Soviet Union and the evident victory of laissez-faire.

Orthodox Objectivism has been represented since 1985 by the Ayn Rand Institute (ARI), founded by Rand’s heir, Leonard Peikoff. In 1990, philosopher David Kelley, who had been associated with the ARI, established the Institute for Objectivist Studies, now the Atlas Society, which attempts to define Objectivism as an open system: it sees Rand as the originator but not the be-all and end-all of what Objectivism can be. The Atlas Society is an important platform; it was at one of its events that Paul Ryan gave his speech praising Rand, which subsequently set the 2012 election campaign alight. The ARI, however, is the primary promoter of pure-bred Rand. It controls her papers and her estate; it distributes hundreds of thousands of free copies of her books to schools every year; it runs essay competitions for students with prizes of up to \$10,000. The ARI’s Objectivist Academic Centre promotes Randian scholarship. Academia is a vital area marked by the ARI for conquest: this is where ideas grow. One of the institute’s major donors, John Allison, was instrumental in the

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<sup>15</sup> Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 279, 275. Rand’s views on Reagan were published in the final issue of her periodical, the *Ayn Rand Letter*, dated November–December 1975. The *Letter* had replaced her earlier publication, the *Objectivist*.

<sup>16</sup> “If you want to understand some of the ideas that shaped the global economy, particularly in the ’80s and ’90s, there are three people, thinkers that influenced guys like Alan Greenspan, for instance—one is Hayek, another one is Milton Friedman and the third one is Ayn Rand.” Niamh Hourigan, interview by John Murray, *John Murray Show*, RTÉ Radio 1, August 21, 2012.

establishment of the BB&T Chair for the Study of Objectivism at the University of Texas at Austin. Allison was formerly CEO of BB&T, a bank; in 2012 he was appointed president of the Cato Institute, one of Washington's most influential think tanks.

From an insurgent on the fringes, Ayn Rand has made it to the centre of Republican Party politics. *Reason*, America's mainstream libertarian magazine, began life as an Objectivist-leaning newsletter (in 1971 it featured the first interview with Nathaniel Branden since Rand cut him out). Gale Norton, secretary of the interior under George W. Bush, moved from interest in Rand, to the Libertarian Party, to the Republicans.<sup>17</sup> Gary Johnson, governor of New Mexico between 1995 and 2003, once gave his fiancée a copy of *Atlas Shrugged* and said: "If you want to understand me, read this." Mark Sanford, current congressman and former governor of South Carolina, in 2009 wrote an article for *Newsweek* praising Rand. Ron Johnson, the senior senator for Wisconsin, calls *Atlas* his "foundational book." Rand Paul, a senator from Kentucky, is apparently not named after the author, but nonetheless likes to quote her "at length," according to the *Daily Beast*: "During an April 2011 hearing of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, Paul gave a synopsis of Rand's novel *Anthem*." The list goes on.<sup>18</sup>

The financial crash, and the government bailout of capitalism—Congress authorised \$700 billion to be injected into America's banks in October 2008—reinvigorated left-wing thought about a post-capitalist world. Terry Eagleton put it dryly in his primer, *Why Marx Was Right* (2011): "You can tell that the capitalist system is in trouble when people start talking about capitalism. [...] [T]he system has ceased to be as natural as the air we breathe."<sup>19</sup> The opposite side of the political spectrum, however, was arguing that "capitalism" had never existed: only mixed economies. State action was blamed for the Great Recession; government involvement in the economy was the problem, as Rand had always said it was. "*Atlas Shrugged* is coming true," said ARI head Yaron Brook, summing up the mood.<sup>20</sup> Far from fading away, Rand's star has only got brighter. The recession has coincided with the largest sales ever for *Atlas Shrugged*. The *Economist* reports: "Whenever governments intervene in the markets, in short, readers rush to buy Rand's book."<sup>21</sup> *Atlas* has even been made into a trilogy of B-movies. The films, released between 2011 and 2014, were funded by independent

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<sup>17</sup> Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 272, 268.

<sup>18</sup> After Gale Norton, all the examples in this paragraph are taken from "Paul Ryan, Mark Sanford, Ron Paul, and Other Politicians Who Love Ayn Rand," *Daily Beast*, August 14, 2012, slideshow, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/galleries/2012/08/14/paul-ryan-mark-sanford-ron-paul-and-other-politicians-who-love-ayn-rand-photos.html#slide1>.

<sup>19</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Why Marx Was Right* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), xi.

<sup>20</sup> Yaron Brook, quoted in Barrett Sheridan, "Can Ayn Rand Survive the Economic Crisis?," interview with Brook, *Newsweek*, December 10, 2008, <http://www.newsweek.com/can-ayn-rand-survive-economic-crisis-83261>.

<sup>21</sup> "Atlas Felt a Sense of Déjà Vu," *Economist*, February 26, 2009, <http://www.economist.com/node/13185404>.



investors and produced by John Aglialoro, CEO of a gym-equipment company and a trustee of the Atlas Society. Rand's novel never gives a year, yet the first film establishes its setting as the late 2010s, hammering home the makers' disapproval of President Obama's policies.

After the crash, the Federal bailout, and Barack Obama's election, disaffected right-inclined American citizens began to organise protest rallies and to coalesce into political-action groups. The Tea Party, the umbrella name for many loosely connected groups, has emerged since 2008 as one of the most powerful forces in US politics—and it has placed Ayn Rand at the centre of contemporary political discussion. The groups' broad view is that America is going in the absolute wrong direction: that it is heading towards socialism or even totalitarianism. The Tea Party favours lower taxes, restricted government, and freer markets. A 2014 poll for NBC News and the *Wall Street Journal* found that 20 percent of Americans consider themselves supporters of the Tea Party movement; similar polls for George Washington University and CBS News/the *New York Times* found comparable results (22 and 21 percent, respectively).<sup>22</sup> Political scientists Christopher Parker and Matt Barreto report that 85 percent of Tea Party supporters are in favour of limited government, while 91 percent disapprove of President Obama: 67 percent think Obama is moving America towards socialism, and 71 percent say he is destroying the country.<sup>23</sup>

According to the University of Virginia's Center for Politics: "Tea Party supporters now dominate the activist base of the Republican Party. In 2012 they made up nearly two-thirds of those who reported voting in Republican presidential primaries."<sup>24</sup> The Tea Party is composed of higher numbers of white men and evangelical Protestants than the general US population.<sup>25</sup> While the overt Christianity of much of the movement is not commensurate with Rand, the members' belief that an overbearing government is stifling their freedoms is distinctly Randian. It should not surprise us, therefore, that a certain Russian-American novelist is providing fuel for the Tea Party's fire. Gary Weiss writes in *Ayn Rand Nation*:

The Tea Party movement was directly inspired by Rand, and in a manner far more fundamental than the "Who is John Galt?" and "Ayn Rand Was Right" signs proliferating at rallies. The first Tea Party rallies were inspired by a self-described Ayn Rander named Rick Santelli, and Rand is as much a part of the Tea Party movement's soul as Ronald Reagan, [popular conservative broadcaster] Glenn Beck,

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<sup>22</sup> All the polls were conducted in the run-up to the 2014 midterm elections: NBC/*Wall Street Journal*, October 8–12; George Washington University, August 23–28; CBS/*New York Times*, June 20–22.

"Politics," PollingReport.com, accessed October 27, 2014, <http://www.pollingreport.com/politics.htm>.

<sup>23</sup> Christopher S. Parker and Matt A. Barreto, *Change They Can't Believe In: The Tea Party and Reactionary Politics in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 84, 209, 51–52.

<sup>24</sup> Alan I. Abramowitz, "Not Their Cup of Tea: The Republican Establishment Versus the Tea Party," *Sabato's Crystal Ball* (blog), University of Virginia Center for Politics, November 14, 2013, <http://www.centerforpolitics.org/crystalball/articles/not-their-cup-of-tea-the-republican-establishment-versus-the-tea-party/>.

<sup>25</sup> Parker and Barreto, *Change They Can't Believe In*, 78–80.

and Jesus Christ. Author and essayist David Frum observed in early 2010 that the Tea Party was trying “to reinvent the GOP as the ‘party of Ayn Rand.’”<sup>26</sup>

Weiss delves deep into the Tea Party’s affiliation with Rand. One leading Tea Party organiser he interviews, Mark Meckler, says that within the movement, “[y]ou won’t find anybody more widely read than Rand”; the author, and “especially *Atlas Shrugged*,” have had “a substantial influence [...] on the way people think.”<sup>27</sup> *Atlas Shrugged* offers a narrative which mirrors the Tea Party conception of modern America: a country in the grip of socialism, in perpetual decline, with an increasingly tyrannical government taking ever-more power for itself, strangling the productivity of its citizens—the Great Collapse could be just around the corner. Hence what Burns refers to as the post-2009 “vogue” for “going Galt”: people wondering if they should imitate John Galt and limit their productiveness in the economy, in order to avoid higher taxes and feeding the beast which is perceived as the country’s destroyer—i.e. government.<sup>28</sup>

The birth of the Tea Party has allowed the ARI to capitalise on a new wave of right-wing populism. The institute is playing its cards well, spotlighting Rand’s views on individual freedom and restricted government, while shifting her atheism to the side; Brook has explicitly taken the view that, even if Tea Partiers aren’t going to follow Rand wholesale, absorbing some Rand is better than absorbing none.<sup>29</sup> The ARI’s advocacy of the Republican Party is no secret: it is still seen as the most viable political vehicle for Objectivism.<sup>30</sup> Since 2010, the US House of Representatives has been controlled by a Republican caucus significantly beholden to the Tea Party. The movement’s no-compromise mentality regarding a limited state can be blamed for the two-week Federal Government shutdown of October 2013, as well as for House Speaker John Boehner’s belief that government should be judged on the number of laws it repeals, not what it enacts. Boehner made this assertion in response to data demonstrating that the 2013 congress had “passed fewer substantive measures” than any since the mid-1990s.<sup>31</sup> For the Republican base, those repeals can’t happen quickly enough. The following year,

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<sup>26</sup> Weiss, *Ayn Rand Nation*, 17.

<sup>27</sup> Mark Meckler, quoted in Weiss, *Ayn Rand Nation*, 157.

<sup>28</sup> Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 284. InvestorWords.com, an investment and financial dictionary, even has a definition for “going Galt”: “Expression for undergoing a voluntary financial strike or decrease in income. An individual might choose to do this in order to protest the amount of money going to the government [...]. The term is taken from a character in Ayn Rand’s novel *Atlas Shrugged*.” “Going Galt,” InvestorWords.com, accessed April 20, 2014, [http://www.investorwords.com/7934/going\\_Galt.html](http://www.investorwords.com/7934/going_Galt.html).

<sup>29</sup> Weiss, *Ayn Rand Nation*, 66–67, 97, 245.

<sup>30</sup> Weiss, *Ayn Rand Nation*, 53–54.

<sup>31</sup> Drew Desilver, “Congress Ends Least-productive Year in Recent History,” Pew Research Center, December 23, 2013, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/12/23/congress-ends-least-productive-year-in-recent-history/>.



Majority Leader Eric Cantor was unseated in a primary challenge, from his right, by a little-known economics professor—who of course names Rand as an inspiration. Dave Brat,

chairs the department of economics and business at Randolph-Macon College and heads its BB&T Moral Foundations of Capitalism program. The funding for the program came from John Allison [...]. The two share an affinity for Ayn Rand: Allison is a major supporter of the Ayn Rand Institute, and Brat co-authored a paper titled “An Analysis of the Moral Foundations in Ayn Rand.” Brat says that while he isn’t a Randian, he has been influenced by *Atlas Shrugged* and appreciates Rand’s case for human freedom and free markets.<sup>32</sup>

Ayn Rand has been part of what’s happening in American politics since the 1950s. But today, more than ever, the evidence of her involvement is there for all to see.

### **Beyond Political Influence**

In 2011, filmmaker Adam Curtis focused attention on Rand with his BBC documentary *All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace*. He described the author’s influence on Silicon Valley entrepreneurs, whose innovations are responsible for the way we live now. His thesis is supported by Jennifer Burns, when she writes in *Goddess of the Market* that Rand was “one of the first American writers to celebrate the creative possibilities of modern capitalism.” Hence: “her vision has resonated with the knowledge workers of the new economy.”<sup>33</sup> The venerable Christopher Hitchens has written about the “allegiance” to Rand shown by many in the tech sector; he references Rand’s optimism about capitalism and her promotion of the heroic as key factors. The postmodern turn-of-the-century world had declared heroes dead, but “this pulse can never quite be stilled,” and Rand was filling the void for CEOs who wanted to be world movers.<sup>34</sup> Paulina Borsook, in her book *CyberSelfish*, also makes much of the libertarian inclinations of digital economy workers. Rand, along with authors like Robert A. Heinlein and William Gibson, offered models of heroic independence, which innovators in the digital age latched onto. These workers broke with the New Deal consensus of strong public and private sectors, psychologically aligning freedom with unregulated markets. “Technolibertarianism,” for Borsook, is the “dangerously naive and, at its worst, downright scary,” belief that human freedom consists of independent technological experts operating in a laissez-faire system. Rand is a key cultural figure in this turn.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Betsy Woodruff, “Eric Cantor’s Challenger from the Right,” *National Review*, January 6, 2014, <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/367690/eric-cantors-challenger-right-betsy-woodruff>.

<sup>33</sup> Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 3.

<sup>34</sup> Christopher Hitchens, “Why So Many High-tech Executives Have Declared Allegiance to Randian Objectivism,” *Business 2.0* (August–September 2001): 129.

<sup>35</sup> Paulina Borsook, *CyberSelfish: A Critical Romp Through the Terribly Libertarian Culture of High Tech* (London: Little, Brown, 2000), 4–5, 18, 245.

Curtis interviews Rand's old associates Nathaniel and Barbara Branden; he says entrepreneurs in the new technology sectors of the late twentieth century were the people "most inspired" by Rand. They set up reading groups to spread her ideas, named their children and their companies after her. Those influenced included "some of the most powerful" entrepreneurs, such as Larry Ellison, founder of Oracle. Curtis features interviews with digital innovators. John McCaskey tells the filmmaker: "I really did feel like an Ayn Rand hero. I was one. [...] I was building the products. I was thinking independently. I was being rational. I was taking pride in what I did. [...] I wasn't in the book—but I was an Ayn Rand hero."<sup>36</sup>

Beyond those mentioned by Curtis, other digital-era innovators inspired by Rand include Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales; PayPal founder Peter Thiel; Craigslist founder Craig Newmark; and Mark Cuban, co-creator of Broadcast.com, who has a net worth of \$2.5 billion and a yacht named *Fountainhead*.<sup>37</sup> Wales, for his part, describes himself as "very much an Objectivist to the core."<sup>38</sup> Burns comments on the irony of Rand's impact on Internet entrepreneurs "who are pioneering new forms of community." She notes that Wikipedia combines an "emphasis on individual empowerment" with "trust in the wisdom of crowds."<sup>39</sup> And yet, to take the words of its creator at face value, there is still something very individualist and even Objectivist about the open-source encyclopaedia:

If you've ever seen the film *12 Angry Men*; it's the story of a jury that's trying to decide in a murder case. And there's one guy who disagrees with everyone else. He thinks that the evidence does not prove that the defendant is guilty. He argues for two hours, and one by one he slowly convinces people that there are holes in the evidence. And in the end, they acquit. Well, that's what happens sometimes in a really great Wikipedia debate. You may have eleven people on one side and one on the other. But if that one person is reasonable and thoughtful and deals with the criticisms one-by-one, people will actually change their minds and we end up with a strong product. That can't really be described as the wisdom of crowds, in the way most people use it. So, I'm a little skeptical of that rhetoric.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> John McCaskey, quoted in Adam Curtis, dir., "Love and Power," *All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace*, episode 1, aired May 23, 2011, BBC Two, television programme.

<sup>37</sup> Cuban says of Rand's novel: "It was incredibly motivating to me. It encouraged me to think as an individual, take risks to reach my goals, and responsibility for my successes and failures. I loved it." Burns notes of Wales and Newmark that they "built on Rand's ideas but married them to a very different theory of human nature, one in which community and connection are paramount." "Billionaire Mark Cuban is Revealed as Owner of the 88 Meter Feadship *Fountainhead*," Agent4Stars.com, July 15, 2011, <http://blog.agent4stars.com/billionaires-mark-cuban-and-larry-ellison-take-delivery-of-their-88-meter-super-yachts-and-sister-ships-fountainhead-and-musashi/>; George Packer, "No Death, No Taxes," interview with Peter Thiel, *New Yorker*, November 28, 2011, [http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2011/11/28/111128fa\\_fact\\_packer?currentPage=all](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2011/11/28/111128fa_fact_packer?currentPage=all); Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 284.

<sup>38</sup> Jimmy Wales, quoted in R. U. Sirius (Ken Goffman), "Jimmy Wales Will Destroy Google," interview with Wales, *10 Zen Monkeys*, January 29, 2007, <http://www.10zenmonkeys.com/2007/01/29/wikipedia-jimmy-wales-rusirius-google-objectivism/>.

<sup>39</sup> Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 284.

<sup>40</sup> Wales, quoted in Sirius, "Wales Will Destroy Google."



Though he cites *12 Angry Men*, Wales's formulation recalls another moment in fiction: Howard Roark in *The Fountainhead*, persuading a jury disinclined to acquit, of the ultimate truth of his position. In any case—the impact of this Rand-fired idea on the world cannot be gainsaid: Wikipedia has changed the way knowledge is accessed. More fundamentally, it is putting competitor encyclopaedias out of business.<sup>41</sup>

Ayn Rand was always going to be the businessperson's philosopher. She celebrated enterprise, production, and profit-making; her philosophical system was, as Donna Greiner and Theodore Kinni point out, intended "to prove that her epic image of business was the right one."<sup>42</sup> The degrees of readers' absorption of Objectivism, and the ways in which they have been motivated by Rand, of course vary widely. The breadth of Rand's work's impact as a formative experience stretches from Silicon Valley to bodybuilding professionals to eco-capitalists. Mike Mentzer was a champion bodybuilder who developed and sold a fitness philosophy in accordance with his Objectivist beliefs.<sup>43</sup> Stewart Brand, publisher of the *Whole Earth Catalog* (1968–94), a hippy-libertarian bible of self-sustainable living, found "unusual gold" in *Atlas Shrugged*, even though he thought the novel "preposterous."<sup>44</sup> There is a Chicago software company named John Galt Solutions, and a New York construction firm called the John Galt Corporation; the chief executive of Whole Foods, John P. Mackey, considers his reading of Rand integral to his success, as does James M. Kilts, "who led turnarounds at Gillette, Nabisco and Kraft."<sup>45</sup>

One businessman whose history as a Rand promoter is both understandable and surprising, is the founder of CNN. Ted Turner is a media innovator, a mogul—and one of the world's most powerful environmentalists. Rand disdained the save-the-planet movement, seeing it as an attack on technology and thus man.<sup>46</sup> In 1967, Turner paid for 248 billboards across the southern United States which read "Who Is John Galt?"<sup>47</sup> Today, Turner is noted for his \$1 billion pledge which established the United Nations Foundation. Turner created *Captain Planet and the Planeteers*, a 1990s television cartoon which is a near-perfect inverse

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<sup>41</sup> Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 284.

<sup>42</sup> Donna Greiner and Theodore B. Kinni, *Ayn Rand and Business* (New York: Texere, 2001), vii.

<sup>43</sup> Matthew Stoloff, "Integrating Mind and Body," *Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* 6, no. 1 (Fall 2004): 147–49, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41560272>.

<sup>44</sup> Stewart Brand, quoted in Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 263.

<sup>45</sup> Harriet Rubin, "Ayn Rand's Literature of Capitalism," *New York Times*, September 15, 2007, [http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/15/business/15atlas.html?\\_r=4&oref=slogin&pagewanted=print&](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/15/business/15atlas.html?_r=4&oref=slogin&pagewanted=print&).

<sup>46</sup> Ayn Rand, "The Anti-Industrial Revolution," in Rand, *Return of the Primitive: The Anti-Industrial Revolution*, ed. Peter Schwartz (New York: Meridian, 1999), 273–83.

<sup>47</sup> Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 214. Turner says: "Long ago, when I was a young man reeling from my father's suicide, I embraced the 'me-first' ideology of Ayn Rand." He now thinks, however, that, "Rand was wrong, dead wrong, and it is precisely that kind of twisted logic that has sown division in our world." Ted Turner, quoted in Tom Riley, "A Man Out of Time," review of *Last Stand: Ted Turner's Quest to Save a Troubled Planet*, by Todd Wilkinson, *Philanthropy* (Winter 2014), accessed November 3, 2014, [http://www.philanthropyroundtable.org/topic/excellence\\_in\\_philanthropy/a\\_man\\_out\\_of\\_time](http://www.philanthropyroundtable.org/topic/excellence_in_philanthropy/a_man_out_of_time).

of Randian philosophy. Its villains are selfish industrialists who don't care about other people or the planet, only money. Its heroes are a team of teens with magic rings whose powers "combine" to create a pollution-stopping superhero, Captain Planet: the embodiment of collective action in the service of global good. The programme aims to raise political awareness by showing sharp contrasts and being irresistibly entertaining: lessons Turner no doubt imbibed from Rand.

One can be inspired by Rand—even be compelled to go down a particular path because of her—and not accept all the tenets of her worldview. This is an obvious point. Not everyone who identifies with Catholicism follows every doctrine of the Church. The aforementioned John Allison tells us: "I know from talking to a lot of Fortune 500 CEOs that *Atlas Shrugged* has had a significant effect on their business decisions, even if they don't agree with all of Ayn Rand's ideas."<sup>48</sup> There is a general sense among businesspeople, those quoted by Burns and those who've given views elsewhere, that Rand gets things both right and wrong, when it comes to business and life. In 2013, on a thread at LinkedIn, a social networking site for professionals, dozens of CEOs and leading businesspeople selected "The Book That Changed Me." *The Fountainhead* is one of only three books that appears on the list more than once, the others both being self-help guides: Stephen Covey's *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* and Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. Beth Comstock, chief marketing officer at General Electric, writes that Rand's novel captured her attention in college and has never let it go:

I've found that business breakthroughs are often driven by visionaries who are moved by their convictions to be better, do better and follow a path that is clear to no one but themselves.

But [...] experience has taught me that much of *The Fountainhead* doesn't translate to the business world. [...] In reality, it's hard to be the soloist, especially in this connected economy [...]. No man stands alone and no idea is conceived in isolation. [...]

[...]

[The book puts forward another] mistaken belief I see repeated too often; that reason and logic are what's most important in business. As any good marketer understands, people are motivated by many things.<sup>49</sup>

As part of the same thread, Randy Kessler, a prominent family law attorney, writes of reading *The Fountainhead* in high school: "I did not yet know my life's path, but I immediately gained confidence that whatever I did, I could do it my way, if I was persistent and dedicated, and if I truly believed in what I was doing." Still today, "while I am no Howard Roark, I think

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<sup>48</sup> John A. Allison, quoted in Rubin, "Rand's Literature of Capitalism."

<sup>49</sup> Beth Comstock, "*The Fountainhead*: Rand Gets Visionaries Right, but Business Woefully Wrong," LinkedIn, November 19, 2013, <http://www.linkedin.com/today/post/article/20131119115851-19748378--the-fountainhead-rand-gets-visionaries-right-but-business-woefully-wrong?trk=cha-feed-art-title-5806779816238034944>.



about him often.” The reasons are simple: “We must be capable of independent and ethical thought and of sharing those thoughts, sometimes forcefully. We must be able to know we gave good advice, even if we can never tell anyone.”<sup>50</sup>

In a follow-up post, LinkedIn selected the “ten most buzzed-about books for professionals” from across its network; *Atlas Shrugged* was number five.<sup>51</sup> Rand’s “ideological and literary trash,” as Žižek calls it, shows no signs of losing its power to win fans and influence people.<sup>52</sup>

Comstock’s testimony raises a point which bears noting. While many of Rand’s most prominent proponents are the proverbial “straight white male,” by no means all of her devotees are members of this group. Tennis stars Billie Jean King, Martina Navratilova, and Chris Evert count her fiction as an inspiration to them.<sup>53</sup> Barbara Branden, surveying Rand’s impact, relays the story of Anne Wortham, who—while on a tour of duty with the Peace Corps—came across a second-hand copy of *Atlas Shrugged* in a shop in Kampala, Uganda. The book transformed her life: “all my plans upon returning to the United States had changed,” Wortham says. She went on to become an assistant professor at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government, and is currently an associate professor of sociology at Illinois State University. Branden writes: “The most significant consequence of Ayn Rand’s influence in terms of Anne’s intellectual output is her book, *The Other Side of Racism* [1981]—a denunciation of coercive egalitarianism and a clarion call to individualism in race relations.”<sup>54</sup> After Barack Obama’s election, Wortham wrote an open letter to her fellow Americans, where she says: “Please know: I am black; I grew up in the segregated South. I did not vote for Barack Obama [...]. I do not require a black president to know that I am a person of worth, and that life is worth living.”<sup>55</sup>

It should also be said: though primarily an American phenomenon, Rand fandom is not exclusive to the US. When she gave public speeches, individualists travelled from as far away as Africa to listen.<sup>56</sup> According to the *Economist*, Sweden leads the world in Google searches for “Ayn Rand” from non-English-speaking countries; Sweden also has higher per-

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<sup>50</sup> Randy Kessler, “*The Fountainhead*: I Did It My Way,” LinkedIn, November 19, 2013, <http://www.linkedin.com/today/post/article/20131119123157-19030295--the-fountainhead-i-did-it-my-way?trk=cha-feed-art-title-5806779816238034944>.

<sup>51</sup> Francesca Levy, “The Top 10 Books for Professionals,” LinkedIn, December 3, 2013, <http://www.linkedin.com/today/post/article/20131203190537-28723569-the-top-10-books-for-professionals-plus-doris-kearns-goodwin-answers-your-questions-on-leadership?trk=eml-mktg-inf-m-booklist-1204-button>.

<sup>52</sup> Žižek, “Actuality of Ayn Rand,” 225.

<sup>53</sup> Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 265.

<sup>54</sup> Barbara Branden, *The Passion of Ayn Rand* (London: W. H. Allen, 1987), 407.

<sup>55</sup> Anne Wortham, “No He Can’t,” LewRockwell.com, November 6, 2008, <http://www.lewrockwell.com/2008/11/anne-wortham/no-he-cant/>.

<sup>56</sup> Heller, *World She Made*, 320.

capita sales of her books than Britain, a country one might think would be more receptive to Rand's laissez-faire message. India, too, is a hub of Randian activity:

India ranks after only America and Canada in online English-language searches for Randian topics. Book sales are strong, but understate the craze, says Barun Mitra of the Liberty Institute, an Indian think-tank. They miss the thriving trade in pirated editions [...].

Businessmen and Bollywood stars (including the late Shammi Kapoor) name Rand as an influence [...]. Baichung Bhutia, a football star, says his fictional hero is [...] Howard Roark. Krishnarao Jaisim, ex-chair of the Indian Institute of Architects, named his firm "Jaisim Fountainhead."<sup>57</sup>

In *All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace*, Adam Curtis's thesis is ambitious, but he nonetheless makes it plausible, by laying out the evidence. The innovations of those Silicon Valley entrepreneurs, are responsible for the computer systems underpinning financial markets since the 1980s. Curtis asserts that the late-twentieth-century belief that a stable world could be created through machines, can be traced back to Ayn Rand. With Greenspan as Fed chairman, and through the influence of Silicon Valley and Wall Street, the political-economic consensus became that cycles of boom and bust could be brought to an end, thanks to the power of computers to negate human error in the arena of financial trading.

This market ideal not only has Rand at its root; its whole nature is distinctly Randian. Humans create technology, an extension of their will, which allows for the fulfilment of an ordered world, through the principle of a rational creation and exchange of wealth. This was the fin-de-siècle utopia.

### **Multi-media Rand**

Alicia Florrick is the protagonist in US legal drama *The Good Wife*. The character, played by Julianna Margulies, is a founding partner in her own law firm; she is married to the Democratic governor of Illinois. Like any self-respecting liberal, Alicia scorns Ayn Rand. Her views were aired in a 2014 episode of the show, "The One Percent." A major corporate client is being sued for discrimination. The head of the company, James Paisley (Tom Skerritt), tells Alicia she should read Rand. Alicia tells him he shouldn't be getting his ethics from those novels: "It's like basing your philosophy on the books of John Grisham." Paisley is about to lay off a fifth of his workers. But he claims that he is a victim. Channelling Rand's mid-1960s

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<sup>57</sup> "Who's Shrugging Now?," *Economist*, October 20, 2012, <http://www.economist.com/news/international/21564832-individualist-philosopher-has-fans-some-unlikely-countries>.



declaration that big business is America's "persecuted minority," he says: "The 1 percent is the new hunted minority in this country. Not unlike the Jews in Nazi Germany."<sup>58</sup>

"The One Percent" is an obvious reference to Occupy Wall Street, the protest movement that emerged in the course of the post-2008 recession, demanding greater income equality between the bottom "99 percent" and the top-earning "1 percent" of the population. Akin to many television dramas, *The Good Wife* taps into the zeitgeist and abstracts plotlines from current events. This is the third episode of the 2013–14 season of the show to mention Rand. Its portrayal of an arrogant Rand-touting corporate king is hardly an original take on her work. However, it is emblematic of Rand's revived presence in the media sphere, in the wake of 2008. And it does emphasise the continuity that the political left sees between Rand's works and corporate excess.<sup>59</sup>

A subtler and more interesting reference to Rand is made in a 2007 episode of *Mad Men*, a TV drama about advertising executives on Madison Avenue in the 1960s. Don Draper (Jon Hamm), the lead, is invited into the office of his boss, Bertram Cooper (Robert Morse). Cooper tells Draper that he appreciates all his work; he says that he knows Draper's talents are unquantifiable, but nonetheless gives him a bonus of \$2,500. "Have you read her?" Cooper asks, pointing to his bookshelf. "Rand. *Atlas Shrugged*. That's *the one*." He says that he and Draper are alike: "It's strength. We are different. Unsentimental about all the people who depend on our hard work." *Mad Men* is really about the birth of modern commercialised life. Rand is placed right there at the origin.<sup>60</sup>

The above are just two recent examples in a long line of TV references to Rand. Often she is a figure of fun, though sometimes her ideas are put to thematic use. The sheer number of programmes which have referenced her is overwhelming; it includes everything from animated comedies *The Simpsons*, *Futurama*, and *South Park*, to live-action shows across various genres: *Frasier*, *Columbo*, and *Gilmore Girls*, to name three.<sup>61</sup>

Young adult network The WB featured *Atlas Shrugged* in one of the first episodes of *One Tree Hill*—a programme whose theme song, evincing Randian self-esteem, goes, "I don't wanna be anything other than me." Main character Lucas Scott (Chad Michael Murray) is

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<sup>58</sup> Ted Humphrey, "The One Percent," *The Good Wife*, season 5, episode 21, directed by Rosemary Rodriguez (Paramount Home Entertainment, 2014), DVD; Rand, "America's Persecuted Minority: Big Business," *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal*, 40.

<sup>59</sup> Gary Weiss, for instance, sees the same "philosophy of greed," a concern only with personal profit, evidenced in both Rand's work and the behaviour of "the main actors in the financial crisis." Whether such a philosophy was "explicitly adopted" by the individual actors is not important; it was a culture promoted by Greenspan and the consensus regarding "market supremacy." Weiss, *Ayn Rand Nation*, 2–3.

<sup>60</sup> Chris Provenzano, "The Hobo Code," *Mad Men*, season 1, episode 8, directed by Phil Abraham (Lionsgate Home Entertainment UK, 2008), DVD. Emphasis in original.

<sup>61</sup> Chris Matthew Sciabarra provides a comprehensive list (up to 2004) of TV shows that have referenced Rand. Sciabarra, "The Illustrated Rand," *Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* 6, no. 1 (Fall 2004): 4, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41560268>.

finding it hard to hone his basketball prowess; fellow players on the high school team are giving him a rough time. As they chat in the school library, a teammate, Jake Jagielski (Bryan Greenberg), hands the protagonist Rand's novel. He says of Lucas's talent, "Don't let 'em take it," tapping the book knowingly. Lucas's voiceover at the episode's close, quotes from the end of Galt's speech: "Do not let your fire go out, spark by irreplaceable spark, in the hopeless swamps of the not-quite, the not-yet, and the not-at-all. Do not let the hero in your soul perish, in lonely frustration for the life you deserved, but never been able to reach. The world you desire can be won, it exists, it is real, it is possible, it is yours."<sup>62</sup> Rand is fodder for stories of teenage angst as well as stories about the origins of the modern market system.

Nor is television the only pop-cultural medium in which she has made an impact. One of the most well-known instances of a Rand-inspired product is the album *2112*. Canadian progressive rock band Rush credit "the genius [sic] of Ayn Rand" in the liner notes to this, their 1976 long-play. The album was released under Rush's label Anthem Entertainment: another explicit reference to Rand.<sup>63</sup> The "2112" suite has a plot which mirrors the *Anthem* novella. It tells a story set in a collectivist dystopia; Rand's hero reinvents the lightbulb, Rush's hero rediscovers the guitar; both present their discoveries to the authoritarian powers-that-be, and both are shot down; both imagine a better world where the individual is his own master. Rush drummer and lyricist Neil Peart was profoundly influenced by Rand; her impact is apparent throughout his writing. *Creem* magazine interviewed Peart in 1981, where he said: "Everything I do has Howard Roark in it, you know, as much as anything. The person I write for is Howard Roark."<sup>64</sup>

Surveying articles by Chris Matthew Sciabarra and Jeff Rigenbach in a centenary symposium issue of the *Journal of Ayn Rand Studies*, a student of English is faced with one ineluctable conclusion: Ayn Rand should be taught on all popular literature courses. The authors go into impressive detail regarding Rand's influence on popular fiction: on numerous

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<sup>62</sup> Mark Schwahn, "The Places You Come to Fear the Most," *One Tree Hill*, season 1, episode 2, directed by Bryan Gordon (Warner Home Video, 2005), DVD. The episode originally aired on The WB on September 30, 2003. *One Tree Hill*'s opening theme is "I Don't Want to Be" by Gavin DeGraw (2003). The episode's closing voiceover bears only minor differences with the passage in Rand. The voiceover highlights the final sentiment, "it is yours," by undoing Rand's contraction "it's." Lucas also skips a few words and adds an "and." The original passage reads (words deleted in the episode are emphasised by me): "Do not let your fire go out, spark by irreplaceable spark, in the hopeless swamps of *the approximate*, the not-quite, the not-yet, the not-at-all. Do not let the hero in your soul perish, in lonely frustration for the life you deserved, but *have* never been able to reach. *Check your road and the nature of your battle*. The world you desire can be won, it exists, it is real, it is possible, it's yours." Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* (London: Penguin Books, 2007), 1069.

<sup>63</sup> Rush, *2112*, Mercury/Anthem 534 626-2, 1997, compact disc, originally released in 1976; "The name 'Anthem' was taken from a title of an Ayn Rand novel," "About Anthem," Anthem Entertainment Group, accessed October 16, 2014, [http://www.anthementertainmentgroup.com/sro/anthem/about\\_anthem.php](http://www.anthementertainmentgroup.com/sro/anthem/about_anthem.php).

<sup>64</sup> Neil Peart, quoted in Durrell S. Bowman, "'Let Them All Make Their Own Music': Individualism, Rush, and the Progressive/Hard Rock Alloy, 1976-77," in *Progressive Rock Reconsidered*, ed. Kevin Holm-Hudson (New York: Routledge, 2002), 183.



novelists and on writers for comics. Rand was not an artistic innovator, in the sense of form; as such she has had little impact on literary aesthetics, broadly conceived. It is an understatement to say that she is not a celebrated figure of modernism or postmodernism, the two major artistic movements of her lifetime. Indeed, she is a subject of scorn among literary critics, as exemplified by Žižek's comments. Within the field of popular literature, however, she has left a significant mark, even if her impact is not "pervasive."<sup>65</sup> She has given younger writers philosophical–political ideas to play with, and taught them how to spin a gripping yarn. Popular literature in the manner discussed here conforms to Ken Gelder's definition; not only fiction with a large readership, but that which is "simple"—relative to high literature—in terms of ideas, language, and structure; work which is "exaggerated" and "exciting."<sup>66</sup>

When it comes to sheer numbers, the most popular novelist derivative of Rand is Terry Goodkind, whose *Sword of Truth* fantasy series (1994–2013) has reportedly sold over twenty-five million copies worldwide.<sup>67</sup> Goodkind is a self-described Objectivist and acknowledges Rand as his sole literary influence (much as Rand acknowledged Aristotle as her sole philosophical influence).<sup>68</sup> In a review of the series on the Atlas Society website, William Perry noted:

Each of Goodkind's books has a theme expressed by a Wizard's Rule, and in fact the title of the first book is *Wizard's First Rule*. The first rule is, "People are stupid. They will believe what they want to be true or what they fear to be true." This does not mean that people are necessarily stupid, only that they usually are. The second rule is: "The greatest harm can come from the best intentions." This is the rule of unintended consequences from economics and politics, which is so familiar to Objectivists and libertarians.<sup>69</sup>

The characters and plotlines in Goodkind's books play out these maxims, just as Rand's philosophy is demonstrated in the course of her novels. Goodkind's Randian themes are apparent even from these two rules: the first representing Rand's belief that human competency is rare and to be venerated; the second her belief that you should never set out to help others (unless you're helping yourself first).

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<sup>65</sup> Jeff Riggenbach, "Ayn Rand's Influence on American Popular Fiction," *Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* 6, no. 1 (Fall 2004): 141, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41560271>.

<sup>66</sup> Ken Gelder, *Popular Fiction: The Logics and Practices of a Literary Field* (London: Routledge, 2004), 19–20.

<sup>67</sup> "Wizard's First Rule (*Sword of Truth* Book 1) [Kindle Edition]," Amazon.com, accessed September 22, 2014, <http://www.amazon.com/Wizards-First-Rule-Sword-Truth-ebook/dp/B00433TO4I>.

<sup>68</sup> William Perry, "The Randian Fantasies of Terry Goodkind," review of *The Sword of Truth* series, by Terry Goodkind, *New Individualist* (online magazine), Atlas Society, accessed September 22, 2014, <http://www.atlassociety.org/tni/randian-fantasies-terry-goodkind>; Riggenbach, "Rand's Influence on American Popular Fiction," 131.

<sup>69</sup> Perry, "Randian Fantasies of Terry Goodkind."

Goodkind slips into paraphrasing Rand. Consider the following passage, quoted by Riggenbach, from *Faith of the Fallen* (2000). Richard Cypher—a magician, a warrior, and one of the series’ protagonists—is speaking:

The only sovereign I can allow to rule me is reason. The first law of reason is this: what exists, exists; what is, is. From this irreducible, bedrock principle, all knowledge is built. This is the foundation from which life is embraced.

Reason is a choice. Wishes and whims are not facts, nor are they a means to discovering them. Reason is our only way of grasping reality—it’s our basic tool of survival. We are free to evade the effort of thinking, to reject reason, but we are not free to avoid the penalty of the abyss we refuse to see.<sup>70</sup>

This clearly draws from a passage in Galt’s speech which offers the foundation of Objectivism:

Existence exists—and the act of grasping that statement implies two corollary axioms: that something exists which one perceives and that one exists possessing consciousness, consciousness being the faculty of perceiving that which exists.

[...]

Whatever the degree of your knowledge, these two—existence and consciousness—are axioms you cannot escape, these two are the irreducible primaries in any action you undertake, in any part of your knowledge and in its sum [...].

To exist is to be something [...] *A is A*. A thing is itself. [...] Existence is Identity, Consciousness is Identification.

[...]

Man cannot survive except by gaining knowledge, and reason is his only means to gain it. [...]

[...]

Reality is that which exists [...] reason, man’s only means of knowledge, is his only standard of truth.<sup>71</sup>

Goodkind also possesses Rand’s talent for presenting as victims those whom others view as oppressors. The 2001 entry in the series, *The Pillars of Creation*, is dedicated to the members of the CIA, “who, for decades, have valiantly fought to preserve life and liberty, while being ridiculed, condemned, demonized, and shackled by the jackals of evil.”<sup>72</sup>

### Heroes for Earth

Other novelists who count Rand as an influence include Kay Nolte Smith, who was part of Rand’s circle in the 1960s and ’70s, and started her writing career at the *Objectivist*. Erika Holzer was also part of the early Objectivist movement, and acknowledges what she terms a “profound literary debt” to Rand. Her thriller *Eye for an Eye* was adapted into a 1996 movie starring Sally Field, Kiefer Sutherland, and Ed Harris. Helen Knode, author of *The Ticket Out*

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<sup>70</sup> Terry Goodkind, *Faith of the Fallen* (London: Victor Gollancz, 2000), 26.

<sup>71</sup> Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 1016–17. Emphasis in original.

<sup>72</sup> Terry Goodkind, *The Pillars of Creation* (London: Gollancz, 2008), n.p.



(2003) and *Wildcat Play* (2012), considers Rand's theory of art to be a major influence on her. The theory, explained in *The Romantic Manifesto* (discussed in the next chapter), emphasises the importance of human free will over the doctrine that man is determined by his social conditions.<sup>73</sup>

Sometimes, of course, influence can take the form of mere inspiration—admiration of something done well and an impulse to do well in one's own endeavours. Ira Levin, author of *Rosemary's Baby* and *The Stepford Wives*, wrote to Rand in 1950, before he ever published a book, citing a scene from *The Fountainhead*: "Like the young man who stood beside Howard Roark and looked down on Monadnock Valley, I need say nothing but—thank you." Levin's third novel, *This Perfect Day* (1970) bears notable similarities with *Anthem*.<sup>74</sup> It was also after the success of the movie version of *Rosemary's Baby* (directed by Roman Polanski, 1968), a tale of child sacrifice and the occult, that Anton LaVey was approached by an editor at Avon Books about producing a "Satanic Bible" to capitalise on the moment.<sup>75</sup> This, as has been noted, led LaVey back to Rand for inspiration. Ayn Rand is at the centre of webs of cultural coincidence.

There is one subgenre of fiction which can count Rand as a foundational figure: libertarian science fiction. Her utopian vision of the free market and its potential to unleash technological progress undoubtedly plays a role here. *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* names *Atlas Shrugged*, along with Heinlein's *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress* (1966), as books "which strongly affected the development of the movement."<sup>76</sup> Authors in the genre who specifically mention Rand as an influence include J. Neil Schulman and L. Neil Smith.<sup>77</sup> Smith's alternate-history series beginning with *The Probability Broach* (1980) designates Rand as president of the North American Confederacy, a continent-encompassing libertarian nation, between the years of 1952 and 1960. Smith has told Jeff Riggenbach: "Ayn Rand established the formal framework for my personal philosophy."<sup>78</sup> The Libertarian Futurist Society annually offers the Prometheus Award for the best novel in the genre, recalling the moniker Equality 7-2521 chooses for himself in *Anthem*, after he breaks from his oppressors. A second accolade, the Prometheus Hall of Fame Award, honours classic works; both *Atlas* and *Anthem* are recipients, in 1983 and 1987 respectively.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Riggenbach, "Rand's Influence on American Popular Fiction," 105, 121, 93.

<sup>74</sup> Ira Levin, quoted in Rand, *Letters of Ayn Rand*, ed. Michael S. Berliner (New York: Plume, 1997), 465; Riggenbach, "Rand's Influence on American Popular Fiction," 116–19.

<sup>75</sup> Lewis, "Infernal Legitimacy," in Peterson, ed., *Contemporary Religious Satanism*, 48.

<sup>76</sup> Neil Tringham, "Libertarian SF," in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, ed. John Clute and Peter Nicholls, December 21, 2012, [http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/libertarian\\_sf](http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/libertarian_sf).

<sup>77</sup> Riggenbach, "Rand's Influence on American Popular Fiction," 115, 125.

<sup>78</sup> L. Neil Smith, quoted in Riggenbach, "Rand's Influence on American Popular Fiction," 115.

<sup>79</sup> "Prometheus Awards," Libertarian Futurist Society, accessed September 23, 2014, <http://lfs.org/awards.shtml>.

L. Neil Smith is also the author of three novels in the *Star Wars* Expanded Universe, licensed projects which continue the story beyond George Lucas's phenomenally successful films.<sup>80</sup> This suggests that Rand-influenced SF authors are not confined to libertarian SF, but can also make a mark within the most mainstream of sci-fi franchises. Another example on point is Diane Carey, who has written more than thirty *Star Trek* licensed novels. One reviewer sardonically suggests that the author is "engrossed in [a] love affair with Ayn Rand."<sup>81</sup> Carey has infused Randian themes, such as the value of self-reliance, into her *Trek* work, and ends her novel *Final Frontier* (1988) with a quote from Rand. The back-cover blurb even makes the novel sound Randian, with suitably epic Atlas-myth rhetoric: "This is the story of a hero [...]. His name is Kirk. Commander George Samuel Kirk. He is a warrior, born and bred to battle. Now destiny has placed the fate of a hundred innocent worlds on his shoulders."<sup>82</sup>

Goodkind's *Sword of Truth* novels were developed into a television series, *Legend of the Seeker*, which premiered in 2008. Goodkind co-created the show with Sam Raimi, director of the trilogy of Spider-Man films starring Tobey Maguire (2002–2007). Goodkind is only one step removed from Rand. Raimi, however, was only two steps removed from Rand, when he converted Spider-Man to film, since the Marvel Comics hero was created by Stan Lee and Steve Ditko, the latter of whom credits Rand as a major influence.

That Rand influenced the development of comic-book superheroes should come as no surprise, Sciabarra writes. Nathaniel Branden has noted the similarities between Rand's heroic humans and the average superhero: "They are all outsiders," he says. "They are all doing good work, but are, in many ways, unappreciated, misunderstood, or even opposed."<sup>83</sup> Ditko's comic creations include Mr. A (from Rand's/Aristotle's exhortation "A is A") and The Question, both of whom personify Objectivism. Ditko's Randian worldview is perhaps best summed up by a quote from Mr. A, who, Sciabarra notes, is appropriately drawn "in sharp blacks and whites."<sup>84</sup> The hero exclaims: "Fools will tell you that there can be no honest

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<sup>80</sup> Smith's novels are: *Lando Calrissian and the Mindharp of Sharu*, *Lando Calrissian and the Flamewind of Oseon*, *Lando Calrissian and the Starcave of ThonBoka*, all originally published in 1983, and collected in 1994 as *The Lando Calrissian Adventures* (Del Rey).

<sup>81</sup> Ellen Cheeseman-Meyer, "Captain Robert April, You're Doing It Wrong: Objectivism, Climate Control, and Diane Carey's *Final Frontier*," review of *Final Frontier*, by Diane Carey, Tor, October 11, 2012, <http://www.tor.com/blogs/2012/10/captain-robert-april-youre-doing-it-wrong-objectivism-climate-control-and-diane-careys-final-frontier>.

<sup>82</sup> Diane Carey, *Final Frontier* (London: Titan Books, 1988), back cover. The Rand quote which ends the book enunciates her non-initiation of force principle: "No man may *initiate* the use of physical force against others. No man—or group or society or government—has the right to assume the role of a criminal and initiate the use of physical compulsion against any man. Men have the right to use physical force *only* in retaliation and *only* against those who initiate its use. The ethical principle involved is simple and clear-cut: it is the difference between murder and self-defense" (Carey, *Final Frontier*, n.p.). The quote is from Rand, "The Objectivist Ethics," *Virtue of Selfishness*, 36 (emphases in original).

<sup>83</sup> Nathaniel Branden, quoted in Sciabarra, "Illustrated Rand," 5.

<sup>84</sup> Sciabarra, "Illustrated Rand," 10.



person! That there are no blacks and whites. [...] That everyone is gray! But if there are no blacks and whites, there cannot even be a gray. Since grayness is just a mixture of black and white!" Elsewhere, Mr. A paraphrases Francisco d'Anconia's "money speech" from *Atlas Shrugged*, quoted in the last chapter: "Only fools will tell you that money is the root of all evil! Money is the tool of exchange, a tool that must be made before it can be used, begged, stolen or earned! And it has to be made by the productive abilities of men! Is that evil? Money is made by, and the rightful tool of, honest people!"<sup>85</sup> Alan Moore, whose politics are more left-aligned, created a character in his acclaimed *Watchmen* series as a response to Ditko.<sup>86</sup> "Rorschach," an uncompromising vigilante, can be read as a critique of Ditko and in turn Rand.

Another comics writer who credits Rand, listed by Sciabarra, is the creator of *300* and *Sin City*: "If Ditko is the gold standard by which to measure Rand's impact on comics, Frank Miller [...] follows closely behind. [...] Miller's Randian influence is less political than it is literary and aesthetic, in so far as he constructs single-minded, intransigent characters. He credits Rand's *Romantic Manifesto* as having helped him to define the nature of the literary hero and the legitimacy of heroic fiction."<sup>87</sup> Miller's *Martha Washington Goes to War* (1994) draws on *Atlas Shrugged*, a debt which is acknowledged in the afterword. Miller explains: "Eschewing the easy and much-used totalitarian menace made popular by George Orwell, Rand focused instead on issues of competence and incompetence, courage and cowardice, and took the fate of humanity out of the hands of a convenient 'Big Brother' and placed it in the hands of individuals with individual strengths and individual choices made for good and evil."<sup>88</sup>

In terms of mass appeal, comics themselves have been superseded by superhero film adaptations. This does not mean that the sensibilities found in the originals die a death; on the contrary, they find new forms and new audiences. Perhaps the most explicitly politically conservative set of superhero films in recent times is Christopher Nolan's *Dark Knight* trilogy (2005–2012), which uses as a partial basis Miller's *Batman: Year One* (1987) and *The Dark Knight Returns* (1986). The final film in the cycle incorporates themes from the post-2008 world, with a villain who uses the rhetoric of Occupy Wall Street while committing heinous acts of violence. The right-wing press was ecstatic. *Forbes* praised *The Dark Knight Rises* as an "instant conservative classic," while the *Daily Telegraph* hailed Batman as a defender of capitalism.<sup>89</sup> Meanwhile, the left-wing *Guardian's* Sunday edition, the *Observer*, condemned

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<sup>85</sup> Steve Ditko, quoted in Sciabarra, "Illustrated Rand," 11.

<sup>86</sup> Sciabarra, "Illustrated Rand," 9.

<sup>87</sup> Sciabarra, "Illustrated Rand," 12.

<sup>88</sup> Frank Miller, quoted in Sciabarra, "Illustrated Rand," 5.

<sup>89</sup> Jerry Bowyer, "Why Batman's *The Dark Knight Rises* is an Instant Conservative Classic," *Forbes*, July 26, 2012, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/jerrybowyer/2012/07/26/why-batmans-the-dark-knight->

the film's "reactionary vision" which "demonises collective action against capital"; the movie, Mark Fisher writes, promotes the idea that "any direct action against the rich, or revolutionary moves towards the redistribution of property, will lead to dystopian nightmare."<sup>90</sup> Fisher's description almost makes it sound like *Atlas Shrugged* for a new generation, with Batman as the successor to John Galt. Any thematic link to Rand is of course more complicated than that. For one thing, though indeed a capitalist, and heir to a powerful corporation—like Francisco d'Anconia and Dagny Taggart—Nolan's Bruce Wayne/Batman is hardly a crusader for a new way of life based on untrammelled laissez-faire, à la Rand. The reviewers are correct in pointing out that Batman is primarily a defender of the status quo; he preserves the fragile order of mixed-economy liberal democracy, doing battle against those who would sow anarchy (the Joker in *The Dark Knight*) or scorch the earth to begin anew (the League of Shadows in the first film, *Batman Begins*). It is possible, however, to see echoes of Rand, through Miller to Nolan, in the *Dark Knight* trilogy. There are traces of Rand everywhere in our culture.

When Anne Heller titled her biography of the author, *Ayn Rand and the World She Made*, it of course had two meanings: the world that Rand created for herself through her fiction, and our world as it is now, which is left with indelible imprints. This thesis is about Rand's connections to our world. Her work is at the centre of a truly vast phenomenon; a network of influence which extends into politics, business, and popular culture. The chapters that follow are about something more, however. Rand's links with science fiction are crucial to a rounded view of how she considered humanity and technology, and so that is where we go next. A posthuman outlook necessarily follows this. From here we can analyse Objectivism, one of the most practically influential philosophies of the latter twentieth century, in the context of a posthuman philosophy and reality which will increasingly dominate life in our twenty-first century.

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rises-is-an-instant-conservative-classic/; Robert Colville, "How *The Dark Knight Rises* Reveals Batman's Conservative Soul," *Daily Telegraph*, July 17, 2012, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/9405999/How-the-Dark-Knight-Rises-reveals-Batmans-Conservative-soul.html>. Intriguingly, the *Telegraph* article also says, of another recent movie featuring a billionaire inventor turned superhero, *Iron Man* (2008): "It's just what Ayn Rand would have done, if she'd had the budget."

<sup>90</sup> Mark Fisher, "Batman's Political Right Turn," *Observer*, July 22, 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/jul/22/batman-political-right-turn>.



## The Science-fictional Imagination of Objectivism

On July 16, 1969, at 9:32 a.m. eastern daylight time, Ayn Rand stood watching what she termed “an upturned candle with its flame directed at the earth.”<sup>1</sup> It was the ascent of the *Apollo 11* rocket. Alan Greenspan, at the time a member of the Gates Commission on conscription, had arranged for Rand to be invited to Cape Kennedy for the launch.<sup>2</sup> As the craft sped towards space, Rand found herself clapping, in concert with the gathered crowds, and waving upwards at the rocket. She wrote in her periodical the *Objectivist*, in September 1969, of experiencing “a feeling that was not triumph, but more”:

One knew that this spectacle was not the product of inanimate nature, like some aurora borealis, or of chance, or of luck, that it was unmistakably human—with “human,” for once, meaning grandeur—that a purpose and a long, sustained, disciplined effort had gone to achieve this series of moments, and that man was succeeding, succeeding, succeeding! For once, if only for seven minutes, the worst among those who saw it had to feel—not “How small is man by the side of the Grand Canyon!”—but “How great is man and how safe is nature when he conquers it!”<sup>3</sup>

Rand’s “sense of life,” her philosophy and her ethics, are inextricably linked with the notion of technological development. She was upfront in stating this: “[L]ife in nature, without technology, is wholesale death.”<sup>4</sup> The invention of new technologies, such as Rearden Metal and Galt’s motor, propels the plot of *Atlas Shrugged*; such inventions are shown to transform human life for the better: they are intrinsic to the progress of civilisation. Another kind of technology governs the plot of *The Fountainhead*: architecture, and the drive to innovate there. The social settings of *We the Living* and *Anthem* are presented as backwards because they do not prize technological development.

Rand was concerned with elaborating a “philosophy for living on earth”; but, the word “earth” should not be narrowly interpreted so as to confine man forever to the planet of the same name. Continual technological development enables the expansion of human possibility; indeed, could enable a future for humankind among the stars, where we visit and perhaps

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<sup>1</sup> Ayn Rand, “*Apollo 11*,” Ayn Rand Institute, accessed May 19, 2013, [http://www.aynrand.org/site/PageServer?pagename=objectivism\\_apollo11](http://www.aynrand.org/site/PageServer?pagename=objectivism_apollo11). Launch time from “*Apollo 11*,” NASA, accessed May 19, 2013, [http://www.nasa.gov/mission\\_pages/apollo/missions/apollo11.html](http://www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/apollo/missions/apollo11.html).

<sup>2</sup> Anne C. Heller, *Ayn Rand and the World She Made* (New York: Anchor Books, 2009), 388; Michael S. Berliner, ed., *Letters of Ayn Rand* (New York: Plume, 1997), 648.

<sup>3</sup> Rand, “*Apollo 11*.”

<sup>4</sup> Ayn Rand, “The Anti-Industrial Revolution,” in Rand, *Return of the Primitive: The Anti-Industrial Revolution*, ed. Peter Schwartz (New York: Meridian, 1999), 283.

colonise distant planets. Howard Roark declares in *The Fountainhead* that “[t]he creator’s concern is the conquest of nature.”<sup>5</sup> Commenting on the “philosophical” significance of the *Apollo 11* mission, Rand uses a vocabulary of control and conquest that would be familiar to Roark: the “unimaginable power” of the rocket “ruled by [man’s] power.”<sup>6</sup> Man’s first footsteps on the moon—his ability to build the technology to reach that faraway orb—were to Rand a true example of man’s greatness. It is clear that Rand saw “nature” as a force extending beyond the surface of the earth, into space and beyond. Though Roark references nature, he may as well have said that the creator’s concern is the conquest of the physical *universe*.

The concept of space travel, of man venturing among the stars, is evidently something that tickled Rand. Five years after the *Apollo 11* launch, she would begin perhaps her most famous speech—to the graduating class at West Point—with a science-fictional anecdote about an astronaut who crash lands on an unknown planet. The astronaut glimpses unfamiliar beings approaching and is never heard from again because he refuses to use his mind to survive.<sup>7</sup> Rand read science fiction (SF), including the work of H. G. Wells, and the kind of SF found in mainstream and pulp magazines.<sup>8</sup> Early in her career, Rand planned (but never completed) a story about an aeroplane, as she put it, “caught in an interplanetary gravitational space.” Heller traces a possible influence for this story, as well as for *Anthem*, to Russian futurist writers, whom Rand never acknowledged, but who were famous in St. Petersburg when Rand lived there in the 1920s.<sup>9</sup>

Advancing on the introductory analysis of Rand’s novels and the summary of her influence in chapters one and two, this chapter is an exploration of the idea of Rand as a science fiction author, as a link to reading her as promoting posthumanism. Science fiction prefigures and is bound up with posthuman futures—a point made by many posthumanist theorists, and a point which will be discussed in chapter five. Rand didn’t call herself an SF writer, but has been called an SF writer by critics. Rather than simply explain how what Rand wrote fits into the science fiction genre, however—which, as I will detail, has been done by others—I want to go deeper and theorise how her conception of humanity—her whole view of the world, as found in her nonfiction and fiction—links her thematically with the preoccupations, parameters, and methodology of the science fiction genre. This is the “science-fictional imagination” of Objectivism, and such an imagination is a categorical link

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<sup>5</sup> Ayn Rand, *The Fountainhead* (London: Penguin Books, 2007), 712.

<sup>6</sup> Rand, “*Apollo 11*.”

<sup>7</sup> Ayn Rand, “Philosophy: Who Needs It,” in *Philosophy: Who Needs It* (New York: Signet, 2005), 1–2. The original speech was delivered at West Point Military Academy, March 6, 1974.

<sup>8</sup> Shoshana Milgrim, “*Anthem* in the Context of Related Literary Works: ‘We Are Not Like Our Brothers,’” in *Essays on Ayn Rand’s “Anthem,”* ed. Robert Mayhew (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 120, 125.

<sup>9</sup> Ayn Rand, quoted in Milgrim, “*Anthem* in the Context of Related Literary Works,” in *Essays on Ayn Rand’s “Anthem,”* ed. Mayhew, 120; Heller, *World She Made*, 48.



to the posthuman. The fact that both Objectivism and posthumanism are connected to science fiction, in turn highlights their connection to each other—a point which I hope will become clearer as the dissertation progresses.

After exploring some definitions of SF below, and arriving at a working definition for our purposes in this chapter, I look at Rand's view of art. The utopianism she evinces here links her with notions of ideal and un-ideal societies, utopias and dystopias, which are intrinsic to SF. Following this, I have chosen to analyse Rand in relation to one subgenre of SF, dystopian fiction. Notwithstanding her utopian vision, Rand more often presented men struggling in dystopian conditions, where revolution is required—working to realise their own utopias. As such, perhaps the subgenre of SF that Rand has most in common with is dystopian fiction. Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan write: “[I]t is only if we consider dystopia as a warning that we as readers can hope to escape its pessimistic future”; therefore, dystopias can “maintain utopian hope *outside* their pages.”<sup>10</sup> Rand exercises her utopian hope by portraying dystopia as a warning. Rand's heroes maintain utopian hopes in dystopian conditions, while her readers are meant to keep the hope alive outside her pages. I look at her work in relation to three major twentieth-century dystopian novels: Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. We will see how Rand's concerns, even when set in a novel that is not overtly science-fictional, are similar to those of mid-twentieth-century dystopian SF. I identified in chapter one that Rand wrote popular fiction; she also crossed the boundary of that medium with her philosophical intent. It is fair to say that the aforementioned novels are performing a similar exercise, in being examples of Literary Science Fiction—clearly part of a genre not necessarily portraying “real life,” and yet serious novels of ideas nonetheless.

There are thus three overarching elements to the science-fictional imagination of Objectivism, teased out at length below: (i) Rand's promotion of technology and futurity; (ii) her view of art as a utopian space, or a vehicle for utopia; (iii) the relationship between Rand's fiction and dystopian SF. Rand's views on technology and futurity are evidenced first through her views on the Space Race, one of the major technological struggles of her Cold War context. Rand's opinions on technology, as found in her fiction, are elaborated in greater detail in chapter four.

I mentioned in the last chapter Rand's influence on libertarian SF. A whole thesis could probably be written about the traces of Rand in libertarian SF. But that is work that I feel would have to come after the work which is the focus of this chapter: unpacking Rand's relationship with the science fiction sphere more generally. For the purposes of this thesis, this

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<sup>10</sup> Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan, “Dystopia and Histories,” introduction to *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*, ed. Baccolini and Moylan (New York: Routledge, 2003), 7. Emphasis in original.

relationship is an important connector between Rand and posthumanism. Once I have outlined the fundamental philosophical relationship between Rand's work and SF, as I do in this chapter, I must move forward with the central study of this dissertation—the relationship between Rand and posthumanism—in the subsequent chapters.

### **Minds Fit for the Stars**

Space is something that was particularly alive in the global consciousness, in the third quarter of the twentieth century. This was the post-World War II imagination: teetering between dystopia and utopia, between the possibility of a nuclear apocalypse and the possibility of colonising the heavens. The Cold War fused the binaries together, as it locked West and East in an eyeball-to-eyeball standoff. On October 4, 1957, *Sputnik 1* was launched into orbit around the earth. In April 1961, Yuri Gagarin became the first human being to venture into outer space. For a time, the Soviet Union could claim to be the most advanced state on the planet. Perhaps, for a time, Communism could lay claim to the future. But the *Apollo* moon landing put an end to that. Handed down in history, the Space Race provides a useful metaphor for American and Western supremacy, to whoever wishes to promote such things. America had put its flag on the moon; citizens of America had ventured farther than any men before.

An interesting facet of Rand's support for NASA, her admiration for *Apollo*'s "upturned candle," is that it complicates her dictum that technology is good in the hands of the individual and a negative force in the hands of the state. We see this dictum expressed most luridly in *Atlas Shrugged*, where the individual inventor on his own, John Galt, creates a motor that would revolutionise how the world gets its electricity. By direct contrast, the collective of the State Science Institute invests itself in the creation of the Xylophone, a weapon of mass destruction which will ultimately precipitate the collapse of America. The individual-creator provides new sources of light, while state-controlled technology results only in death. For Rand, technology as such can never be evil, though bad people may misuse it.<sup>11</sup> The creation of new technologies expands opportunities, and people make choices about how to benefit from those opportunities: "Industrial progress makes opportunities grow, *but only so long as a society remains free*. [...] In our present age, men have much less chance to rise and make success than they had in Horatio Alger's time. Their opportunities are being killed year by year—not because of our industrial development, but because of our growing Statism and control over industry."<sup>12</sup>

NASA is a government body, and those who worked on the *Apollo* programme did so in the service of a government-mandated goal: the race to the moon was planned by the state.

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<sup>11</sup> Rand, letter to Isabel Paterson, August 4, 1945, in *Letters*, 181.

<sup>12</sup> Rand, letter to Arthur Pierson, May 10, 1950, in *Letters*, 474. Emphases in original.



Rand reasoned, however, that these workers gave their labour of their own free choice.<sup>13</sup> This stood in contrast to the Soviet system, which forced people to serve wherever they would be of most use to the state. According to a Randian view, it was inevitable that the United States would surpass Russia in the Space Race, since free-thinking men of science can only be put to use by dictatorships for so long, before they become a problem; and since theft, whether by espionage or simple copying, will only ever get you so far.<sup>14</sup>

The question of space travel is intertwined with the question of human destiny. The issue has always been shadowed by arguments over human priorities. Why are we spending so much money to go into outer space, when there are people still starving on earth? What kind of future do we want to build? Rand's position on where resources should be directed is clear: "Those who suggest we substitute a war on poverty for the space program should ask themselves whether the premises and values that form the character of an astronaut would be satisfied by a lifetime of carrying bedpans and teaching the alphabet to the mentally retarded."<sup>15</sup> Given that we are talking about taxpayers' money when it comes to NASA, Rand's words smack of support for white elephants, and for so-called "corporate welfare"—help the "achievers" at all costs. Yet, the core point she raises is a provocative one: If you were capable of travelling among the stars, would you be happy cleaning gutters? In one of her more astute pieces of commentary, Rand contrasts the "Apollonian" triumph of science and reason that *Apollo 11* represents, with the drug-assisted "Dionysian" revelry of the Woodstock music festival, which took place just a month after the launch at Cape Kennedy. Two paths for human action are indicated by these events, Rand suggests: the pursuit of technological accomplishments that push the boundaries of what man can achieve, in the Apollonian hand; and in the Dionysian hand represented by Woodstock, a nihilism made manifest in the desire to surrender one's individuality and reasoning mind to the whims of others, to forego potential accomplishment for the pleasures of the moment: to want to live only for now, to use psychoactive drugs as an escape, and to hope somebody passes around a

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<sup>13</sup> Heller, *World She Made*, 389.

<sup>14</sup> In her foreword to the 1959 edition of *We the Living*, Rand writes: "But what about the Soviet possession of the atom bomb? Read the accounts of the trials of the scientists who were soviet spies in England, Canada and the United States. But how can we explain the 'Sputnik'? Read the story of 'Project X' in *Atlas Shrugged*." Ayn Rand, *We the Living* (London: Signet, 1983), viii. Rand's views on Soviet espionage and copying are included in *Ayn Rand Answers: The Best of Her Q & A*, ed. Robert Mayhew (New York: New American Library, 2005), 33–34. Richard A. Posner writes: "[W]e now know that much of the technological success of the Soviet Union in the domain of weaponry, the only domain in which it had such successes, was due to espionage." Posner, "Orwell versus Huxley: Economics, Technology, Privacy, and Satire," in *On "Nineteen Eighty-Four": Orwell and Our Future*, ed. Abbott Gleason, Jack Goldsmith, and Martha C. Nussbaum (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 196.

<sup>15</sup> Rand, "Apollo 11," *Objectivist*, September 1969, quoted in Heller, *World She Made*, 389.

box of Cocoa Puffs so you don't go hungry.<sup>16</sup> We can accept Nietzsche's delineations of the Apollonian and the Dionysian in human behaviour, Rand writes, but certainly not his value judgment of the Dionysian as superior to the Apollonian; indeed, the reverse is the case, for Rand. She summarises: "Apollo and Dionysus represent the fundamental conflict of our age"; "it is man's irrational emotions that bring him down to the mud; it is man's reason that lifts him to the stars."<sup>17</sup> If the Dionysian is nihilistic because it takes people away from reason, science, achievement, then so are government policies that keep people subsisting, according to a Randian view. The best among us want to go places, they want to push boundaries; they want these things for themselves, for a sense of having achieved something for themselves. Ultimately Rand was in favour of policies and societies which facilitated this instinct, rather than a view of life as subsistence.

NASA retired its space shuttle programme in 2011. Today, we stand in the dawn of what Mason Peck, NASA's chief technologist, calls "the commercial space age": "It's about companies large and small finding ways to make a market out of space. The energy we see now—the *economic* motivation to go into space—we haven't seen that before."<sup>18</sup> In January 2013, *National Geographic* summarised:

Last spring [...] SpaceX, a private company based near Los Angeles, used one of its own rockets to launch an unmanned capsule that docked with the International Space Station. [...] A month before that, a company called Planetary Resources, backed by billionaire investors such as Google's Larry Page and Eric Schmidt, announced plans to use robotic spacecraft to mine asteroids for precious metals. Working with Virgin Galactic, a company whose main business is space tourism, Planetary Resources expects within the next year or two to launch a lightweight telescope into low Earth orbit. "We hope by the end of the decade that we will have identified our initial targets and begun prospecting," says Peter Diamandis, the firm's co-founder.<sup>19</sup>

And so the spirit of nineteenth-century American enterprise is re-founded in the heavens: there's gold up there among those stars. In the second decade of the twenty-first century, space

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<sup>16</sup> Rand quotes from *Newsweek* and *New York Times* reports on the Woodstock festival. She expounds on the irony that an iconic event of "free love" was backed by promoters linked to large corporations, who wanted access to the youth market. Rand quotes accounts from local farmers and businesspeople, who describe the destruction of their property by festival attendees. She also cites the fact that fifty emergency doctors were flown in due to a health crisis caused by overcrowding and unsanitary conditions. The piece includes interviews from the *New York Times* (August 25, 1969) with young attendees, who talk about the prevalence of sex and drugs at the festival, and how their view of life is that they have to have whatever they want, whenever they want it. The provision of food at Woodstock is also mentioned. One young man is quoted: "All of a sudden you'd have a box of Cocoa Puffs hit you in the side. [Someone would] say, 'Take a handful and pass it on.'" Rand, "Apollo and Dionysus," *Return of the Primitive*, 109–14. "Apollo and Dionysus" was originally delivered as a Ford Hall Forum lecture, "Apollo (11) and Dionysus (at Woodstock)," in 1969.

<sup>17</sup> Rand, "Apollo and Dionysus," *Return of the Primitive*, 100, 118.

<sup>18</sup> Mason Peck, quoted in Tim Folger, "Crazy Far," *National Geographic*, January 2013, 76. My emphasis.

<sup>19</sup> Folger, "Crazy Far," *National Geographic*, January 2013, 75–76.



continues to provide a projection of life on earth. Space saw “freedom” defeat Communism when Americans landed on the moon, and now it is seeing private enterprise advance past government action.

Space Exploration Technologies Corporation, SpaceX, was founded in 2002 by Elon Musk, a South African–born Canadian-American entrepreneur. Musk previously co-founded PayPal with Peter Thiel, whose Randian inclinations have already been mentioned. Musk is also co-founder of Tesla Motors, which makes electric cars. As of this writing, SpaceX has a US\$1.6 billion contract with NASA to fly at least twelve cargo supply missions to the International Space Station.<sup>20</sup> The company is listed as a potential supplier to Mars One, a not-for-profit foundation which aims to establish a permanent human settlement on Mars.<sup>21</sup> Musk is crystal clear about his ambition to take men to Mars. In a video on the SpaceX YouTube channel, he presents his case for “making life multi-planetary,” describing it as the next major step in evolution.<sup>22</sup> This notion of humankind taking control of its own evolution, via technology, is also a central idea underpinning posthuman philosophy—and is explored further in later chapters.

There is something of an Internet meme branding Musk, currently CEO of both SpaceX and Tesla, as an Ayn Rand hero.<sup>23</sup> It is in any case no surprise that Objectivists are great supporters of the aims of SpaceX. At the Atlas Summit in 2012, a conference for Rand fans in Washington, DC, there was a presentation by Steve Davis, a SpaceX engineer, entitled “SpaceX and the Future of Space Flight.” Tim Murphy, writing for the left-wing *Mother Jones*, reports: “Davis isn’t pitching his company, so much as he’s hawking an ethic—one shared by the gathering of Objectivists and embodied by Elon: Don’t wait for someone else to solve a problem because they probably won’t. Winners set benchmarks and take the initiative; bureaucracies take your money and run.”<sup>24</sup> Davis was appointed to the Atlas Society’s board of advisors later that year.<sup>25</sup> Murphy also reported a fascinating exchange from the post-presentation Q&A at the Atlas Summit. One college-age attendee asks whether Musk is familiar with Rand and Objectivism. Davis responds that he knows the SpaceX CEO has

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<sup>20</sup> “About,” SpaceX, accessed February 7, 2014, <http://www.spacex.com/about>.

<sup>21</sup> “About the Suppliers,” Mars One, accessed February 7, 2014, <http://www.mars-one.com/partners/suppliers>.

<sup>22</sup> Elon Musk, “The Case for Mars,” YouTube video, 1:02, posted by SpaceX, July 9, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ndpuxuf-uJHE>.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Tim Murphy, “Ayn Rand in Space,” *Mother Jones*, July 6, 2012, <http://www.motherjones.com/mojo/2012/07/ayn-rand-elon-musk-spacex>; Jack Baruth, “Elon Shrugged,” *Road and Track*, February 15, 2013, <http://www.roadandtrack.com/go/news/industry-news/the-nyt-tesla-controversy-is-about-more-than-range>; Daniel Case, “Sarah Palin Attacks Elon Musk,” *Daily Kos*, April 10, 2013, <http://www.dailykos.com/story/2013/04/10/1200642/-Sarah-Palin-attacks-Elon-Musk>.

<sup>24</sup> Murphy, “Rand in Space.”

<sup>25</sup> “The Atlas Society Announces Aaron Day as New CEO and Appoints New Board of Advisors,” PRWeb, October 19, 2012, <http://www.prweb.com/releases/2012/10/prweb9884847.htm>.

read *Atlas Shrugged*, but “the most political thing” he’s ever heard from Musk is “Look here, Davis, get this done!” This happens to exemplify, Davis implies, the “political” attitude of *Atlas*’s heroes: produce what I am asking you to produce or I will find someone who will.<sup>26</sup>

The work of Ayn Rand, then, is easily associated with thoughts of building a space-faring future. Rand aligned her philosophy with the kind of thinking that takes man into space—with minds that are fit for the stars, we might say—with a reliance on reason, science, technology construction, conquering nature, and ever-greater achievement. Technology is the way to the future, and that future is expansion.

The Mars One organisation plans to begin manned missions to Mars in 2024.<sup>27</sup> Over 200,000 people have applied to be among the first to set foot on the Red Planet, though travellers face a one-way trip. Mars One has shortlisted 1,058 applicants as potential Martian colonists.<sup>28</sup>

From a common-sense point of view, it is impossible to reflect on such events, seemingly fanciful as they are, without thinking about Utopia. John Gray defines a project as utopian “if there are no circumstances under which it can be realized”;<sup>29</sup> but the nature of technological progress means that what is impossible today may not be tomorrow. Today it may seem utopian to think of building a community on Mars; in fifty years it may already have happened. SpaceX, et al., are in the business of making their imagined futures real.

In describing Rand as a utopian thinker in chapter two, I focused on Karl Popper’s definition of utopian social engineering. To recap, utopian engineering, for Popper, involves the imagining of an Ideal State, followed by steps to make manifest that Ideal State in reality; ultimately the complete overturning of the existing order is envisaged.<sup>30</sup> Popper contrasts this with what he terms piecemeal engineering, which focuses not on working towards a perfect society, but on alleviating the worst problems in any given society at a particular time. Rand, as we have seen, displays a distinct propensity for utopian engineering: it is evident in her thought and her fiction. Lying behind this, however, is Rand’s broader view of art: what art should be, and what it should do. Rand’s conceptual view of art is key to realising the primacy of utopia in her thought: art presents the completed ideal that readers can then attempt to put into practice.

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<sup>26</sup> Steve Davis, quoted in Murphy, “Rand in Space.”

<sup>27</sup> Mars One, accessed February 7, 2014, <http://www.mars-one.com/>.

<sup>28</sup> Jonathan McCrea, “Life on Mars: Irish Man Signs Up for Colony Mission,” *Irish Times*, January 9, 2014, <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/science/life-on-mars-irish-man-signs-up-for-colony-mission-1.1648449>.

<sup>29</sup> John Gray, *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia* (London: Allen Lane, 2007), 20.

<sup>30</sup> Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, new one-volume ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 147–48.



## The Special Properties of SF

The literary and cultural genre which most particularly deals in utopias and dystopias, the ideal and the un-ideal, is science fiction. Adam Roberts describes “futuristic utopias and dystopias” as one of SF’s “major tropes.”<sup>31</sup> Ken Gelder, in his study of the genre, also identifies this to be the case:

Its social commitments and technological investments mean that SF inevitably has a far more overtly political identity than other genres [...]. H. G. Wells was a socialist who wrote a number of utopian novels which imagined socialism living itself out at some point in the future [...]. For Darko Suvin, an early academic commentator on SF, imagined utopias are a ‘socio-political subgenre of science fiction’ [...]. But perhaps utopias were increasingly difficult to imagine as the twentieth century moved on. [...]

The utopian possibilities of science fiction have drawn the interest of some influential Left-wing cultural critics, such as Raymond Williams and Fredric Jameson. After all, SF is generically disposed to imagine worlds better than the one we inhabit ourselves. But the twentieth century is probably better known for its dystopias, or *anti-utopias*.

Gelder goes on to list Zamyatin’s *We*, Huxley’s *Brave New World*, Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* as “famous examples” of dystopian SF.<sup>32</sup> All of these are discussed later in the chapter, in relation to Rand.

By considering Rand’s work in the context of science fiction, we may come to better understand her ideas. Two of Rand’s four novels are explicitly science fictional—indeed, explicitly dystopian: *Anthem* and *Atlas Shrugged*. More than this, however, the spectre of science fiction hovers near Rand’s entire philosophy, given her utopian vision, her technological mindset, and her focus on the future.

Rand’s own statements on SF as a genre are fairly banal. In a 1958 course she gave on writing and interpreting fiction, Rand classifies SF as a form of fantasy “which projects future inventions.” She continues with an illustrative example: “Most of Jules Verne’s science fiction presented extensions of the discoveries of his time; for instance, he wrote stories about dirigibles and submarines before these were actually invented. This was merely a literary exaggeration of an existing fact. Since inventions exist, it is legitimate for a writer to project new and greater ones.” Rand writes that SF and other types of fantasy “are rational when they serve some abstract purpose applicable to reality.”<sup>33</sup> She appears to classify SF proper as only those stories which predict future inventions, and whether or not a work is good SF depends

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<sup>31</sup> Adam Roberts, *Science Fiction*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2006), 12.

<sup>32</sup> Ken Gelder, *Popular Fiction: The Logics and Practices of a Literary Field* (London: Routledge, 2004), 71. Emphasis in original.

<sup>33</sup> Ayn Rand, *The Art of Fiction: A Guide for Writers and Readers*, ed. Tore Boeckmann (New York: Plume, 2000), 169. Rand’s lectures were informal, given to a group of around twenty acquaintances; the content of the book has been produced and edited from tape recordings.

on the viability of the inventions depicted. Describing most contemporary science fiction as “junk,” Rand explains: “I dislike it because it’s too freewheeling. You can invent anything you wish and say that’s the science of the future”; SF is “a legitimate form of literature, but it’s seldom good.”<sup>34</sup> While recognising SF as a legitimate form of fiction—i.e. not essentially immoral or irrational—Rand is very far from considering it the best cultural vehicle for ideas.

In her 1958 course, when considering “Special Forms of Literature,” under the rubric “Fantasy,” Rand says: “To begin with, there are stories laid in the future, as, for instance, *Atlas Shrugged* and *Anthem*, Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and a whole string of older books.” Rand thus classifies all these works as “stories laid in the future,” but she does not describe them as SF. The “justification” for works like *Anthem*, *Atlas*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, “is to show the ultimate consequences of some existing trend, or some other application to actual reality”; “[s]trictly speaking, this type of fiction is not fantasy, but merely a projection of something in time.”<sup>35</sup> It is notable that Rand mentions her own works in the same sentence as *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, aligning herself with Orwell, or Orwell with herself. However, there is no suggestion of political or thematic similarities, merely a similarity of setting: future time.

Rand evidently did not specifically consider herself a science fiction writer. Nevertheless, calling Rand a science fiction writer is uncontroversial in certain circles. Jeff Riggenbach notes that the question of whether or not Rand wrote SF has been contested among Objectivists (perhaps in part due to SF’s perceived lack of value as Literature); however, among the SF critical community, it is held as self-evident: Ayn Rand wrote science fiction. Riggenbach notes that both *Anthem* and *Atlas Shrugged* are included in standard bibliographies of SF and SF reference works, such as Neil Barron’s *Anatomy of Wonder: Science Fiction*, and John Clute and Peter Nicholls’s *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*.<sup>36</sup>

The SF *Encyclopedia*’s entry for Ayn Rand, along with describing *Anthem* and *Atlas* as SF, suggests: “Although Objectivism has never incorporated itself as a religion under American law (Rand was an eloquent atheist), its theological reclusiveness as regards opposing argument, and the Star Chamber arbitrariness of its internal workings during its pomp some decades ago, mark this belief as unmistakably analogous to Scientology in its relationship to sf culture in general.”<sup>37</sup> The entry mentions Rand’s “continuing influence” on libertarian SF. Meanwhile, the entry for libertarian SF posits that, “[u]niquely among political movements, many of libertarianism’s most influential texts have been by sf writers,” including

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<sup>34</sup> Rand, *Ayn Rand Answers*, 222.

<sup>35</sup> Rand, *Art of Fiction*, 169.

<sup>36</sup> Jeff Riggenbach, “*Atlas Shrugged* as a Science Fiction Novel,” in *Ayn Rand’s “Atlas Shrugged”: A Philosophical and Literary Companion*, ed. Edward W. Younkins (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007), 132.

<sup>37</sup> John Clute, “Ayn Rand,” in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, ed. John Clute and Peter Nicholls, August 12, 2013, [http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/rand\\_ayn](http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/rand_ayn).



Rand.<sup>38</sup> Objectivists and libertarians form a significant part of the fanbase for science fiction such as *Star Trek*—a fact which will be extrapolated further in my final chapter. Other facets of Rand in the science fiction sphere include a character in Matt Ruff’s 1996 novel *Sewer, Gas and Electric: The Public Works Trilogy*; the character is an artificial intelligence who is a recreation of Rand. The television series *Andromeda* (2000–2005), which was created from notes left behind by Gene Roddenberry, and produced by his wife, Majel Barrett, featured a location named Ayn Rand Station, orbiting the planet Fountainhead. The station was the birthplace of the “Nietzscheans,” a race of genetically engineered superhumans. The 2007 videogame *BioShock* portrays a post-Objectivist dystopia, where Randian philosophy has resulted in a rigid class system and led to civil war; the game also features mechanical technology and biotechnology which grant superhuman abilities. I comment more fully on *Andromeda* and *BioShock* in chapter five.

Thus, two of Rand’s four novels can be counted as science fiction, while Rand and Objectivism form an adjunct to SF culture. Rand’s influence on technology entrepreneurs—those who make SF visions become real—has been noted already, and will be expanded on in the next chapter. The last chapter, in turn, will consider specifically cybercultural and posthumanist SF. What I would like to illuminate in this chapter is something more general: the aforementioned science-fictional imagination of Objectivism.

Science fiction is of course subject to competing definitions. Eric S. Rabkin lists four ways to arrive at a definition: characteristic, prototypical, operational, and social. A characteristic definition allows the entry of a work into a particular genre, only if it fits certain delineated criteria. The prototypical definition references certain supposedly originating works of the genre and encompasses stories “like” these. An operational definition would define science fiction as those books in the library found in the science fiction section. A social definition, finally, involves judgements of taste; for some people, Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is not science fiction, because it’s good. For his own part, Rabkin opts for a characteristic definition: “Science fiction is that branch of the fantastic that seeks plausibility against a background of science.”<sup>39</sup> This would seem to overlap with Rand’s view: the claims of the stories to scientific plausibility are crucial. Rabkin cites Mary Shelley’s preface to *Frankenstein* (1818), where she invokes the work of Erasmus Darwin to support her theory of monster-creation. This differentiates Shelley’s work from other gothic fiction, which portrays the purely supernatural, and makes *Frankenstein* prototypical SF.

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<sup>38</sup> Neil Tringham, “Libertarian SF,” in *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, ed. Clute and Nicholls, December 21, 2012, [http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/libertarian\\_sf](http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/libertarian_sf).

<sup>39</sup> Eric S. Rabkin, “Defining Science Fiction,” in *Reading Science Fiction*, ed. James Gunn, Marleen S. Barr, and Matthew Candelaria (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 21.

The plausibility or possibility of the depicted worlds is a keystone of many definitions of SF, including those of H. Bruce Franklin—in the same essay collection as Rabkin—and Marxist critic Darko Suvin, in one of the earliest attempts to comprehensively define the genre, his 1979 book, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre*. Franklin argues that science fiction’s sphere is the possible, distinguishing it from those forms whose realms are the impossible (fantasy) and the actual (so-called realistic fiction).<sup>40</sup> This chimes with Rand’s opinion of where good fiction should lie; her view was that fiction should represent what might (and ought to) be. Roberts, drawing on Suvin, argues that “it is not the ‘truth’ of science that is important to SF; it is the scientific method, the logical working through of a particular premise.”<sup>41</sup> This is a faculty Rand shares with mid-twentieth-century writers of dystopia, including Huxley, Orwell, and Bradbury: if we continue on the path we are on, the future will be horrid.

Taking account of the above-mentioned methodologies, we can see that there are many common elements to attempts at defining SF: future projection, referencing a background of science, and portraying not-yet-invented inventions, are all intrinsic to the genre. Drawing on the above methodologies, for our purposes in this chapter, the following characteristic definition of SF will suffice: A work of science fiction is a work of fiction set in a speculative scientific or technological moment; either the science and technology depicted are speculative, or the work depicts a speculated moment in techno-scientific time, or both. So, *Anthem* is science fiction, since its setting is a speculated future in techno-scientific time, a moment when humankind has regressed technologically. *Atlas Shrugged*, likewise, is science fiction; as Riggenbach points out, the tome features three fictional (speculated) technologies which propel the plot: Galt’s motor, Rearden Metal, and Project X (the Xylophone).<sup>42</sup> These traits in Rand’s work—speculated technologies and speculated techno-scientific moments—are shared with some of the most enduring SF dystopias, including *Brave New World*, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and *Fahrenheit 451*: making them works of science fiction as well as works of dystopian fiction.

Gelder, in line with Roberts and Suvin, identifies a “scientific-social view” as key to SF as a genre.<sup>43</sup> In Rand’s work this is manifested as an exploration of “the nature of science and its proper role in human affairs,” in Riggenbach’s words.<sup>44</sup> Scholar of Romanticism Marilyn Butler maintains that the science fiction novel “retains a unique licence to be

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<sup>40</sup> H. Bruce Franklin, “What Is Science Fiction—and How It Grew,” in *Reading Science Fiction*, ed. Gunn, Barr, and Candelaria, 23.

<sup>41</sup> Roberts, *Science Fiction*, 9.

<sup>42</sup> Riggenbach, “*Atlas Shrugged* as a Science Fiction Novel,” in *Ayn Rand’s “Atlas Shrugged,”* ed. Younkens, 134.

<sup>43</sup> Gelder, *Popular Fiction*, 64.

<sup>44</sup> Riggenbach, “*Atlas Shrugged* as a Science Fiction Novel,” in *Ayn Rand’s “Atlas Shrugged,”* ed. Younkens, 133.



didactic,” since SF “has to evaluate whole societies”; this is in contrast to the typical novel as it has evolved, which explores individual psychology.<sup>45</sup> Gelder makes a similar point when he refers to SF’s “commitment to thinking *socially*” and the fact that it is “a polemical genre”; “science fiction busily creates entire societies and puts them to work, for better or worse.”<sup>46</sup> Ayn Rand was not a psychological writer. While she writes about the individual, her work is not an exploration of the vicissitudes of the psyche, the “grey” that accompanies the human condition, as we might understand typical literary fiction to be. Moreover, Rand’s work was nothing if not didactic. She was explicit in stating: “The motive and purpose of my writing *is the projection of an ideal man.*”<sup>47</sup>

Rand’s pro-technology views and her focus on futurity are evidenced across her work, fiction and nonfiction; they are not simply found in *Anthem* and *Atlas*. These views are set in the context of a third major trait of Rand’s oeuvre, which is also common to science fiction: a utopian vision; or, a specific vision of an Ideal State—to use Popper’s term—that is different from the contemporary social condition. The ideal is crucial for Rand; the ideal individual and the ideal society. Ways of thinking and behaving that were different from what she perceived most people to be practising in the time she was alive, were what Rand hoped to inculcate. Rand places human value with the individual, and she grades political structures on their respect for individual rights. I would argue that a corollary of this is that the single overriding concern of Rand’s fiction is not the nature of the *individual* as such, but the nature of *society*—specifically, a concern with the kind of societies that allow individuals to flourish, or not. The great individual simply *is*, in Rand: he knows from childhood that there is something different about him; from an early age he guides his life towards a singular purpose. We can all choose to have “good premises,” in the Randian view: to possess respect for individual rights, to worship only man and his achievements. But we cannot all be world movers. Though her heroes are in a sense “self-made” through hard work, Rand also makes clear that there is something in-born and untouchable about the world-moving elite—indeed, the whole point about the John Galt and the Howard Roark is that they are different from the great mass of humanity. They possess talents that are unique to them, and superior to the talents of others. Thus, we cannot all choose to be great men. Yet, a question that remains for *us*, the majority of citizens in human communities, is the nature of the human structures we establish. For Rand of course the goal is political structures that allow individuals to thrive as individuals—only in these environments can those possessed of potential greatness achieve their potential. The wrong kind of society is a repeated antagonist in Rand’s fiction. Kira cannot achieve her

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<sup>45</sup> Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 29. Butler’s book was originally published in 1975.

<sup>46</sup> Gelder, *Popular Fiction*, 65, 71. Emphasis in original.

<sup>47</sup> Ayn Rand, *The Romantic Manifesto: A Philosophy of Literature*, rev. ed. (New York: Signet, 2005), 155. Emphasis in original.

ambitions in Soviet Russia. Equality 7-2521 wants to invent new technologies but society won't let him. Howard Roark is "unjustly" put on trial twice for his choices as an individual. John Galt must start a "strike" to get society to stay out of his way.

The goal of Rand's writing, then, is not only the projection of an ideal man, but suggesting the kind of social environments in which ideal men can flourish. This is most often done through negation: society acts as antagonist, and this encourages thoughts of good societies where great men would not have to suffer. Rand's most complete portrayal of her "good society" is found in the chapters of *Atlas Shrugged* set in Galt's Gulch. As Butler identifies an evaluation of "whole societies"—as distinct from individual psychology—to be a distinguishing facet of science fiction, so we can identify this aspect in Rand's work. This is an essential element in the science-fictional imagination of Objectivism, along with the aforementioned technological mindset and future focus.

If science fiction imagines whole societies, it is most often future societies that it imagines. The plot of a science-fictional text could be set in the past or the present relative to the time the text was written, but the work's theme would likely still have to do with "the future," in that the book, movie, etc. features technology or scientific procedures which do not (yet) exist, but are, rather, plausible or imaginative elaborations of the contemporary technological moment. In these stories, possible technological futures are made part of current or past historical time. It is impossible to conceptualise science fiction as a genre, without a view of the future as seen from the present. As Gelder puts it, "[t]he key words for SF are *extrapolation* and *speculation*."<sup>48</sup> A constant concern of Rand's work is what the future will look like. The future takes an explicitly science-fictional form in *Anthem* and *Atlas*, but even Rand's non-SF novels, *The Fountainhead* and *We the Living*, are about the battle of ideas for the future of America, and the world. Rand writes in her foreword to the 1959 edition of *We the Living* that she hopes "this novel might do its share in helping to prevent [...] a socialist America."<sup>49</sup>

A Cold War mentality is everywhere in Rand: the future will privilege either collectivism or individualism. If the future privileges individualism, Rand is clear, new technologies will flourish. This facet of the philosophy of Objectivism also feeds into its science-fictional imagination. SF imagines futures; not simply future societies, but future technologies. In this respect, science fiction and reality are in a feedback loop. Science fiction shapes reality just as reality shapes science fiction. *Star Trek* alone provides myriad examples. Scanning devices which may soon become available to diagnose diseases, are dubbed

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<sup>48</sup> Gelder, *Popular Fiction*, 64. Emphases in original.

<sup>49</sup> Rand, foreword to *We the Living*, vii.



“medical tricorders,” after those in the show.<sup>50</sup> A new virtual reality gaming concept by a group of university students is named Project Holodeck, after the immersive-reality “holodecks” in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.<sup>51</sup> Many US astronauts were inspired by *Trek* and NASA intentionally modelled aspects of the space programme after the show.<sup>52</sup> Those who write science fiction about determinably plausible futures and those who invent for the future operate in a continuum. Writing science fiction and inventing new technologies are of course very different skills, but the imaginative process is similar: futures are envisioned in which day-to-day living has changed, in ways great or small.

Objectivism operates in the arena of imagined futures, those found in fictional form and those real-life possibilities for the future of humanity. Technology or its absence is an indicator of positive or negative futures. In *Anthem* the future is bleak because a state of primitivism is enforced. Compare this dystopia to the future imagined by Yaron Brook, executive director of the Ayn Rand Institute. Brook is responding to a question about overpopulation as part of a regular ARI YouTube video series, “Yaron Answers”; the particular video is from July 2013:

I don't know what overpopulation is [...]. The United States has vast, vast areas that have nobody living in them. [...] The human mind is incredible at being creative, [at] creating new technologies in order to increase the productivity of the land, of farming. And as a consequence there's plenty of food out there and that is because of freedom, because of capitalism. [...] And, look, when there's not enough land space there are oceans we could live in, and when the oceans [are full], there's space.<sup>53</sup>

Brook is parroting Rand's own view of overpopulation, but that is to be expected.<sup>54</sup> Brook is telling us that, for Randians, a free future is a future among the stars. His statement evinces

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<sup>50</sup> “The Dream of the Medical Tricorder,” *Technology Quarterly*, *Economist*, December 1–7, 2012, 10–12.

<sup>51</sup> Project Holodeck, accessed May 20, 2013, <http://www.projectholodeck.com/>.

<sup>52</sup> Constance Penley writes: “[M]any of the astronauts have been vocal about the inspiration they received from *Star Trek*. Mae Jemison, the first African-American woman in space, says it was Nichelle Nichols in her role as Lt. Uhura, the African communications officer on board the *Enterprise*, who made her first want to go into space. [...] [A]t an even more fundamental institutional level, NASA has deliberately participated in making itself over as *Star Trek* [...]. NASA first began its *Star Trek* makeover in the mid-seventies, when the space agency yielded to President Gerald Ford's demand (prompted by a *Star Trek* fan letter-writing campaign) to change the name of the first shuttle from *Constitution* to *Enterprise*. Many of the show's cast members were there as the *Enterprise* [...] was rolled out onto the tarmac at Edwards Air Force Base to the stirring sounds of Alexander Courage's theme from *Star Trek*. [...] NASA actually hired Nichelle Nichols at one point in the late seventies to help recruit women and minorities into the astronaut corps.” Penley, *NASA/TREK: Popular Science and Sex in America* (London: Verso, 1997), 18–19.

<sup>53</sup> Yaron Brook, “Yaron Answers: How Would a Free Market Stop Overpopulation?,” YouTube video, 4:42, posted by the Ayn Rand Institute, July 24, 2013, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tz8G7Ke\\_l4M](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tz8G7Ke_l4M).

<sup>54</sup> “There is no population problem. If people were free to produce, they'd produce enough to feed themselves. There's enough on this earth to support much larger populations.” Rand, *Ayn Rand Answers*, 35.

Randian utopian engineering; a belief that technological creation by individuals can deliver us into new worlds.

### The Birth of Objectivism from the Spirit of the Romantics

Man as ideal, this is the core of Rand's aesthetics: "The motive and purpose of my writing is *the projection of an ideal man*."<sup>55</sup> Rand's ideal men, concretised in her fiction, are infused with qualities imported from a mythic vision of the nineteenth century; they are intended as the human sublime, incorporating at once the technological progressivism of the Industrial Revolution, and a factor of Romantic awe.

Literarily speaking, Rand saw herself as a Romantic—or, more specifically, though it may seem a contradiction in terms to a literary critic, as a Romantic Realist: "My school of writing is romantic realism: 'romantic' in that I present man as he ought to be; 'realistic' in that I place men here and now on this earth, in terms applicable to every rational reader who shares these values and wants to apply them to himself."<sup>56</sup> We might suggest that Rand does not always place her characters in the "here and now," given especially the future and dystopian settings of *Anthem* and *Atlas Shrugged*. However, her settings are of this earth and the laws of the physical world apply, in ways that they don't, say, with certain forms of fantasy. The most interesting aspect of Rand's statement here on Romantic Realism is its establishment of a purpose for fiction: fiction is a guide for the reader on how to live well.

This next section of the chapter discusses Rand's opinions about art, with a view to demonstrating how these feed into her science-fictional imagination. Rand's ideas on art, expounded in her declaratively titled nonfiction book *The Romantic Manifesto* (1969), further spotlight her utopianism; they also further demonstrate Rand's privileging of technology and futurity. All of these facets flow into her science-fictional imagination, according to the parameters described above.

#### **Rand, Romanticist**

The problem of defining Romanticism is one that has echoed through the centuries. Arthur O. Lovejoy famously summarised the difficulty, in 1924: "The word 'romantic' has come to mean so many things that, by itself, it means nothing."<sup>57</sup> "Romanticism" can be interpreted for every age, and have connotations manifestly un-benign, as F. L. Lucas described in 1936: "Even in modern Germany the Nazi movement shows a strong 'Romantic' tinge with its

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<sup>55</sup> Rand, *Romantic Manifesto*, 155. Emphasis in original.

<sup>56</sup> Rand, *Ayn Rand Answers*, 188. Emphasis in original.

<sup>57</sup> Arthur O. Lovejoy, "On the Discrimination of Romanticisms," *PMLA* 39, no.2 (June 1924): 232, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/457184>.



homesick hankerings to revert to the noble pagan, to Nature and the soil, to 'thinking with the blood.'"<sup>58</sup>

Such caveats notwithstanding, it is not overly bold to suggest that Romanticism is generally understood as a Europe-wide artistic movement of the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a reaction against the rigidity of neoclassicism. In aesthetics, Romanticism favoured individual expression, non-formalised style, and subject matter drawn from the lives of ordinary men and women, rather than royalty or aristocracy. It was a movement that responded to the Enlightenment, and was also bound up with the political tumult of the day: with the idealism and failures of the French Revolution, and the wars subsequently sparked; with the declared independence of America; with the calls for greater rights for men and women, and the push to dismantle monarchy.

In his seminal anthology of Romanticism, the textbook for many undergraduate courses, Duncan Wu suggests that the problem of defining Romanticism as an aesthetic movement comes about because it was not a movement whose boundaries and goals were set by the artists themselves. Rather, "Romanticism" was a label applied by the academy, to many different artists working in different countries and different decades. Hence, Wu opts for a wide definition, in identifying idealism as a vital tenet of the Romantic turn. The Romantics are defined by their "capacity for belief," perhaps in contrast to the jaded acceptance with which many of us, artists and otherwise, look at the world today. It was an era when "people were awakened to a sense of self-determination." The Romantics were, Wu writes, "optimists for human nature," who believed in "the redemptive potential of the mind."<sup>59</sup> These are things which chime with Rand's appraisal of the Romantic era. She celebrates the breaking with tradition and the recognition of individual consciousness which characterised the time: "[I]t was an atmosphere of men intoxicated by the discovery of freedom, with all the ancient strongholds of tyranny—of church, state, monarchy, feudalism—crumbling around them, with unlimited roads opening up in all directions and no barriers set to their newly unleashed energy":

Its art projected an overwhelming sense of intellectual freedom, of depth, i.e., concern with fundamental problems, of demanding standards, of inexhaustible originality, of unlimited possibilities and, above all, of profound respect for man. The existential atmosphere (which was then being destroyed by Europe's philosophical trends and political systems) still held a benevolence that would be incredible to the men of today, i.e., a smiling, confident good will of man to man, and of man to life.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> F. L. Lucas, *The Decline and Fall of the Romantic Ideal*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948), 7.

<sup>59</sup> Duncan Wu, introduction to *Romanticism: An Anthology*, 4th ed., ed. Wu (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), xxxii, xxxvi, xxxiii, xxxviii–xxxix.

<sup>60</sup> Rand, *Romantic Manifesto*, 95–96, vi.

The facet of idealism, a certain kind of utopianism—a wish for and a vision of a “better future” according to one’s own belief system—is something Rand certainly shared with the Romantics.

Many critics have identified the Romantic era, which was commensurate with the Industrial Revolution, as the sine qua non of modernity, of the way we live now; it achieved nothing short of a revolution in artistic, political, and economic thinking and ways of being.<sup>61</sup> Rand was ambitious enough to hope that her work alone would spark a revolution in the aesthetic, philosophical, political, and economic fields.

In her typical egocentrism, Rand viewed her novels as “a bridge” between the great Romantic literature of the nineteenth century, and a future Romantic tradition, which may or may not come about.<sup>62</sup> A comparison of Rand’s work in relation to specific examples of Romantic fiction does not concern us here. However, I do want to unpack, in terms of concepts and definitions, Rand’s claim to being the heir of the Romantics, in order to elucidate certain aspects particular to her writing.

In 1949, René Wellek answered Lovejoy with a broad definition of Romanticism: “[T]he following three criteria should be particularly convincing, since each is central for one aspect of the practice of literature: imagination for the view of poetry, nature for the view of the world, and symbol and myth for poetic style.”<sup>63</sup> Rand, of course, did not write poetry; but if we substitute the words “literature” and “literary” for “poetry” and “poetic,” we could say that Rand’s work aptly fits at least the first and last elements in Wellek’s definition. She certainly privileged the imaginative prerogatives of the individual-creator, and her novels do make use of symbolism and myth. When Dagny flies towards Galt’s Gulch in *Atlas*, for example, the sky is “the colour of a future light”—symbolising the rebirth of America that will come from the place to which Dagny is travelling.<sup>64</sup> The second element of Wellek’s definition does not fit with Rand: she does not especially value nature; she values man’s power over it. The focus of Rand’s work was always humankind: man, as she insisted. We can note this in her description of the *Apollo* rocket, which, as it lauds man’s greatness, consciously

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<sup>61</sup> Isaiah Berlin summarises the case: “The importance of romanticism is that it is the largest recent movement to transform the lives and the thought of the Western world. It seems to me to be the greatest single shift in the consciousness of the West that has occurred, and all the other shifts which have occurred in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries appear to me in comparison less important, and at any rate deeply influenced by it.” Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism: The A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, 1965; The National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC*, ed. Henry Hardy (London: Pimlico, 2000), 1–2.

<sup>62</sup> Rand, *Romantic Manifesto*, vi–viii.

<sup>63</sup> René Wellek, “The Concept of Romanticism in Literary History,” in *Romanticism: Points of View*, 2nd ed., ed. Robert F. Gleckner and Gerald E. Enscoe (1970; repr., Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1974), 193.

<sup>64</sup> Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* (London: Penguin Books, 2007), 692.



does not fall back on metaphors drawn from the natural world.<sup>65</sup> The rocket is compared to another human invention, “an upturned candle with its flame directed at the earth.” The metaphor takes on greater significance if we consider that in *Anthem* the candle is a symbol of benighted primitivism, in contrast to the lightbulb. The upsetting of the candle in Rand’s *Apollo 11* description, then, really does represent for her the triumph of technology and civilisation, two ideals to be pursued by man.

To take another aspect of Welles’s definition: Rand’s work holds a fundamental reliance on ancient myths. Rand recasts myths to fit her ideal, as the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Romantics used received myths for their purposes. There is no better example of Rand’s reliance on myth than Prometheus, whom she references in *Anthem*, *The Fountainhead*, and *Atlas Shrugged*. If previous incarnations depict Prometheus as an exemplar of hubris or a tragic rebel, however, Rand casts him as a triumphant figure of defiance, the mythic precursor to her own heroes. At the end of *Anthem*, Equality 7-2521 renames himself Prometheus, after “he [who] taught men to be gods”: “He took the light of the gods and he brought it to men [...]. And he suffered for his deed as all bearers of light must suffer.”<sup>66</sup> Equality’s naming himself Prometheus is his own statement of discovery; he names himself to mark his individuality and demarcate his future as individual from his past as cog in the collective. In *Atlas Shrugged*, Francisco compares Galt to a Prometheus who chooses to suffer no longer: “John Galt is Prometheus who changed his mind. After centuries of being torn by vultures in payment for having brought to men the fire of the gods, he broke his chains and he withdrew his fire—until the day when men withdraw their vultures.”<sup>67</sup> Francisco’s formulation gives Prometheus a superheroic agency which he did not possess in the Aeschylean myth; it also makes society in the human sense the punisher of the Titan and not the lone tyrant Zeus. Thus, Prometheus becomes a typical Randian hero, punished by the collective for wanting to do his own thing. Rand’s revision of Prometheus here may not accord with Aeschylus, but it does match her own description of the man who discovered fire, in *The Fountainhead*: “He was probably burned at the stake he had taught his brothers to light,” comments Roark. Roark goes on to reference Prometheus himself, “he [who] had stolen the fire of the gods,” as an exemplar of the “unsubmissive” creator found in every origin story about humanity.<sup>68</sup> There is thus a continuity running from *Anthem* through *The Fountainhead* to *Atlas Shrugged* in the image of the Randian hero as the persecuted Promethean light-bearer.

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<sup>65</sup> Other writers on the space race do this—for example: “[T]he four arms of the launch tower [from which *Sputnik* launched] unfolded like the petals of a flower.” Jon Trux, *The Space Race: From “Sputnik” to Shuttle; The Story of the Battle for the Heavens* (Sevenoaks, Kent: New English Library, 1985), 24.

<sup>66</sup> Ayn Rand, *Anthem* (New York: Signet, 2005), 99.

<sup>67</sup> Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 517.

<sup>68</sup> Rand, *The Fountainhead*, 710.

A preoccupation with Prometheus is something Rand's fiction shares with Romantic literature. The Promethean archetype occurs especially among the German Romantics.<sup>69</sup> The Greek Titan is also employed by Mary Shelley (*Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, 1818/31) and Percy Shelley (*Prometheus Unbound*, 1820), amongst others. Rand's rewriting of the Promethean myth is consistent with principles laid down by Percy Shelley in his preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, where he argues for the right of the individual-creator to re-interpret ancient tales. In his dramatic poem, Shelley rewrites Aeschylus such that the "Champion" of mankind, Prometheus, is not reconciled with its "Oppressor," Zeus.<sup>70</sup> Rather, Prometheus overcomes Zeus's power through feelings of love. Noting Rand's concept of "the sanction of the victim"—the idea that one individual can only have power over another through the second individual's consent, tacit or otherwise—Kirsti Minsaas argues that Shelley offers "a striking parallel to Rand." Shelley "makes Prometheus's enchainment the result of his own sanction, his willingness to be victimized by his oppressor, since it is only by virtue of the hero's hatred of Zeus that the god is enabled to exert his power over him. When Prometheus withdraws that hatred, Zeus loses his power." Rand's version of the Prometheus story, seen in *Atlas Shrugged*, however, still has a radically different emphasis: "[I]n Rand's version, the creator's sanction is not a matter of self-consuming hatred but of self-denying altruism, [therefore] the withdrawal of the sanction takes on an entirely different cast, becoming an act not of forgiving love and pity, but—quite contrarily—of proud self-assertion."<sup>71</sup> Shelley's philosophically Christian message is replaced with Objectivist egoism.

Other myths referenced in Rand include that of Atlas and that of Atlantis, the latter serving as a metaphor for Galt's Gulch. Rand's affection for myth feeds into her desire to demonstrate ideal men—symbolic men—in fictional action. Her heroes are themselves mythic figures of a sort, intended to be flawless, to be looked up to like religious icons in that they provide a guide to life. In *Atlas*, the mystery surrounding Galt's existence—which forms a significant recurring plot-theme—and the final revelation of his appearance, reinforce his mythic status. Referencing ancient and enduring myths can only lend weight to Rand's fiction and her philosophy; to her ideals as symbols for the godlike in man; to her heroes as examples to which we should aspire.

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<sup>69</sup> Roslynn D. Haynes, *From Faust to Strangelove: Representations of the Scientist in Western Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 75–78; Kirsti Minsaas, "Ayn Rand's Recasting of Ancient Myths in *Atlas Shrugged*," in *Ayn Rand's "Atlas Shrugged"*, ed. Younkins, 143; M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), 281.

<sup>70</sup> Percy Shelley, preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, in *Shelley's "Prometheus Unbound": The Text and the Drafts*, ed. Lawrence John Zillman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 35.

<sup>71</sup> Minsaas, "Rand's Recasting of Ancient Myths," in *Ayn Rand's "Atlas Shrugged"*, ed. Younkins 145–46.



## Art as Utopian Space

Rand's own definition of Romanticism is revealed in *The Romantic Manifesto*, first published in 1969 and released in a revised edition in 1975.<sup>72</sup> Rand's definition sweeps away much of what others might consider to be key traits of the movement, such as its mysticism, its poetics of the natural world, and its democratic consciousness. If some have seen Romanticism as a reaction *against* the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, Rand views it in continuum with the advancements in reason, science, and technology brought about by those events. Rand never mentions the Enlightenment specifically, but her view of Romanticism in art makes clear that she views the phenomenon as stemming from rational faculties rather than emotional mysticism. In this, Rand in fact prefigures academic criticism of the last several decades, which has attempted to define a continuum between the Enlightenment and Romanticism, where previously the latter was identified as a break with the former. One of the first books to describe this continuum was Aidan Day's *Romanticism* (1996), where he characterises the "political radicalism which exists in the period, purveyed by supposedly 'Romantic' writers" as "a late Enlightenment phenomenon."<sup>73</sup> This political view of Romanticism chimes with Rand's, as we will see.

Rand's primary focus in defining Romantic literature is to identify the aspect of volition: "Romanticism is a category of art based on the recognition of the principle that man possesses the faculty of volition. [...] If man possesses volition, then the crucial aspect of his life is his choice of values—if he chooses values, then he must act to gain and/or keep them—if so, then he must set his goals and engage in purposeful action to achieve them." Man's ability to reason flows from the fact that he has volition.<sup>74</sup> We might argue that this definition of Romanticism is less indebted to Romantic art itself than to the political texts of the Romantic era—Rand's is a Paine's *Rights of Man* view of art. Recall that Rand praised the Declaration of Independence as "the greatest document in human history, both philosophically and"—crucially—"literarily."<sup>75</sup> Thomas Paine's earlier pamphlet, *Common Sense* (1776), was vital in marshalling support for American independence.<sup>76</sup> The Declaration is full of sentiments echoed in Paine, penned as it was by his friend Thomas Jefferson.

Romantic fiction, then, in Rand's sense, is about volitional man making reasoned choices, and it presents this as a moral ideal. Though its purpose is not persuasion as such—

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<sup>72</sup> The book consists of essays and a short story first published in Rand's periodical the *Objectivist*, plus her introduction to a 1962 Bantam Books edition of Victor Hugo's *Ninety-Three*, translated by Lowell Blair. The 2005 Signet copy of *The Romantic Manifesto* quoted here reproduces the text of the 1975 revised edition.

<sup>73</sup> Aidan Day, *Romanticism* (London: Routledge, 1996), 182.

<sup>74</sup> Rand, *Romantic Manifesto*, 91–92, 97.

<sup>75</sup> Rand, *Ayn Rand Answers*, 1.

<sup>76</sup> Hugh Brogan, *The Penguin History of the United States of America*, 2nd ed. (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 173.

the artist simply wishes to present his own shining example—in presenting an ideal, good fiction in practice advocates for lives and societies based along the lines of its ideal. Rand reiterates the Aristotelian view that fiction is more philosophically potent than history, since fiction can present things as they might be and ought to be.<sup>77</sup>

For Rand, art inevitably represents the artist's view of the world, whether consciously or unconsciously: "Art is a selective re-creation of reality according to an artist's metaphysical value-judgments. An artist re-creates those aspects of reality which represent his fundamental view of man and of existence."<sup>78</sup> Therefore, the type of art one chooses to make is a statement of one's moral fitness or unfitness. Every hero needs a villain, especially in the writing of Ayn Rand. She sets up Naturalism as the antithesis of Romanticism. Whereas Romanticism validates volition, Naturalism "denies it," positing that man's "life and his character are determined by forces beyond his control." Where earlier (Naturalistic) literature held that fate, the gods, or innate tragic flaws ruled men's lives, modern Naturalistic literature holds that society determines the destinies of men. Shakespeare is blamed as the "spiritual father," in modern literary history, of Naturalism, while naturally Emile Zola too is condemned.<sup>79</sup>

Rand acknowledges that her definition of Romantic literature is her own, and points out that there are no universally accepted definitions of anything in art.<sup>80</sup> Although Rand's definition is unique, it is not necessarily any more arbitrary or problematic than, for instance, Nietzsche's delineations of the Apollonian and the Dionysian in *The Birth of Tragedy*. These too rely on a selective interpretation and creative extrapolation.

Rand explicitly dismisses certain Romantic writers—blaming Byron, for instance, for perpetuating the "malevolent universe" premise; that is, that man possesses volition "in regard to his own character and choice of values, but not in regard to achieving his goals in the physical world."<sup>81</sup> The writers that Rand actually credits as exemplars of her kind of Romanticism are few in number; she names Hugo, Dostoevsky, and Schiller among a top tier, with Scott and Dumas on a second tier. Rand penned an introduction to a 1962 edition of Hugo's *Ninety-Three*, in which she termed him "the greatest novelist in world literature."<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Rand, *Romantic Manifesto*, 71.

<sup>78</sup> Rand, *Romantic Manifesto*, 91.

<sup>79</sup> Rand, *Romantic Manifesto*, 91–92, 116–17, 108–9.

<sup>80</sup> Rand, *Romantic Manifesto*, 95.

<sup>81</sup> Rand, *Romantic Manifesto*, 102. In contrast, the "benevolent universe premise" is a central tenet of Objectivism. Leonard Peikoff explains: "The 'benevolent universe' does not mean that the universe feels kindly to man or that it is out to help him achieve his goals. No, the universe is neutral; it simply is; it is indifferent to you. You must care about and adapt to it, not the other way around. But reality is "benevolent" in the sense that if you *do* adapt to it—i.e., if you do think, value, and act rationally, then you can (and barring accidents you will) achieve your values. You will, because those values are based on reality." Peikoff, "The Philosophy of Objectivism," lecture series, quoted at *The Ayn Rand Lexicon: Objectivism from A to Z*, ed. Harry Binswanger, accessed October 10, 2014, [http://aynrandlexicon.com/lexicon/benevolent\\_universe\\_premise.html](http://aynrandlexicon.com/lexicon/benevolent_universe_premise.html). Emphasis in original.

<sup>82</sup> Rand, *Romantic Manifesto*, 99–100, 147.



Rand's Romantic canon is indeed limited; though, it is in her interest to name a selective canon, which establishes precursors but does not detract from her own achievement. One of her central points is that the Romantics were reaching towards something which they never fully grasped. They never completed a portrait of the ideal man; they didn't accept that capitalism was the best economic environment for the expression of their talent and for the human race as a whole. Nevertheless, unbeknownst to themselves, they came further towards an Objectivist vision of the world than anyone, until Rand herself: "The Romanticists saw their cause primarily as a battle for their right to individuality and—unable to grasp the deepest metaphysical justification of their cause, unable to identify their values in terms of reason—they fought for individuality in terms of *feelings*, surrendering the banner of reason to their enemies."<sup>83</sup>

Past Romantics did not create their ideal men; Rand did create hers. Thus, Objectivist intellectual Andrew Bernstein describes *Atlas Shrugged* as the culmination of the Romantic novel. Comparing the book to Hugo's *Les Misérables* and Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, Bernstein argues: "[O]n their own terms, Hugo and Dostoyevsky show their respective moral codes as incapable of promoting the sweeping social change that each seeks. Only Ayn Rand shows her moral-philosophical vision as triumphantly capable of transfiguring the world."<sup>84</sup> Rand creates her ideal men, and through knowing them we can know what her ideal government would be, her ideal of social relations.

Rand's fiction is preoccupied with ideals. For her there can be no flaw in fiction, in Romantic art; the only purpose in showing the flawed is as a thematic device, as a contrast to the hero: Toohey contra Roark in *The Fountainhead*, James Taggart contra John Galt in *Atlas Shrugged*. The ideal should never be flawed, in any respect:

If one saw, in real life, a beautiful woman wearing an exquisite evening gown, with a cold sore on her lips, the blemish would mean nothing but a minor affliction, and one would ignore it.

But a painting of such a woman would be a corrupt, obscenely vicious attack on man, on beauty, on all values—and one would experience a feeling of immense disgust and indignation at the artist. (There are those who would feel something like approval and who would belong to the same moral category as the artist.)<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Rand, *Romantic Manifesto*, 97–98. Emphasis in original.

<sup>84</sup> Andrew Bernstein, "Atlas Shrugged as the Culmination of the Romantic Novel," in *Essays on Ayn Rand's "Atlas Shrugged"*, ed. Robert Mayhew (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009), 167.

<sup>85</sup> Rand, *Romantic Manifesto*, 24. Beauty is an assumed absolute for Rand—an Objective standard. There is no place for it to be in the eye of the beholder. Rand explains the Objective standard of beauty this way: "Beauty is a sense of harmony. [...] You know what features belong in a human face. Well, if the face is lop-sided, with a very indefinite jawline, very small eyes, beautiful mouth, and a long nose, you would have to say that's *not* a beautiful face." Rand, *Ayn Rand Answers*, 226. Emphasis in original.

Rand's injunction against portraying women with cold sores, is almost the mirror opposite of advice given by the character Biffen in the novel *New Grub Street* (1891), by the Naturalist George Gissing. Biffen declares, "Let us copy life. [...] Let the pretty girl get a disfiguring pimple on her nose just before the ball at which she is going to shine. Show the numberless repulsive features of common decent life."<sup>86</sup> Rand may have had Gissing in mind, consciously or unconsciously, when she wrote the above lines. In any case, she had the kind of writing in which he engaged.

The distinction Rand draws between the real-life woman with the cold sore, and the painting of such a woman, elucidates her view of art as utopian space. Art, of whatever kind—painting, music, fiction—is where ideals are found. Though the artist's primary purpose, according to Rand, is only to portray his ideal, and not to serve a social function, in practice, for the consumer, art functions as a guide to life—if it is good art: "[I]t is *Romanticism* that trains and equips man for the battles he has to face in reality."<sup>87</sup> Thus, if Rand's fiction is where her ideals are, the reader of correct moral character, of an Objectivist bent, will want to make real life conform as closely as possible to the ideals found in the fiction. Fiction is a vehicle for making reality better: "[A]rt does not *teach*—it shows, it displays the full, concretized reality of the final goal."<sup>88</sup> Notice how this reflects Popper's description of utopian social engineering: the Ideal State is decided in advance (in this case by a fictional text); our job is to take steps to make reality approach the fictional end-vision.

The utopian space Rand's art opens up—as a place where ideals are found—is linked by its very nature to future time. If individuals absorb and attempt to enact the ideals found in the fiction, the future world will be better than the present. Hence, the future is inevitably part of the utopian space created by Rand's fiction; the future is inevitably part of the imagination of Objectivism. Rand was always concerned with futurity—we can infer this too from her linking herself to the art of the future, to a future Romantic literature.

If the ideal is made real it will be in the future. And the ideal future for Objectivists is technologically advanced. In her theory of aesthetics, Rand links the process of art-creation to the process of technology-invention in an explicit way. While man invents technology to assist in the provision of his material needs, he creates art to fulfil his nonmaterial needs—the needs of his "soul"/consciousness. Hence: "Art is the technology of the soul."<sup>89</sup> Technology is necessary for man's survival in the physical world; art is necessary for the survival of his inner consciousness. Art assists survival by showing the way to go, the way to the ideal future. Art

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<sup>86</sup> George Gissing, *New Grub Street*, Project Gutenberg, February 4, 2013, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1709/1709-h/1709-h.htm>.

<sup>87</sup> Rand, *Romantic Manifesto*, 133. Emphasis in original.

<sup>88</sup> Rand, *Romantic Manifesto*, 163. Emphasis in original.

<sup>89</sup> Rand, *Romantic Manifesto*, 162.



is philosophically commensurate with technology, for Rand, and both are bound up with the future as ideal.

### **The Fall of Romanticism and the Rise of Pop Lit**

It is of note that the origins of the science fiction genre also date from the period to which Rand traces her artistic roots, to the Romantic era and the Industrial Revolution. SF can only exist once science and technology pervade the social structure such that they become a force in the popular imagination. Hence, as SF writer Ted Chiang tells us, the genre is “fundamentally a post-industrial revolution form of storytelling.”<sup>90</sup> The other major cultural change behind science fiction’s origin is Romanticism. Adam Roberts, overviewing the history of SF, explains that, “it is the primacy of notions of the Imagination and the Sublime associated with Romantic writing that sets the agenda for the development of SF.”<sup>91</sup> Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* is often cited as the first SF novel.<sup>92</sup> Moreover, *Frankenstein* provides a prototype of the posthuman—a point which will be elaborated upon in chapter five.

Rand traces the fall of Romanticism, and its attendant philosophical optimism about human possibility—its benevolent universe premise—to the horrors of World War I; World War II, in turn, spelled the end for Naturalism, since the collectivist social solutions espoused by certain of its authors were shown up in their ultimate totalitarian incarnation.<sup>93</sup> Those aspects of the Romantic tradition which yet existed in Rand’s day had been cross-bred with the culture’s demand for irony and cynicism, to form mere “bootleg Romanticism,” as Rand dubs it in her inimitably forceful way. Interestingly, the facets of the Romantic which do survive are to be found in popular fiction and media—in, for instance, the actions of James Bond and Mike Hammer in the novels of Ian Fleming and Mickey Spillane. These novels incorporate elements of the “cynicism and despair” so evident in the rest of the culture. Yet, at core, these works validate heroism, validate man as a rational being who can achieve his goals, and this is why they are Romantic.<sup>94</sup>

Remnants of the Romantic, for Rand, are also to be found in the science fiction of *The Twilight Zone* television series (1959–64). Rand’s description of one episode is worth quoting here in full:

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<sup>90</sup> Ted Chiang, quoted in Betsy Huang, “Interview: Ted Chiang,” *Asian American Literary Review*, May 24, 2013, <http://aalmag.org/specfictioninterviewchiang/>. H. Bruce Franklin makes a similar point, “What Is Science Fiction,” in *Reading Science Fiction*, ed. Gunn, Barr, and Candelaria, 25.

<sup>91</sup> Roberts, *Science Fiction*, 42.

<sup>92</sup> Shelley’s *Frankenstein* has been identified as the genesis of SF by many commentators. See, for example, Franklin, “What Is Science Fiction,” in *Reading Science Fiction*, ed. Gunn, Barr, and Candelaria, 30; Roberts, *Science Fiction*, 42.

<sup>93</sup> Rand, *Romantic Manifesto*, 112.

<sup>94</sup> Rand, *Romantic Manifesto*, 127, 125–26.

In some indeterminate world of another dimension, the shadowy, white-clad, authoritarian figures of doctors and social scientists are deeply concerned with the problem of a young girl who looks so different from everyone else that she is shunned as a freak, a disfigured outcast unable to lead a normal life. She has appealed to them for help, but all plastic surgery operations have failed—and now the doctors are grimly preparing to give her a last chance: one more attempt at plastic surgery; if it fails, she will remain a monstrosity for life. In heavily tragic tones, the doctors speak of the girl's need to be like others, to belong, to be loved, etc. We are not shown any of the characters' faces, but we hear the tense, ominous, oddly lifeless voices of their dim figures, as the last operation progresses. The operation fails. The doctors declare, with contemptuous compassion, that they will have to find a young man as deformed as this girl, who might be able to accept her. Then, for the first time, we see the girl's face: lying motionless on the pillow of a hospital bed, it is a face of perfect, radiant beauty. The camera moves to the faces of the doctors: it is an unspeakably horrifying row, not of human faces, but of mangled, distorted, disfigured pigs' heads, recognizable only by their snouts. Fade-out.

The last remnants of Romanticism are sneaking apologetically on the outskirts of our culture, wearing the masks of a similar plastic surgery operation which has been partially successful.

Under the pressure of conformity to the pigs' snouts of decadence, today's Romanticists are escaping, not into the past, but into the supernatural—explicitly giving up reality and this earth. The exciting, the dramatic, the unusual—their policy is declaring, in effect—do not exist; please don't take us seriously, what we're offering is only a spooky daydream.<sup>95</sup>

Rand's reactions to the likes of Fleming, Spillane, and *The Twilight Zone*, spotlight her own ambivalence, and the ambivalence of the Objectivist movement generally, towards popular literature and popular culture—a point which has already been discussed, in chapter one. As we saw there, Objectivists cite Rand's popularity in making claims for her legitimacy, and yet they also seek establishment legitimacy for her novels as “serious literature,” not just fiction that is popular. This divergent emphasis—a tension between popularity and seriousness—is mirrored within the community of science fiction writers and fans. Genre fiction is passed over for major awards such as the Booker, and until the advent of pop lit courses it was not considered a legitimate object of study in university English departments. Yet, SF is undeniably one of the most prevalent forms of cultural production, not only in novel form, but across movies, television, and videogames too. SF, Gelder writes, “continues to map itself out precisely in terms of its commercial imperatives on the one hand, and its purity on the other”; many SF writers are saying serious things, yet are shut out of “serious” literary circles, precisely because their work is science fiction.<sup>96</sup> Science fiction is both popular and lacking in seriousness in the eyes of the traditional literary establishment. So is the fiction of Ayn Rand.

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<sup>95</sup> Rand, *Romantic Manifesto*, 113. Although she doesn't mention the details, the episode Rand refers to is the sixth of season two, “Eye of the Beholder,” written by series creator Rod Serling, first broadcast on November 11, 1960.

<sup>96</sup> Gelder, *Popular Fiction*, 66, 68.



Rand aligned her work with “serious” nineteenth-century Romantic literature, not with genre fiction and not with science fiction. However, her veneration of Romanticism only serves to reinforce her science-fictional imagination: because she celebrates a form out of which science fiction grew, and because her particular conception of the Romantic serves utopian ends (art as ideal space)—and utopias and dystopias are intrinsic to the SF genre.

### The Soviet Union and the Western Future

The mid-twentieth century stood between utopia and dystopia, in terms of the absolute ideas of where man might end up. It was man’s technology in both cases that would bring about the end: the awesome technology of the nuclear bomb, reducing the earth to a new stone age; the awesome technology of the moon rocket, taking us where no men had travelled before. It is a banal comment to say that the tension between technology-as-force-for-good and technology-as-destructive lies at the heart of much twentieth-century science fiction. Here Rand bucked the trend of many of her fellow writers of science-fictional utopias/dystopias, in only ever presenting technology in a positive light.

It is after the Russian Revolution and the First World War, moving decade by decade towards the Cold War, that some of the most enduring SF dystopias emerge: Yevgeny Zamyatin’s *We* (c. 1921), Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1931), George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), and Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* (1953). Rand’s novels of dystopian futures, *Anthem* (1938) and *Atlas Shrugged* (1957), were written and published contemporaneously with some of the most famous books of the genre. *Anthem* in particular is often likened to *We*, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and *Brave New World*. Randian scholar Shoshana Milgrim has written a comprehensive study comparing *Anthem* to “related literary works.” Milgrim provides a number of useful insights which are worth covering, before I move on with my own analysis.

*We* was circulated privately in Russia in the early 1920s. Its first publication was in English translation, in the US, in 1924; it was not actually published in Russia until 1988. According to Milgrim, it is “possible” that Rand read *We* before she departed Russia, or afterwards—though there is no direct evidence that she read or was influenced by her fellow Russian Zamyatin, notwithstanding certain similarities between *We* and *Anthem*. Zamyatin tells the story of D-503, an engineer who lives in the One State, a worldwide state in which life is entirely regulated by the government and citizens are constantly monitored; individual names have ceased to exist and everyone must dress the same. D-503 is chief engineer on a project to build a spacecraft so the One State can conquer other planets. Milgrim writes:

Salient similarities between *We* and *Anthem* include the regimentation of life, the world-wide state, the replacement of names by numbers, and the first-person narration

by a secretly rebellious protagonist. But these are not unique to *We*. The regimentation of life and the world-wide state are features of [H. G.] Wells [...], whom both Zamyatin and Rand read. The number-names and regimentation [...] can be found in Jerome K. Jerome's "The New Utopia" (1891); Jerome's works were popular in Russia and easily available.<sup>97</sup>

In any case, as Milgrim goes on to point out, the moral conclusion of *Anthem* differs markedly from that of *We*—and indeed *Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*—especially with regard to the role of technology in human enslavement. For Rand, technological advancement itself is never to blame for the use of technology by the state to coerce the populace: this is merely another form of the collective imposing its will on individuals. All of Rand's dystopias are technologically backwards compared to the twentieth-century West—the USSR in *We the Living*, the worldwide state in *Anthem*, and the declining America in *Atlas Shrugged*. Rand created primitive dystopias because, for her, technology is a liberator not an oppressor. Moreover, it requires free men and women to create and sustain technological development. Rand does not see "technological advancement as compatible with political slavery."<sup>98</sup>

Milgrim opines that of the various similar works by other authors she discusses, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* "is the one that comes closest to the idea of *Anthem*—and to the related ideas of *The Fountainhead* as well."<sup>99</sup> This is certainly fair. Notwithstanding Orwell's lifelong avowed socialism, he was also a proponent of the individual. When protagonist Winston Smith is tortured by O'Brien, a member of the ruling Inner Party, towards the end of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, O'Brien expresses the view that power over others is an end in itself—sentiments which echo the worldview of arch-villain Ellsworth Toohey in *The Fountainhead*. The totalitarian powers-that-be in both Zamyatin and Huxley maintain that the happiness of the masses is the purpose of their control. Another important similarity between Orwell's novel and *Anthem* is "the observation that a decline in the quality of human life is accompanied by a decline in language."<sup>100</sup> In Orwell, Newspeak is introduced to reduce the possibilities for human thought; in Rand, the loss of the word "I" means a society devoid of the entire concept of individuality. Orwell also demonstrates how totalitarian regimes work to substitute subjective for objective reality: the view of the rulers replaces scientific empiricism. This is an argument Rand herself put forward. As she commented: "You cannot believe any scientific claims that come out of Soviet Russia or any other dictatorship."<sup>101</sup> Rand was "familiar" with *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

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<sup>97</sup> Milgrim, "Anthem in the Context of Related Literary Works" in *Essays on Ayn Rand's "Anthem,"* ed. Mayhew, 137–38.

<sup>98</sup> Milgrim, "Anthem in the Context of Related Literary Works," in *Essays on Ayn Rand's "Anthem,"* ed. Mayhew, 149.

<sup>99</sup> Milgrim, "Anthem in the Context of Related Literary Works," in *Essays on Ayn Rand's "Anthem,"* ed. Mayhew, 153.

<sup>100</sup> Milgrim, "Anthem in the Context of Related Literary Works," in *Essays on Ayn Rand's "Anthem,"* ed. Mayhew, 152.

<sup>101</sup> Rand, *Ayn Rand Answers*, 34.



and was of the view that Orwell was influenced by *Anthem*, though there is no evidence that Orwell read it.<sup>102</sup> Once again, *Anthem*'s conclusion differs from that of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Orwell's novel ends with "hero" Winston's defeat, while all Rand's heroes remain unconquered on their own terms: a key difference when it comes to optimism/pessimism about the future. Even Kira in *We the Living*, who dies without realising her many dreams, dies unwavering in her self-belief, in her conviction that "[I]f it had been, if only because she knew it could be."<sup>103</sup> Winston has his psychology remade through torture, so that his individualism is lost forever. Milgrim suggests that Orwell "believes that evil can win," where Rand possesses an unshakeable faith in individual triumph.<sup>104</sup> Rand, then, is showing her utopian colours. She did not believe that, in real life, the success of individualism was inevitable. But she did believe that art should show undefeated individuals.

There are two vital distinctions that Milgrim describes between *Anthem* and similar works: (i) Rand identifies scientific and technological progress as incompatible with the loss of individual freedom, to an extent that others do not; and (ii) Rand identifies the individual as *inherently* good (conceptually) and the collective as inherently bad, while others merely posit certain forms of collectivism as deleterious. Milgrim suggests that *Anthem* stands alone among these works in having a happy ending, as it were—the ultimate triumph of the individual over the totalitarian collective, the suggestion of the imminent defeat of the collective. (However, some commentators have suggested that the placement of "The Principles of Newspeak" as an appendix to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* indicates the eventual overthrow of the totalitarian system of Big Brother.)<sup>105</sup> Milgrim does not discuss *Fahrenheit 451*; when we add it to the mix, we see perhaps another hopeful conclusion to a mid-twentieth-century portrait of future dystopia. The climax of Bradbury's novel could hardly be called a triumphant victory, rather more an expression of a belief that perseverance and memory will one day result in the rebirth of a civilisation of the mind. In Bradbury's novel, the protagonist, Montag, exchanges a vacuous, technologically advanced, totalitarian collective for a collective based on the intellect, on freedom, and on a connection to the natural world. However, individualism as a moral concept, in the absolute Randian sense, is not in play. After he joins the collective of those who preserve books in their minds, Montag is told by Granger,

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<sup>102</sup> Milgrim, "Anthem in the Context of Related Literary Works," in *Essays on Ayn Rand's "Anthem,"* ed. Mayhew, 153.

<sup>103</sup> Rand, *We the Living*, 446.

<sup>104</sup> Milgrim, "Anthem in the Context of Related Literary Works," in *Essays on Ayn Rand's "Anthem,"* ed. Mayhew, 153.

<sup>105</sup> The placement, after the novel proper, of a scholarly document on the inner workings of the Oceanian regime, written in the past tense, could indicate that the regime has ceased to exist and has become an object of historical study. See, for example, Robert Paul Resch, "Utopia, Dystopia, and the Middle Class in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*," *boundary 2*, vol. 24, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 158, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/303755>. Thomas Pynchon makes a similar point in his foreword to the 2003 centennial edition of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, published by Plume.

the nominal leader: “You’re not important. You’re not anything. Some day the load we’re carrying with us may help someone.”<sup>106</sup> In the effort to preserve knowledge for future generations, the individual is only a vessel, without a right as such to his own life on his own terms. This is the only way out of dystopia offered in *Fahrenheit 451*.

For Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan, the “dystopian imagination”—dystopian fiction—functions as, “a prophetic vehicle, the canary in the cage, for writers with an ethical and political concern for warning us of terrible sociopolitical tendencies that could, if continued, turn our contemporary world into the iron cages portrayed in the realm of utopia’s underside.”<sup>107</sup> The grip of totalitarian governments in the early to mid-twentieth century influenced the writing of all of the above examples of dystopian science fiction. *We* is usually interpreted as a thinly veiled attack on the Soviet system; hence, it has “the distinction of being the first novel banned by the Glavlit (Chief Administration for Literary Affairs), established in 1922.”<sup>108</sup> Orwell and Bradbury both cite fascism and Soviet Communism in explaining the origins of their works.<sup>109</sup> Critics have been commenting on the connection between *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and the USSR since the earliest reviews.<sup>110</sup> *Brave New World* was published before the Nazis came to power. The direct influence of Communism, however, is evidenced not only by the planned structure of society in the novel, but in the very names of the citizens of Utopia, as it is called—Bernard Marx, Polly Trotsky, Sarojini Engels, *Lenina*. It would be folly to consider *Anthem* without an acknowledgement of Rand’s own background growing up under totalitarianism.

All of these novels are also more generally about dilemmas for humanity as a whole, about where the future is headed, what it will look like. And *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, *Brave New World*, *Fahrenheit 451*, and *Anthem*, are explicitly and implicitly about developments in Anglo-American culture. This is the grand tradition of science fiction: a relevance that goes

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<sup>106</sup> Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451* (London: HarperVoyager, 2008), 209.

<sup>107</sup> Baccolini and Moylan, “Dystopia and Histories,” in *Dark Horizons*, ed. Baccolini and Moylan, 1–2.

<sup>108</sup> Gary Kern, “Introduction: The Ultimate Anti-Utopia,” in *Zamyatin’s “We”: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Kern (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1998), 9, quoted in Milgrim, “*Anthem* in the Context of Related Literary Works,” in *Essays on Ayn Rand’s “Anthem,”* ed. Mayhew, 137.

<sup>109</sup> Bradbury writes in his afterword to *Fahrenheit 451*: “What caused my inspiration? [...] There was Hitler torching books in Germany in 1934, rumours of Stalin and his match-people and tinderboxes.” Orwell wrote: “My recent novel [*Nineteen Eighty-Four*] is *not* intended as an attack on socialism or on the British Labor Party (of which I am a supporter) but as a show-up of the perversions to which a centralized economy is liable and which have already been partly realized in Communism and fascism.” Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*, 221; George Orwell, quoted in Martin Gardner, review of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, by Orwell, *Ethics* 60, no. 2 (January 1950): 145, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2378852> (emphasis in original).

<sup>110</sup> See, for example, the following reviews of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: Marjorie B. Snyder, “Conjuring Up Tomorrow,” *Scientific Monthly* 69, no. 3 (September 1949): 207, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/19687>; Frank H. Underhill, “Airstrip One—1950,” *International Journal* 5, no. 1 (Winter 1949–50): 61, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40197659>; Martin Gardner, *Ethics* 60, no. 2 (January 1950): 144, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2378852>.



beyond the source of inspiration. Rand's 1946 foreword to *Anthem* discusses contemporary world and Western turns towards collectivism. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is set in a future England, not a future Russia; *Fahrenheit 451* in a future America. The truly terrifying aspect of *Brave New World* is that none of the poles of twentieth-century praxis provides a way out: the capitalism of Henry Ford, the Communism of Karl Marx, the psychoanalytic understanding of Sigmund Freud, science and religion, all meet in a horrifying posthuman vista. I don't discuss posthumanism yet; that comes later in the thesis. But I will flag the fact that, in addition to being an archetype of dystopian fiction, *Brave New World* provides one of the archetypal images of posthumanity: the erasure of individuality through genetic engineering. Francis Fukuyama begins his monograph on the dangers of biotechnology, *Our Posthuman Future*, with a discussion of *Brave New World*, and how the breeding of Alphas, Betas, Gammas, Epsilons, and Deltas means "there is no such thing as the human race any longer," because "human nature has been altered." Huxley's genetically engineered humans fit into roles in a rigidly hierarchical, technologically advanced worldwide state. Such beings "no longer struggle, aspire, love, feel pain, make difficult moral choices, have families, or do any of the things that we traditionally associate with being human."<sup>111</sup>

*Brave New World*, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and *Fahrenheit 451*, all to varying extents draw on Soviet Russia. At the same time, each in turn carries a "message" for the West. Therefore, it is interesting to consider these novels in relation to Ayn Rand, who, in her own formulation, came from the Soviet Union, and wrote about it, in order to deliver a message to the West. In 1934 Rand wrote to Jean Wick, her agent for *We the Living*: "[T]he conditions I have depicted [in the novel] are true. I have lived them. No one has ever come out of Soviet Russia to tell it to the world. That was my job."<sup>112</sup> I have excluded *We* from the analysis below, to keep the focus on Anglo-American culture, which Rand valorised far more than anything which came out of the Russia of her lifetime. Rather than look at these works in relation to *Anthem*, however, I want to take one step back, and consider how Huxley's, Orwell's, and Bradbury's portraits of totalitarianism compare to and contrast with *We the Living*, which in 1936 became the first work about Soviet Russia to be published by a Russian in English.<sup>113</sup>

*We the Living* is not a work of science fiction; on the contrary, though she would undoubtedly hate the designation, it is Rand's most traditional novel in the "naturalistic" sense. Neither *Anthem* nor *Atlas* is set in a known year; *We the Living* is grounded in historical time and place: Russia after the Bolshevik Revolution, in the first half of the 1920s. (*The Fountainhead* is also set in a particular period—America in the 1920s and 1930s—but the

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<sup>111</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution* (London: Profile Books, 2002), 6. Emphasis in original.

<sup>112</sup> Rand, letter to Jean Wick, October 27, 1934, in *Letters*, 18. Emphasis in original.

<sup>113</sup> Heller, *World She Made*, 91.

specifics of history are less important to its theme.) Rand's first novel is the one most explicitly based on real events: her own life before she emigrated. Rand described the book as her "intellectual" autobiography.<sup>114</sup> While it is about life in Soviet Russia, it is also about contemporary America and the totalitarian tendency in every time and place: "It is a story about Dictatorship, any dictatorship, anywhere, at any time, whether it be Soviet Russia, Nazi Germany, or—which this novel might do its share in helping to prevent—a socialist America," Rand writes in her 1959 foreword.<sup>115</sup> *Brave New World*, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, *Fahrenheit 451*, and *We the Living*—despite their differing styles and the differing politics of the authors—are part of an economy of texts which situate themselves in opposition to the totalitarian political systems of the mid-twentieth century. What we can thus demonstrate is that *We the Living* shares with *Anthem* and these other works, a delineation of the deleterious effects of totalitarian states on the individual mind. The mind of the individual cannot flourish in the social environments depicted, which I term performative-conformative societies: societies in which *one's conformity to the system must be performed*. In comparing Rand's most "naturalistic" work to examples of dystopian science fiction, we can see how, even when presented in non-SF form, her concepts of the ideal individual and the un-ideal society feed into a science-fictional imagination for Objectivism. We can see, too, how literary dystopias of the era relied on a "Randian" view of the Soviet Union as a menace to the individual mind. I also bring in evidence from *The Fountainhead* below, Rand's only other novel which is not science fiction. Like *We the Living*, *The Fountainhead* does not conform to the definition of SF given above: it does not feature fictional (speculated) technology as a plot device, nor is it set in a speculated moment in techno-scientific time.

### **Performative Societies and the Reality of the Individual**

In *We the Living*, *Brave New World*, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and *Fahrenheit 451*, the primary unit of human value is the individual mind. The mind is what it is to be human. This is in line, it must be said, with most of Western philosophical and hence political and economic thought. The individual *mind* is also the primary unit of human value in libertarian-posthumanist reality, as will be explored in the next chapter. The opposing factor to the individual mind, in each of the above novels, is some form of collective will. In Orwell, Winston seeks a life of privacy in which he can think and write; the Inner Party seeks to keep him from this, as its will to power means its members regulate all thought and action. Winston tells us that in

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<sup>114</sup> Rand, foreword to *We the Living*, ix.

<sup>115</sup> Rand, foreword to *We the Living*, vii. Interestingly, *We the Living* was made into an unauthorized, six-hour, two-part film in Rome in 1942, a version quickly banned by Mussolini, on account of its politics; Rand felt this fact proved her point that Communism and fascism were two sides of the same totalitarian coin. Heller, *World She Made*, 207. The movie is now available on DVD, and has an official website: <http://www.wethelivingmovie.com/>.



Oceania, “[n]othing” is one’s own, “except the few cubic centimetres inside your skull.”<sup>116</sup> And the Party even (especially) seeks to occupy individuals’ brains. In Bradbury, Montag wishes to read and to develop himself intellectually, activities which are illegal and for which he is pursued by the state’s agents. Bernard, Helmholtz, and John in *Brave New World* variously want privacy, intellectual stimulation, and exclusivity in sexual partnerships—another assertion of individual will. For this two of them are sent to live on an island and one finds himself so out of sync with society that suicide becomes the answer. Helmholtz and John bond over their mutual view of art: that it should express deeper meanings about man’s existence. But, as World Controller Mustapha Mond informs them, if a society’s interest is in total social stability, high art, which questions the nature and purpose of life, must be banned.<sup>117</sup> In Rand, Kira dreams of engineering according to her own designs, not those mandated by the state. She dies trying to escape from a collective that will never let her advance.

*Privacy* is important to each of the “individuals” in the four works. Winston wants to be out of the telescreen’s ever-watchful eye. Montag thinks there are too many people in the world, such that nobody really knows anyone else.<sup>118</sup> He also wants to escape from the television, which his wife watches with such constancy that it has lulled her into a deadened state. Bernard intensely dislikes crowds, except during the brief period when his rescue of the Savage makes him the centre of attention. Helmholtz writes poems “about being alone,” though such things are heretical.<sup>119</sup> Kira is the consummate loner; even as a child she wanted to play by herself, not with others (Rand is probably the only author in whose work refusing to play with a disabled relative is presented as a positive childhood trait).<sup>120</sup> The collective in each of these novels sees individuals being alone, individuals who wish to be alone, as an existential threat. The collective requires members of society to be under its observation, to perform roles that demonstrate conformity to the collective will.

In order to define what constitutes a performative–conformative society, let us first turn to the idea of performativity, and to theories which explain its importance. After this, we can show how the performative–conformative fits with the various fictional portraits of totalitarianism, and consequently explain how these ideas relate back to a science-fictional imagination as it relates to Rand.

“Performativity” is a concept with a long theoretical tradition, bound up with the nature of language and its relationship to reality. J. L. Austin first described the difference between constative and what he called “performative” language in 1955. The statement “I do”

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<sup>116</sup> George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1984), 27.

<sup>117</sup> Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (London: Grenada, 1979), 177.

<sup>118</sup> Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*, 25.

<sup>119</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 146.

<sup>120</sup> Rand, *We the Living*, 36.

by the bride or groom at a wedding is different from a statement such as “It is raining outside.” “I do” does not simply describe reality, as the other statement does, it in fact *enacts* or creates the reality of the marriage bond; it is thus a performative utterance.<sup>121</sup> Erving Goffman described the ways in which daily life is a performance: we prepare (rehearse) for events and then “perform” in them with others; we behave according to learned social conventions, which we re-enact in our daily lives. We are not even necessarily conscious that we are “performing” for a social audience. Goffman summarises: “All the world is not, of course, a stage, but the crucial ways in which it isn’t are not easy to specify.”<sup>122</sup> Goffman’s analysis facilitates Richard Schechner’s definition of performance as “restored behaviour”—behaviour that is brought forth having been learned.<sup>123</sup> The notion of gender as performative is articulated by Judith Butler. Girls are taught at a young age to behave differently from boys, and they re-enact this difference throughout their lives; this performance of difference *is* what gender is, for Butler: “gender is an identity [...] instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*. [...] [T]he *appearance of substance* is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief.”<sup>124</sup> Butler’s formulation is indebted to de Beauvoir: “one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one.”<sup>125</sup>

We can surely accept, with Goffman, Butler, and Schechner, that certain behaviour in human societies is learned and then re-enacted by the members of those societies. This seems obvious. We should not accept, however, the ultimate implication of modern theories of performativity. That is, that there is no such thing as human nature; that human beings are mere constructs of their particular environments. The denial of human nature often goes hand in glove with a postmodern denial of objective reality, a belief that even if there is a physical reality outside of us, we can never know what it is, since our perceptions are mediated through both our cultural heritage and human frailty. As Steven Pinker points out, however, “just because the world we know is a construct of our brain, that does not mean it is an *arbitrary* construct—a phantasm created by expectations or the social context.” We are products of evolution, and “[o]ur perceptual systems are designed to register aspects of the external world that were important to our survival, like the sizes, shapes, and materials of objects.” To deny

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<sup>121</sup> James Loxley, *Performativity* (London: Routledge, 2007), 7–8.

<sup>122</sup> Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1959), 72.

<sup>123</sup> Richard Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 35–37.

<sup>124</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 191–92. *Gender Trouble* was originally published in 1990. Emphases in original.

<sup>125</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, quoted in Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 10.



the existence of objective reality, is to deny what is known about the complexity of the brain, which is in turn to deny the existence of human nature.<sup>126</sup>

The notion of objective reality has come under sustained attack in recent decades, not only from postmodernists and poststructuralists, but from quantum physics. It is understood that at the quantum level, reality is not material or physical unto itself; rather, the universe consists of potentialities which are made “material” by a mind perceiving them. This leads Anton Zeilinger, for one, to refer to “the obviously wrong notion of a reality independent of us.”<sup>127</sup> This insight, while profound, has little bearing on everyday practical reality as lived by human beings. The laws of gravity still apply. We still have genetic makeups which at least in part determine our fates—anyone born with a hereditary disease can attest to that. We may have to modify our understanding of “objective” or “physical” reality, but such a thing clearly exists, in both the practical and ultimate sense. The wall may not be “solid stuff” at the quantum level, but it will hurt when you kick it.<sup>128</sup>

Rand’s work accepts that human structures, including language, help determine a social condition. The absence of the word “I” from the language is a crucial means of oppression in *Anthem*. The loss of subjectivity is the loss of individuality, which equals the regression of humanity. Of course, Rand absolutely refutes the notion that human beings create what reality is; for her, reality is fixed outside of us, and knowable through investigation. The core tenet of Objectivism is that reality is objective.

For our purposes, in defining what constitutes a performative–conformative society, it is necessary to re-suggest a difference between behaviour which is “performance” and behaviour which is “real”; “performative” is applied here as an adjective of performance in this context. “Performance” is a word with a specifically social suggestion. To “perform” is to behave with a consciousness of other people observing. If one were out to dinner with a well-to-do crowd, one might not belch at the table, even if one felt like doing so, because it would be bad manners. But an individual who did not care about how he was perceived by others—a Randian hero, perhaps—would belch without a second thought; he would have no

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<sup>126</sup> Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 199, 197–98. Emphasis in original.

<sup>127</sup> Anton Zeilinger, “Why the Quantum? ‘It’ from ‘Bit’? A Participatory Universe? Three Far-reaching Challenges from John Archibald Wheeler and their Relation to Experiment,” in *Science and Ultimate Reality: Quantum Theory, Cosmology, and Complexity*, ed. John D. Barrow, Paul C. Davies, and Charles L. Harper Jr. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 201.

<sup>128</sup> In any event, the philosophical debate regarding the implications for realism of quantum mechanics is far from resolved. Like many philosophical debates, perhaps, it is unresolvable. Christopher Norris insists that “the case for realism with regard to quantum mechanics is a great deal stronger than is commonly thought by proponents of the received view.” Norris, *Quantum Theory and the Flight from Realism: Philosophical Responses to Quantum Mechanics* (London: Routledge, 2000), 6.

reason not to. “Performing”—i.e. behaving with a cognisance of others’ observance—in order to “conform” to social norms, is of no interest to the real individual, the Randian hero.

It must also be said that conscious bodily performance is in no way necessarily an indicator of mental reality. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Winston stands before his telescreen. He knows he must behave/perform a certain way in order not to face the wrath of the observing agents of Big Brother, but the reality of his thoughts/feelings is entirely different. During morning exercise, Winston “mechanically shot his arms back and forth, wearing on his face the look of grim enjoyment which was considered proper during the Physical Jerks.” Meanwhile, he is in physical pain and his thoughts turn to the continuousness of war. Winston is performing one thing while in fact being another: *performing* “grim enjoyment” of exercises mandated by the Party, while *being* immersed in thoughts about the “frightening” nature of Party control.<sup>129</sup>

I use “performative” to suggest active/conscious behaviour which is concerned with the responses of other people—and in particular, behaviour enacted in order to conform to social expectations. Hence, groups which require such behaviour from individuals can be said to be performative—conformative societies. Performance is required by the person in order to conform to the behavioural norms of the collective. Performative—conformative societies exist on a continuum from performance-as-conformity to “natural,” i.e. unconscious, conformity. The goal of totalitarianism is always to reach a state of “natural” conformity from the populace.

Society in *The Fountainhead* offers a simple example of a performative—conformative model, which is no doubt also applicable to professional life in many real-world contexts. In order to succeed in conventional terms, within the world of the novel as it is initially set up, one must behave and work in such a way as fits the prevailing conventions. And so, Peter Keating is the character who gets ahead—because he is good at hobnobbing with those in the hierarchy of the architectural profession, because he kowtows to their desire for neoclassical design. All this is a performance, in order to conform to conventional wisdom, in order to get ahead. As we learn by the end of the book, in choosing to perform this identity in order to achieve success on normative terms, Keating has betrayed his “real” self—the self who wanted to be an artist—and it is now too late to go back; he becomes a broken shell with no centre because he never attended to his centre, opting for fakery instead. Keating sacrificed the real to the performative—conformative. Howard Roark, of course, would never do such a thing, and that is why he stands as the counter-example to Keating, the moral example Rand wishes to promote. Roark is all too real—that is, all too genuine—an individual to care about social conventions; his goal is to be what he is, not perform for others’ praise. Because this is fiction,

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<sup>129</sup> Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 32–34.



Rand is able to form in *The Fountainhead* a morality tale in which supposedly genuine individuality is ultimately rewarded, while social conformity (for its own sake) is ultimately punished. We open with the two characters—Keating, the embodiment of the performative–conformative, and Roark, the real individual—at polar opposite points: Keating has just graduated top of his class, while Roark has been expelled from the same class. True to character, eschewing social convention, Roark goes swimming naked in a lake; Keating is networking with the professorial bigwigs. From here, *The Fountainhead* illustrates the rise of Roark and the fall of Keating. Roark suffers for his individuality: not getting commissions, taking a job breaking rocks in a quarry, because he won't design the way others want him to; he faces damnation and poverty. At the climax, he faces prison, for dynamiting a social housing complex he himself had designed, because his designs were not realised in their original form. But, because he has remained true to his principles, true to *himself*, he is able to explain to a jury in genuine terms why he did what he did—he is acquitted, given a commission that will ensure his fame, and he marries the woman he loves. Roark ends the story as he began: alone against nature, facing the ocean and the sky as he once faced the sky's reflection in that lake. His character is unchanged; he has just won the battle on his terms. By contrast, Keating has become a gibbering wreck, as year by year he came closer to the realisation that he never sought his own happiness, merely others' approval.

*The Fountainhead*, then, offers a “soft” example of a performative–conformative society—an example consistent with Western democracy, and the tendency of professional bodies and social groups to favour “groupthink” and conformity to norms over genuine originality. A purer, or harder, example is found in *We the Living*'s depiction of Soviet conditions. Here, the individual must actively perform in such a way so as to demonstrate allegiance to the state—i.e., the collective. The stakes are not simply professional success and lack thereof, but life and death. An indication of the stakes is given early in the novel; an indication of the fate that awaits those who do not perform conformity. Arriving in Petrograd, Kira spots a sign in the train station, presumably posted by the authorities: “LONG LIVE THE DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT! WHO IS NOT WITH US—IS AGAINST US!”<sup>130</sup> Kira and Leo are unable to enact the kind of behaviour that would allow them to get ahead in this society. Leo protests having to teach for free in his spare time and is fired from his job on account of this “bourgeois attitude.”<sup>131</sup> As Rand puts it at one point, “Leo never smiled when he knew he should.”<sup>132</sup> This is the essence of the binary between performance to win over others and the real self. Leo tells us later: “I'm not going to *act* like trash *for the*

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<sup>130</sup> Rand, *We the Living*, 21.

<sup>131</sup> Rand, *We the Living*, 155–56.

<sup>132</sup> Rand, *We the Living*, 158.

*benefit of* [Communist] trash.”<sup>133</sup> The expectations of others mean nothing to Leo; he lives for himself. It is this inability to perform an identity other than his true self, and the lack of reward for selves such as his in Soviet society, that causes Leo’s destructive spiral, as he drinks and prostitutes himself into oblivion. At least, this is the suggestion of the novel. Towards the end, as she is shot attempting to flee Russia, Kira calls out to “the Leo that could have been, that would have been had he lived [...] across the border.”<sup>134</sup> As in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*—as, by all accounts, in the actual USSR—the behaviour of the populace, whether or not citizens are performing in the correct “proletarian” manner, is monitored by the state’s agents, who may perhaps be one’s own family members. Kira’s cousin Victor is lauded for exposing his sister Irina’s role in an anti-Soviet underground. He tells his superiors that “the family is an institution of the past, which should not be considered when judging a member’s loyalty to our great Collective.”<sup>135</sup> Not smiling when you should, could in fact put you on the wrong side of the state, which could put you in your grave.

Kira, like Leo, is unconcerned with interests other than her own—but she is a better performer, and is for a while able to perform an identity other than her real individualistic self, in order to protect the things that are important to her. In this respect, she is not unlike Julia in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*; though, Julia is by far a more natural performer. Julia is such a good performer, that Winston initially sees her as an emblem of the Party’s worst puritanical leanings, when in fact she is something of a hedonist. In *We the Living*, Kira’s “acts” include going to Marxist club meetings, as she knows she must do this to keep her job; she lies about her political opinions to try and keep her place at the Technological Institute in Petrograd.<sup>136</sup> Kira’s ultimate performance is faking a love for the Communist Andrei in order to get money from him that will help her pay for treatment to save Leo from tuberculosis. She does admire Andrei in certain ways, as he is not a typical Soviet, and comes round to being an enemy of the regime, but Kira’s true love is Leo. Leo cannot officially get into a sanatorium with his TB because he is not a member of the ruling class—that is, not a member of the Communist Party.

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* it is the members of the Inner Party, the ruling elite, who must perform conformity to doctrine most completely. Orwell points out that English Socialism’s goal of world conquest is “believed in most firmly” by those Inner Party members “who know it to be impossible.”<sup>137</sup> The forgetting or burying of the truth is a requirement for survival. The same is the case among the ruling elite in *We the Living*. At a hearing to determine whether Kira can remain a student at the Technological Institute, Andrei must

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<sup>133</sup> Rand, *We the Living*, 283. My emphasis.

<sup>134</sup> Rand, *We the Living*, 445.

<sup>135</sup> Rand, *We the Living*, 325.

<sup>136</sup> Rand, *We the Living*, 194, 200.

<sup>137</sup> Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 184.



deeply bury his true feelings for her: “His face did not move. His eyes were cold, steady, impersonal, as if he had never seen Kira before. And suddenly [Kira] felt an inexplicable pity for him, for that immobility and what it hid, although he showed not the slightest sign of what it hid.”<sup>138</sup>

One cannot escape in *We the Living* the impression of “what might have been,” were Kira, Andrei, and Leo not citizens of a state which demanded the performance of conformity to the collective, and instead part of a society which allowed individual selves to flourish. A vital aspect of state control is the state’s monopoly on individuals’ time. One not only has to work all day, but attend Marxist clubs and the like at night, and be constantly aware—because one’s knowledge is constantly tested—of the latest “workers’ news” from across the Soviet Union.<sup>139</sup> So much time is taken up with activities needed to stay alive, that no one can think of the future, of a life beyond subsistence, of realising dreams.<sup>140</sup> These activities are not simply the business of working to feed oneself and one’s family, but, as I’ve indicated, *the performance of conformity*. There is no physical/material reason for having to give all one’s time outside of work over to Marxist discussion clubs, it is purely an aspect of state monitoring and control; those who do not engage in social activities are beyond the collective’s eye, and hence a potential threat.

The enforced subsistence of Soviet rule compels an individual preoccupation with present time. The business of survival—of perpetuating the present, we might say—takes up so much of one’s life that accomplishing a future in which life is better than at present becomes near-impossible. Nevertheless, the best (according to Randian parameters) in this society are possessed of a future-sense. Leo is built for a world of triumph and high technology, and so it is “strange” to see him standing at the Primus; it is “as if he were a being from many centuries away.”<sup>141</sup> At the end of the novel, fleeing Russia, Kira looks upwards and imagines worlds among the stars—places of hope, perhaps, new frontiers—as she battles to find a place for herself in this world.<sup>142</sup> Throughout *We the Living*, Communists speak of building a new future, but their future is regression for the real individuals—future as progress, in technology, knowledge, and individual accomplishment, lies elsewhere.

### **Towards Conformity**

*We the Living* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* open with scenes of dilapidation: the Soviet vista. In Orwell, Winston enters the rundown apartment block which houses his flat, and “gritty dust” enters with him; the hallway smells of “boiled cabbage and old rag mats”; a poster of Big

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<sup>138</sup> Rand, *We the Living*, 200.

<sup>139</sup> Rand, *We the Living*, 313.

<sup>140</sup> Rand, *We the Living*, 311.

<sup>141</sup> Rand, *We the Living*, 318.

<sup>142</sup> Rand, *We the Living*, 439.

Brother is tacked to the wall; and the elevator does not work.<sup>143</sup> In Rand, as heroine Kira arrives in Petrograd by train, the smell is of “carbolic acid”; a faded banner and “a huge fringe of cobwebs” hang above the railway station clock; dust coats the passengers; and the journey has taken so long because of disorganised railroads.<sup>144</sup>

The significant common elements between the first novel about Soviet Russia by a Russian in English, and the novel by an English writer which—at least according to Soviet dissidents—best portrayed Soviet Russia as it was, should not be overlooked. It is arguable that, among science-fictional dystopias, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* comes closest to depicting a specifically Soviet condition, closer even than Rand’s *Anthem*.

Describing Orwell as “Russia’s Tocqueville,” Vladimir Shlapentokh writes of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*’s popularity as an underground text within Soviet Russia. For Russians, “Orwell was not talking about the distant future but their own lives and suffering”; among the Russian intelligentsia, Orwell had “godlike status.”<sup>145</sup> A dissident intellectual himself, Shlapentokh describes the sense of revelation he experienced upon encountering the book, that someone in the West truly understood what was happening within Soviet borders. He details how the operations found in Orwell would have been easily recognised by Soviet citizens as the modus operandi of their own state: the rewriting of history, the constraints on individuals’ behaviour, the necessity of concealing one’s real feelings. It is the case, however, that Rand had detailed all these operations of the Soviet state in *We the Living*, thirteen years before *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was first published. The constraints on behaviour and the necessity of hiding true feelings, I have already delineated. Indeed, there are many moments in *We the Living* which call to mind the Orwellian concept of doublethink, which Orwell defines as a form of “reality control” involving victory “over your own memory.”<sup>146</sup> At a Party meeting in Leningrad, the gathered are told: “We don’t need the obstinate, unbending Communist of iron. The new Communist is of rubber! Idealism, comrades, is a good thing in its proper amount. Too much of it is like too much of a good old wine: one’s liable to lose one’s head. Let this be a warning to any of Trotsky’s secret sympathizers who might still remain within the Party: no past services, no past record will save them from the axe of the next Party purge.”<sup>147</sup> The past does not matter: you must 100 percent agree with the Party line now. In another pre-echo of Orwell, Andrei is told by a Party operative after the same meeting: “I know—we know—what you think. But what I’d like you to answer is this: why do you think you are entitled to

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<sup>143</sup> Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 7.

<sup>144</sup> Rand, *We the Living*, 11–12.

<sup>145</sup> Vladimir Shlapentokh, “George Orwell: Russia’s Tocqueville,” in *George Orwell: Into the Twenty-first Century*, ed. Thomas Cushman and John Rodden (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2004), 269, 272.

<sup>146</sup> Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 34.

<sup>147</sup> Rand, *We the Living*, 295–96.



your own thoughts?”<sup>148</sup> The best example in Rand of the Soviet rewriting of history, comes with Andrei’s state funeral, at which he is eulogised as an emblem of the Communist future, despite the fact that one of his last acts before killing himself was to publically condemn the whole Soviet system and its underlying ideals.

In theme as well as content, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *We the Living* share distinct commonalities. Most emotionally potent among these, perhaps, is the desire of the protagonists for an “out,” their yearning for a better life beyond totalitarianism. Winston’s simple joy in contemplating a glass paperweight that seems from an era before Party rule, is matched by Andrei’s declaration that outside of Soviet Russia, people “consider it reason enough to do things” simply “because they’re lovely.”<sup>149</sup> To untether a life of beauty and happiness from a life of mere survival, is the goal of the protagonists in both texts.

In terms of a fictional world’s operation as a performative–conformative society, the technological infrastructure Orwell depicts obviously moves the possibilities for this up a level from what Rand can depict if she is to stay true to the temporal reality of 1920s Russia. The telescreens in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* take the performative aspect of conformity to new heights, as in the example with Winston cited above: before his telescreen, he is performing one thing while being another. This is the performative state that the presence of the telescreens requires. There is much talk today about how Orwell was only a few decades off in his predictions of the all-pervasive surveillance state. However, the vital facet of political control in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is not the presence of all-pervasive surveillance equipment per se, but the way in which such infrastructure is used to demand and enforce particular behaviour, behaviour which conforms to a state-mandated norm.

In *Fahrenheit 451*, the drug-like nature of the televisual entertainment evidently inculcates a will to conformity in the majority of the populace. The real individuals, independent thinkers such as Montag, must perform conformity by hiding such aspects of their personalities as a love of books. In *Brave New World*, conformative behaviour is inculcated through genetic manipulation and years of “sleep teaching.” Yet, even this is not a guarantee that one won’t have to *perform* certain behaviour in order to achieve social acceptance. Bernard is thought of as strange because he spends a lot of time alone and allegedly does not like Obstacle Golf. When Lenina expresses weariness with the promiscuous life, her friend Fanny remarks that “one’s got to play the game”—i.e. behave promiscuously even in denial of one’s true feelings, in order to keep up social appearances: “After all, everyone belongs to everyone else.”<sup>150</sup> Despite this remnant of the performative in the performative–conformative, however, the citizens of the *Brave New World* are so conditioned that most of the time they

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<sup>148</sup> Rand, *We the Living*, 297.

<sup>149</sup> Rand, *We the Living*, 342.

<sup>150</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 45–46.

“can’t help behaving as they ought to behave,” in the words of World Controller Mustapha Mond.<sup>151</sup>

In moving from *The Fountainhead*, through *We the Living*, to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, *Fahrenheit 451*, and *Brave New World*, we can chart a continuum of performative–conformative behaviour, from performance-as-conformity to apparent unconscious conformity. The former turns ever-more towards the latter as the government’s control of the economy and the populace increases, as we move from democratic mixed economy to dictatorship to posthuman dystopia.

For Rand, there is a nihilism in those who only perform for others, who behave in order to seek social approval or acceptance; they deny their individuality and therefore their real selves. This is why Hank Rearden can accuse those whose philosophy holds sway in the dystopia of *Atlas Shrugged*, of perpetuating life as “a senseless, degrading performance.” Galt goes further, condemning current existence as “a giant pretense, an act you all perform for one another.”<sup>152</sup> If performance is not real—merely a construction which at best can represent the real—then the nihilism of those who live “second-hand lives” in Randian fiction is that there is no “reality” behind the performance.<sup>153</sup> They live in order to receive certain responses from others, and know nothing of what they want for themselves. Randian heroes are all “real” in the sense that a defining trait is that they essentially care nothing for the opinions of others, therefore “performance” to meet others’ expectations never enters their consciousness or behaviour. If they do act performatively, as in the case of Kira, it is to achieve specific self-interested aims, others’ reactions *as such* don’t concern them: they want what they want for themselves. Certain protagonists in Huxley, Orwell, and Bradbury, while far from being on a Randian scale, are “real” individuals in the sense that their “true” selves come into conflict with the nature of the collective; they are set apart—genuine, real individuals in performative–conformative societies.

Rand’s endorsement of NASA, discussed at the outset of this chapter, is her own tacit acknowledgement that government could be a vehicle for goals she admired. Mostly life is not a zero-sum game: the free market or no space travel. And so, while I argue against Rand’s general absolutism, her fiction does make a useful point regarding free thinking’s being necessary for both technological progress and artistic excellence. Free thinking, in this case, is that not conditioned by the need to fit societal norms. The type of mind that’s fit for the stars, is that of the real individual, that found in the Rand-style iconoclastic hero, and to a lesser extent the individual-protagonists of other mid-twentieth-century dystopian fiction. Performative–conformative groups work to counteract the individual will to discovery. If we

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<sup>151</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 177.

<sup>152</sup> Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 564, 1052.

<sup>153</sup> “Second-hand Lives” was the draft title for *The Fountainhead*. Heller, *World She Made*, 109.



are constantly to be concerned with how we are perceived, we can never look outwards and upwards to the stars; if we are always focused on winning over other men and women, we will not be focused on the facts of the physical universe and how we can improve ourselves, as individuals, through better understanding them.

### **Restricted Technology / Restricted Desires**

For Ayn Rand, “*restricted* technology” was “a contradiction in terms”: the will to invent new technologies was a vital aspect of the human drive for constant betterment, for an ever-better life with greater comforts, pleasures, discoveries, and opportunities. Indeed, the will to technology is part of the survival instinct, for Rand: “The demand to ‘restrict’ technology is the demand to *restrict* man’s mind. It is nature—i.e., reality—that makes both these goals impossible to achieve. Technology can be destroyed, and the mind can be paralyzed, but neither can be restricted. Whenever and wherever such restrictions are attempted, it is the mind—not the state—that withers away.”<sup>154</sup> When technological development is curtailed, this is by mandate of the state/collective, and by definition an imposition on the individual creative mind. This is the state of play in each of the four novels under discussion here. In the societies of each of these novels, whether they are apparently technologically poor or technologically advanced, technology *is* restricted, and its restriction functions as an aspect of state control. Thus, while the world of *We the Living* with its Primuses, rundown trains, and saccharine tablets may seem entirely alien to the *Brave New World*, with its Feelies, personal helicopters, and *soma*, in fact, technology fulfils the same function in each novel. It is a means of restricting the individual, either through lack of comfort or an overabundance of state-provided comfort. In each case, the state controls economic production and therefore controls the technologies and the resources that are available to the public. Each citizen is allocated what the state considers appropriate for his or her needs—be it a saccharine tablet, or an intelligence quotient—and only limited deviation from the mean is possible.

Shlapentokh observes that, “the military industry was the single sector of the economy that progressed in Soviet society.”<sup>155</sup> This point is supported in historical studies such as that of David Reynolds. Technology had clearly stalled if not regressed in the Soviet Union. As the state assumed a monopoly on technological production, the only way to work towards technological advancement was to do so towards state-mandated goals, such as weaponry.<sup>156</sup> Prefiguring *Anthem*, an early scene in *We the Living* has Kira and her family huddled around

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<sup>154</sup> Rand, “The Anti-Industrial Revolution,” *Return of the Primitive*, 273, 285. Emphases in original.

<sup>155</sup> Shlapentokh, “Russia’s Tocqueville,” in *George Orwell*, ed. Cushman and Rodden, 276.

<sup>156</sup> David Reynolds, “Science, Technology, and the Cold War,” in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, vol. 3, ed. Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 378, 380–81.

a candle—"that Soviet light"—in the house where they once had electricity.<sup>157</sup> While the worlds of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, *Brave New World*, and *Fahrenheit 451* are technologically advanced in certain ways—with telescreens, genetic engineering, and robot attack dogs—it's clear from each text that the powers-that-be have assumed a Soviet-style monopoly on technology, and wish to stall further development, to freeze history, bar minor tinkering around the edges. Mustapha Mond rejects a scientific paper for publication, and orders its author to be monitored, because the paper's theories on biology could undermine the current political system.<sup>158</sup> The three super-states in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* never make major technological advancements over one another; indeed, it would not ultimately be in their interests to do so, since this would disrupt the status quo and threaten the balance by which the elites in each super-state maintain power.<sup>159</sup> In the reality of *Fahrenheit 451*, not only are people not allowed to read books, they are not allowed to invent things which could not be put to the service of the state. Faber the inventor in fact produces technology which could undermine state rule—an in-ear radio that Montag uses as part of a nascent rebellion—and of course Faber is at pains to keep this technology secret.

Technology, then, in each of the four novels, constitutes an agent of conformity. What enables it to function as such is that its use and development has been co-opted by the state. This is the direct opposite of Rand's vision of technology-as-liberator, in which individuals are allowed develop technologies as they see fit, for their own fulfilment. Performative-conformative groups restrict technology in order to enforce homogeneity. Hence, the role of technology in the societies of each of the novels reinforces their status as performative-conformative societies.

The restriction of technology, the state's monopoly on it, is connected with state management of personal pleasure. The technological advancements of the *Brave New World* enable no pleasure that is not controlled. The drug *soma* provides "Christianity without tears," while compulsory Violent Passion Surrogate treatments ensure all pity and fear is purged.<sup>160</sup> The drive for utilitarianism in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *We the Living* is not limited to technology; where love comes in too, "use to society" is paramount. In both novels, the powers-that-be are engaged in a broad philosophical and practical attempt to stamp out individual love, pleasure, and desire, the "transgression of preference" as Rand calls it in *Anthem*—to make all love the love of the state, the love of the collective. So, in Orwell, the Party seeks to do away entirely with the orgasm, to turn sex into merely the duty to perpetuate the collective.<sup>161</sup> Huxley's statement that in Utopia "everyone belongs to everyone else," is

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<sup>157</sup> Rand, *We the Living*, 46–47.

<sup>158</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 143.

<sup>159</sup> Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 163–69.

<sup>160</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 190, 192.

<sup>161</sup> Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 230.



mirrored by the statement in *We the Living* that individual love is a bourgeois prejudice.<sup>162</sup> Shlapentokh testifies to the ways in which the Soviet system sought to undermine individual love or drive that instinct towards leader-love.<sup>163</sup> Ultimately, while the *Brave New World* promotes promiscuity and the Soviet style promotes procreation as a duty to the state, the goal is the same: the elimination of individual desire and preference. As Richard Posner points out, “any kind of intimacy is a potential threat to a totalitarian society.”<sup>164</sup> Loving one above all others is a socially disruptive force. Thus, under totalitarianism, sex must become another avenue of conformity to state/collective will. How that avenue is constituted will depend on the specific moral mores of the specific society, but the ultimate purpose will be the same. In *Fahrenheit 451*, a similar force is at play. The melange the culture has become levels things such that strong individual attachment becomes near-impossible, and so marriages are matters of convenience in which husbands “come and go,” rather than matters of love and desire.<sup>165</sup> This “levelling” is intentional and explicit government policy, enacted through the banning of books, a cradle-to-grave diet of meaningless entertainment, and a prohibition on privacy and original individual thought. As in *Brave New World*, the supposed purpose of enforced conformity is the happiness of the great majority: there are no geniuses to be jealous of.<sup>166</sup>

As a society turns, then, from a mixed economy towards ever-more state economic control, ever-more control over individuals’ behaviour is required, in order to perpetuate the state itself as-it-is. In terms of individual behaviour, we move from a requirement to perform in order to gain social acceptance, to conformity enforced through state pervasion of social structures and relations.

*We the Living*’s Soviet state overpowers individual lives by demanding performative–conformative behaviour to a collective norm. *The Fountainhead*, too, is a novel about individuals versus collectives. Its central message is to be true to one’s core self in defiance of the pressures of society; this sets up social forces as an antagonist to real individuals, and ensures that the tension between the individual and the collective is at the thematic heart of the book—it is a morality tale in which the independent thinker, Roark, wins out over the arch people-pleaser, Keating. In its preoccupation with the proper relationship between the individual and the state/collective, even the half of Rand’s fiction which is not science fiction, shares the thematic concerns of twentieth-century dystopian SF—as we have seen.

Rand’s fiction, as in Marilyn Butler’s formulation of science fiction, retains its licence to be didactic because it is firstly about the nature of whole societies—in Rand’s case, the

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<sup>162</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 42; Rand, *We the Living*, 163.

<sup>163</sup> Shlapentokh, “Russia’s Tocqueville,” in *George Orwell*, ed. Cushman and Rodden, 278.

<sup>164</sup> Posner, “Orwell versus Huxley,” in *On “Nineteen Eighty-Four,”* ed. Gleason, Goldsmith, and Nussbaum., 203.

<sup>165</sup> Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*, 122.

<sup>166</sup> Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*, 77–78.

relationship between the individual and the collective—and only secondly about characters qua characters; that is, only secondly about the individual psychology of characters, rather than their role as players in an individual/collective dichotomy. This overarching philosophical concern links Rand's work with the concerns of the science fiction genre, especially in its incarnation as dystopian fiction, and—along with Rand's promotion of technology and futurity—exemplifies the science-fictional imagination of Objectivism.



## The Posthuman and the Objectivist

“Rand hated ordinary people with a vengeance,” writes Anne C. Heller in her *Time* review of *Ideal*, a previously unpublished Ayn Rand novel, dating from the 1930s, released in July 2015. The novel’s story centres around an actress falsely accused of murder, who seeks help in turn from several ardent fans, each of whom has written to her claiming that she represents their highest ideal. The fans include a farmer, an artist, a preacher, and a brilliant loner. The theme relates to how we betray what we claim are our highest ideals. Not surprisingly, the loner is the tale’s hero. Heller ended her balanced 2009 biography of Rand on a soaring note, praising the author’s “extraordinary achievement” which has lasted far beyond the collapse of the Soviet Union “she so abhorred”; that achievement “still informs our thoughts about the competing values of liberty and safety, individual rights and the social contract, ownership and equity, and the sometimes flickering light of freedom.”<sup>1</sup> The sentiment at the end of the review could not be more different. Heller relates the lonesome fanatic in *Ideal*, Johnnie Dawes, to Danny Renahan, Rand’s version of murderer William Hickman referred to in chapter one; these characters, of course, were early templates for her later perfect men, Howard Roark and John Galt. Heller in turn compares Dawes to Dylann Roof, a white supremacist charged with shooting dead nine people at a church in Charleston, South Carolina in June 2015: “As Rand’s biographer, I came to appreciate certain things about her [...]. Yet reading *Ideal* today, I can’t help glimpsing Charleston gunman Dylann Roof and his lethal ilk in the undoubting fanaticism of Johnnie Dawes, and I am appalled.”<sup>2</sup>

The judgement is harsh. Rand wrote books, at the end of the day. She found youthful inspiration in a real-life murderer, certainly; her ideology is forcefully and often uncomfortably put, throughout all her work. But, as her career progressed, she was also very careful to avoid any suggestions that she would condone ideologically motivated violence. This was how the Communists had treated her family, after all. Jennifer Burns notes, appropriately, that Rand is hardly the only American writer to be fascinated by the criminal mind: “Rand’s willingness to celebrate a criminal anticipates the work of later writers such as Norman Mailer, Truman Capote, and Cormac McCarthy, who all to some degree portray the murderer as a person of unusual strength, sensitivity, or both. A more immediate parallel for

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<sup>1</sup> Anne C. Heller, *Ayn Rand and the World She Made* (New York: Anchor Books, 2009), 410.

<sup>2</sup> Anne C. Heller, “Ayn Rand’s Deadly, Unpublished Novel Illuminates—and Unsettles,” review of *Ideal*, by Ayn Rand, *Time*, July 20, 2015, 46.

Rand would have been a book she knew well, Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, a serious novel of ideas built around the psychology of a murderer."<sup>3</sup>

Heller's other statement has more validity: Rand hated ordinary people. It is true that Rand valorised titanic achievement, worshipped heroes and greatness, and saw greatness in industry leaders and innovators. There is a place for those of us who are not titans. To live a moral life, one does not have to be capable of greatness; rather, "[t]he moral man is [...] the one who independently exercises such intelligence as he has."<sup>4</sup> That said, under Objectivism, the moral man must worship greatness, look up towards it. Rand's is a conception of the human world, of capitalism, in line with how historian Fernand Braudel describes this economic system; it is about activities "carried on at the summit, or that are striving for the summit."<sup>5</sup>

Is this not the philosophy our economies and societies are run by today? We are told that we must all work better, smarter, harder, be entrepreneurial and innovative in whatever field we are in; competition and meritocracy are the goal in all things. In the words of economist Tyler Cowen, *Average is Over*. With technology capable of doing more and more of the work previously done by humans, the social contract has changed; we are continuing towards a society in which "people are expected to fend for themselves much more than they do now."<sup>6</sup> Rand influenced some of the major policymakers in America in the last two decades of the twentieth century; she helped set the agenda for globalised high capitalism. Beyond simple influence, however, Rand put her finger on much of what has come to drive the modern world. Rand "cherished Wall Street": the centre of the rise of what Gary Weiss calls the philosophy of "market supremacy."<sup>7</sup> Now, the locus of capitalism has shifted from Wall Street to Silicon Valley—where Rand is still to be found, as seen in chapter two, and discussed further below.

It is not so big a leap from better, smarter, faster *Homo oeconomicus* to ... I want to be something more than human altogether. The founder of Facebook imagines telepathy is on the way, "send[ing] full rich thoughts to each other directly using technology."<sup>8</sup> Google's chief engineer thinks that we will be able to fully upload our minds into computers and replace our

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<sup>3</sup> Jennifer Burns, *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 301n32.

<sup>4</sup> Ayn Rand, *Journals of Ayn Rand*, ed. David Harriman (New York: Plume, 1999), 281.

<sup>5</sup> Fernand Braudel, quoted in Fredric Cheyette, "Fernand Braudel: A Biography of Capitalism," *Wilson Quarterly* 4, no. 2 (Spring 1980): 107, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40255803>.

<sup>6</sup> Tyler Cowen, *Average is Over: Powering America Beyond the Age of the Great Stagnation* (New York: Dutton, 2013), Kindle edition, 229.

<sup>7</sup> Gary Weiss, *Ayn Rand Nation: The Hidden Struggle for America's Soul* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2013), 15, 3.

<sup>8</sup> This would be the ultimate Facebook status update: "You'll just be able to think of something [...] and your friends will immediately be able to experience it too." Mark Zuckerberg, quoted in "Verbatim," *Time*, July 20, 2015, 14.



body parts with superior machines by the end of the century.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, there are many embedded in the technology sector who believe that our future is as immortal “posthuman” beings. In real ways, Rand rejected human society completely. Her heroes can be, as Heller posits, “most alive” when “[a]lone and in command of a powerful machine.”<sup>10</sup> It is not a stretch to suggest that Randian images of power through technology aided among Silicon Valley–types a sense of their own heroism, as they sat alone with their machines, the devices that have remade the human world: computers. As we know, many entrepreneurs and knowledge-economy workers responsible for the rise of Silicon Valley were Rand readers and admirers; they helped set the tone of the culture. Silicon Valley is, among its facets, the womb of the posthuman.<sup>11</sup> It gave birth to factions such as Extropianism, and the technologies of a future posthumanity are those emerging from this place and its equivalents.

It is impossible to talk about the posthuman without talking about the present. The question of the posthuman arises because of our present period in history, because of where we are, as human beings, in the course of our development as a species—economically and spiritually. By “economically and spiritually,” I mean in the broadest senses.

The Age of Romanticism is rightly seen as the spur of modern man. The Age of Enlightenment lay the foundations for setting free the critical faculties of the individual, by recalibrating humanity’s capacity for science and the acquisition of knowledge. But it was Romanticism—with its emphasis on individual empowerment and individual expression—which brought about, as Isaiah Berlin puts it, “the greatest single shift in the consciousness of the West that has occurred.”<sup>12</sup> The long nineteenth century saw not only the flourishing of Romanticism, but the Industrial Revolution; it saw not only the birth of modern liberal democracy and the growth of the United States, but the rise of empire.<sup>13</sup> Since then, empire, commerce, and technology have connected the world like never before; in other words, human beings—for better and worse, by force and by choice—have connected themselves to each other to an unprecedented extent.

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<sup>9</sup> Victoria Woollaston, “We’ll Be Uploading Our Entire Minds to Computers by 2045 and Our Bodies Will Be Replaced by Machines within 90 Years, Google Expert Claims,” *Daily Mail*, June 19, 2013, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-2344398/Google-futurist-claims-uploading-entire-MINDS-computers-2045-bodies-replaced-machines-90-years.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Heller, *World She Made*, 212.

<sup>11</sup> Zoltan Istvan describes Silicon Valley as “the womb of transhumanism.” Istvan, *The Transhumanist Wager* (Futurity Imagine Media, 2013), Kindle edition, 289.

<sup>12</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism: The A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, 1965; The National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC*, ed. Henry Hardy (London: Pimlico, 2000), 1.

<sup>13</sup> Historian Eric Hobsbawm traces a “long nineteenth century,” beginning in about 1776 with “the Franco–American political revolution” and the British Industrial Revolution, and ending in 1914 with the outbreak of World War I. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875–1914* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 8–9.

We live in an age of high technology.<sup>14</sup> The engines of today's economy depend upon technology; it is integrated into our daily lives as it never has been. Posthumanism is not the same as having high technology, but it is a way of thought that emerges out of and depends upon technological development. To read the newspapers today is to know that we live in interesting times, technologically. Robots are now integral to industries from car-making to medicine. A restaurant recently opened in Harbin, China where all the servers are robots.<sup>15</sup> Predictions are being made that sex with robots will be commonplace by the middle of the century.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, 3D printing is revolutionising manufacturing. With devices not unlike rudimentary *Star Trek* replicators, everything from necklaces to cancer tumours have been manufactured.<sup>17</sup> On the more day-to-day level, so many of us now carry powerful computers with us on our person at all times: in the form of the smartphone, a device which has become ubiquitous quicker than any technology in memory. Even in the poorest parts of the world, the mobile phone is a possession which is central to how people live.<sup>18</sup> The next wave is imagined to be wearable technology, like Google Glass. It is only a short jump to bringing digital technology within the body itself, getting it under our skins.

On that note, prosthetic devices are improving constantly. The US Food and Drug Administration has approved an artificial retina—"a sheet of electrodes" implanted into the

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<sup>14</sup> I was alerted to many of the articles on technology in the following three paragraphs through Andrew Sullivan's *The Dish*, <http://dish.andrewsullivan.com/>.

<sup>15</sup> Etan Smallman, "Microchip Suey, Sir?," *Metro Herald*, June 27, 2012, 3.

<sup>16</sup> "Researchers at Victoria University of Wellington in New Zealand wrote in the journal *Futures* that sex robots are not only possible, but could be better than real-life prostitutes. [...] [Michelle] Mars and [Ian] Yeoman suggest that robot prostitutes could be preferable to human prostitutes because 'commercial sex robots would be free of disease and would reduce the human trafficking.' [...] But *The Week* asks a very important question, 'Hold on. Isn't having sex with a robot inescapably creepy?' Not so, say Mars and Yeoman. By 2050, robotic prostitu[t]jes wouldn't be considered creepy, but a luxury." Taylor Bigler, "Robotic Prostitutes Could Replace Human Prostitutes by 2050," *Daily Caller*, March 5, 2012, <http://dailycaller.com/2012/05/03/robotic-prostitutes-could-replace-human-prostitutes-by-2050/>.

<sup>17</sup> Allison P. Davis, "Can 3-D Printing Make Stylish, High-End Jewelry an Everyday Luxury?," *Daily Intelligencer* (blog), *New York*, December 5, 2014, <http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2014/12/the-future-of-jewelry-in-3-d.html>; Jason Koebler, "Researchers 3D Printed Cancerous Tumors to Learn How to Kill Them," *Motherboard*, April 14, 2014, <http://motherboard.vice.com/read/researchers-3d-printed-cancerous-tumors-to-learn-how-to-kill-them>. "While not exactly a *Star Trek* replicator, a 3-D printer uses computer images to make—or 'print'—three-dimensional objects. People can create anything from plastic knickknacks, toys and jewelry to a prosthetic webbed foot for a crippled duck, a human kidney and even a gun." "Separating Facts from Fiction about 3-D Printing," *Knowledge@Wharton*, July 31, 2013, <http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article.cfm?articleid=3322>.

<sup>18</sup> The smartphone has reached 50+ percent penetration of US households in a shorter timeframe than technologies including the telephone, the radio, colour television, the microwave, the VCR, and the Internet. Horace Dediu, "When Will Smartphones Reach Saturation in the US?," Asymco, April 11, 2012, <http://www.asymco.com/2012/04/11/when-will-smartphones-reach-saturation-in-the-us/>. "Researchers in Kenya [...] find that people will skip a meal [...] so that they can keep their phone in credit [...] in the hope of making a call or sending an SMS that would enable them to put more food on the table later." Notably, "[a]most half of those surveyed were using internet-enabled smart or 'feature' phones." "Vital for the Poor," *Economist*, November 10–16, 2012, 38.



eye—which recreates the world in light patterns; it can give a formerly blind person a certain sense of sight.<sup>19</sup> A robotic leg has been created that connects directly to the user’s brain, operating by thought alone.<sup>20</sup> Body parts aren’t the only machines that are becoming more human. Sentient technology does not exist, but artificial intelligence is getting more powerful all the time—in the sense of machines and computer programmes that interact with humans, accommodating their needs and predicting their behaviour: whether it be Amazon making purchase recommendations or Netflix suggesting what you should watch. The singularity, the fabled point at which the artificial becomes the highest sentience on earth, may be some distance away, or it may never happen, but it is an event whose possibility looms large in the imagined future.

Biotechnology and genetics are also undergoing a persistent (r)evolution. An increasing proportion of the world’s food supply is coming from organisms altered by science, GMOs. In the lab, it’s possible to grow human noses and vaginas.<sup>21</sup> Genetic screening of embryos and foetuses is already used to detect diseases. The editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Medical Ethics*, Oxford professor Julian Savulescu, argues that there is a “moral obligation to select ethically better children” by “screening out personality flaws, such as potential alcoholism, psychopathy and disposition to violence”: “Surely trying to ensure that your children have the best, or a good enough, opportunity for a great life is responsible parenting?”<sup>22</sup> Matthew Liao, director of New York University’s Bioethics Program, has suggested engineering shorter humans who are disinclined to eat meat, as a solution to climate change; their carbon footprint would be far less than current humanity’s.<sup>23</sup> Drafting ethical frameworks for the future of human development has never been a more urgent project.

The legacies of the Enlightenment, of Romanticism, and of humanist philosophy, have left us with an understanding of autonomous selfhood: the liberal individual subject—the laissez-faire actor, confined within the limits of body and mind, but able to define him- or herself by his or her own choices, in the context of the world, in the context of a connected

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<sup>19</sup> Channon Hodge and Pam Belluck, “The FDA Approves a Bionic Eye,” *New York Times*, February 14, 2013, [http://www.nytimes.com/video/science/100000002039719/the-fda-approves-a-bionic-eye.html?smid=pl-share&utm\\_source=taboola](http://www.nytimes.com/video/science/100000002039719/the-fda-approves-a-bionic-eye.html?smid=pl-share&utm_source=taboola).

<sup>20</sup> Erika Check Hayden, “Rewired Nerves Control Robotic Leg,” *Nature*, September 30, 2013, <http://www.nature.com/news/rewired-nerves-control-robotic-leg-1.13818>.

<sup>21</sup> Olivia Solon, “Lab-grown Cartilage used to Reconstruct Nostrils,” *Wired*, April 11, 2014, <http://www.wired.co.uk/news/archive/2014-04/11/nose-cartilage>; Arielle Duhaime-Ross, “Lab-grown Vaginas Have Been Successfully Implanted in Four Women,” *Verge*, April 10, 2014, <http://www.theverge.com/2014/4/10/5601420/lab-grown-vaginas-successfully-implanted-four-women>.

<sup>22</sup> Julian Savulescu, quoted in Richard Alleyne, “Genetically Engineering ‘Ethical’ Babies is a Moral Obligation, Says Oxford Professor,” *Daily Telegraph*, August 16, 2012, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/science/science-news/9480372/Genetically-engineering-ethical-babies-is-a-moral-obligation-says-Oxford-professor.html>.

<sup>23</sup> Frank Swain, “Climate Change: Could We Engineer Greener Humans?,” *BBC*, July 16, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20140716-the-most-extreme-way-to-be-green>.

economy. The “posthuman” has profound implications for this subject—but exactly what implications depend on whose posthumanism we are talking about.

As a philosophy of life that emerges out of the possibilities of currently developed and developing technology, posthumanism can perhaps allow us to “improve” our bodies, privileging the choices of the mind in the definition of selfhood. If the choice of the mind is to live without illness, to have three arms instead of two to accomplish more tasks, or to have a brain with greater capacity for memory, then we can make a mechanical body, or a genetically engineered body, to achieve these things. This conception of the posthuman is continuous with liberal subjectivity.

Or—posthumanism may allow us to escape liberal subjectivity entirely. Divisions of gender and race can be eliminated by technological bodies; questions of choice and of individual agency can be negated by making every being a node in a network subject to automatic control, rather than individual selves acting in their own interests. In Huxley’s *Brave New World*, people are produced for roles in the system: they are not meant to be beings unto themselves. Gender and race still exist, but this is because the existence of these divisions serves the system; society’s genetic engineering could presumably breed them out if such breeding fitted its purposes.

At the heart of the posthuman question, then, is an issue of divergence: posthumanism is either an extension of the liberal individual subject as it has come to be defined since the Age of Romanticism, or a flight from that subject. Clearly, the posthuman has implications for the human. The notion of what is essentially human is thus integral to posthumanism, and should be addressed before we go any further. It is of course not a solvable puzzle; here can only be offered perspectives which relate to my theme.

### **The Human, the Innovator**

Ayn Rand viewed evolution as a theory, the truth or otherwise of which did not affect her philosophy.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, on the “nature” or “nurture” question, Rand is a denier, in effect, of both genetics and environment as determinants of human identity. Man’s own conscious choices are what determine who he is, for her: “Man is born with an emotional mechanism, just as he is born with a cognitive mechanism; but, at birth, *both* are ‘tabula rasa.’ It is man’s cognitive faculty, his mind, that determines the *content* of both.”<sup>25</sup> That said, Rand clearly believed

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<sup>24</sup> “I am not a student of the theory of evolution and, therefore, I am neither its supporter nor its opponent.” Ayn Rand, “The Missing Link,” in *Philosophy: Who Needs It* (New York: Signet, 2005), 45. For a good discussion of this topic, see Neil Parille, “Ayn Rand and Evolution,” *Rebirth of Reason*, [http://rebirthofreason.com/Articles/Parille/Ayn\\_Rand\\_and\\_Evolution.shtml](http://rebirthofreason.com/Articles/Parille/Ayn_Rand_and_Evolution.shtml) (accessed November 14, 2014).

<sup>25</sup> Ayn Rand, “The Objectivist Ethics,” in *The Virtue of Selfishness: A New Concept of Egoism* (New York: Signet, 2005), 30. Emphases in original.



individuals were born with different levels of potential, different sizes of blank slates on which to write their futures. There is something in-born that helps make a hero. Eddie Willers, Dagny's competent assistant in *Atlas Shrugged*, is "an average person with good premises but no special gifts."<sup>26</sup> An Eddie can live up to his potential by making good choices, but he can never have the potential of a Dagny.

The poverty of the nature versus nurture debate is that it suggests there can be a winner: our identities are formed by either one or the other. It is a division shackled to political agendas. To many on the right side of the political spectrum—including Rand—our individual potentials are unequally divided at birth, and our fates are tied to these.<sup>27</sup> To many on the left, we are determined by the place of our bodies in the social structure. Recent findings in neuroscience highlight the fallacy of the purely "nurture" perspective—but at the same time support the self-evident truth that identity is shaped in part by interactions with the world. Simply put, humans have genes which determine identity, but how an overall genetic makeup is expressed and activated depends on external factors. In evolutionary history, what appears to differentiate *Homo sapiens* from our nearest relatives, such as Neanderthals, is the innately innovative aspect of our minds: our unique ability to shape the world to our needs:

"The early modern humans did something very unusual: They won every time," says Ajit Varki, a professor of cellular and molecular medicine at the University of California San Diego and co-director of a research centre devoted to exploring and explaining the origins of what makes us human.

Dr. Varki thinks he knows why humans were so successful. While they may have been physically similar to their cousins, behaviourally they were light years apart. He suspects that somehow a small group of individuals in Africa developed a suite of gene variations that enabled something like the nuanced social communication that humans practice today. [...]

If so, says Dr. Varki, the children of mating between humans and Neanderthals may have been physically healthy but "cognitively sterile." The disadvantage of losing the uniquely human genetic package, even to a small degree, would have conveyed a tremendous cost in terms of social interaction and reduced their chances of reproductive success.

[...]. Archeologists have found some signs that Neanderthals cared for the injured and were expert tool-makers, but they do not appear to have been especially innovative.

There is a marked explosion in the kinds of artifacts that show up once modern humans are on the scene. In fact, long before written history, our ancestors were essentially creating the paleo equivalents of Athens [and] Florence.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Heller, *World She Made*, 345.

<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, while accepting that people may have different levels of overall potential, Rand denied that individuals were born with "natural talents," as such—innate tendencies towards one field or another. One's particular applications were all chosen, for her. She maintained, for example, that she could have been a successful musician or economist, rather than a writer, had she chosen either field. Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 219.

<sup>28</sup> Ivan Semeniuk, "The Hunt for Humanity," *Globe and Mail*, June 21, 2014, F7.

The findings of Varki and others support the definition of humanity given by Kenan Malik in his essay “What Is It to Be Human? What Science Can and Cannot Tell Us,” a clarion call for a return to philosophical humanism. For Malik, humans are unique on earth because we are both objects of nature and subjects who can transcend it:

In the six million years since the human and chimpanzee lines first diverged on either side of Africa’s Great Rift Valley, the behaviour and lifestyles of chimpanzees have barely changed. Human behaviour and lifestyles clearly have. [...]

[...] [A]round 40,000 years ago [...] humans embarked on an astonishing voyage of artistic, technological and cultural discovery. The paleo-anthropologist Paul Mellor has eloquently dubbed the moment of transformation “the human revolution.” It was a revolution that gave rise to the first cave paintings, the beginnings of ritual behaviour, the use of new sophisticated tools such as fishhooks, harpoons and bows and arrows, and the first intimations of long distance trade. But the most extraordinary change was that innovation became a hallmark of humanity for the first time. Humans began learning from previous generations, improving upon their work, and establishing a momentum to human life and culture that has taken us from cave art to quantum physics and the conquest of space. It is this capacity for constant innovation that distinguishes humans from all other animals.<sup>29</sup>

The Industrial Revolution, the birth of the assembly line and mass production, have been blamed for the mechanisation of man—turning him into an automaton who is alienated from his own labour because he does not enjoy its fruits, as Marx would have it. However, the origins of posthuman conception are really to be found in the twentieth century: when our tools, our machines, become complex enough that we begin to think of ourselves as *like the machines*, in a positive way. Malik, writing in 2001, refers to “[r]ecent advances” in “neuroscience, genetics, and artificial intelligence” which have made it possible to think of humans as “sophisticated machines.”<sup>30</sup> Rand joined in the twentieth-century vogue for technological explanations of the human. Among the author’s least celebrated theories is her contribution to psychology. She writes, contra Freud, that the human subconscious is “like a computer—more complex a computer than men can build,” which is programmed by the conscious mind. Rand also describes ethics as the “technology” of philosophy; that is, the tools for putting one’s philosophy into practice.<sup>31</sup>

Chapters one and two of this thesis considered the context of Rand’s life and her fiction as things in and of themselves, and introduced the wide sphere of her influence. Chapter three looked at Rand in relation to science fiction and notions of utopia and dystopia; this formed an important prelude—necessary background thoughts—to a direct discussion of Rand and the posthuman. Having explicated these elements, therefore, it is now possible to move

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<sup>29</sup> Kenan Malik, “What Is It to Be Human? What Science Can and Cannot Tell Us,” in Malik et al., *What Is It to Be Human? What Science Can and Cannot Tell Us* (London: Academy of Ideas, 2001), 15.

<sup>30</sup> Malik, “What Is It to Be Human?,” *What Is It to Be Human?*, 12.

<sup>31</sup> Rand, “Philosophy: Who Needs It,” *Philosophy: Who Needs It*, 5–6, 3.



on to that direct discussion. My dissertation's introduction offered an overture, a preview of the idea that Rand and posthumanism could be considered together. This chapter goes well beyond that, delineating the different aspects of posthumanism and stating which are most relevant to Rand.

This fourth chapter of my thesis continues below by expositing Rand's views on technology, which lead towards posthuman conception. Two elements of her worldview, as found in the fiction, are interpreted: (i) *man conquering nature is good, it is a true expression of man's unique value*; and (ii) *technology is an extension of human will and as such has immense value*.

The chapter continues further by examining definitions of the posthuman. I look at the two major strains of posthumanist thought, as identified by Jeanine Thweatt-Bates, in relation to Rand: Donna Haraway's cyborg, and the transhuman. While Haraway's cyborg is a socialist construction, a reverie of communion between the human and non-human, the transhuman—a theory and a practice put forward by Max More, Nick Bostrom, and many others—hews to the legacy of individualism. I briefly demonstrate Rand's difference from the Harawayan concept of the posthuman, in order to subsequently highlight—at some length—her similarities with the opposing strain. One of the major debates within the transhumanist movement is over the applicability of Nietzsche's Superman to the transhuman. Since the *Übermensch* also informs the Ayn Rand hero, a fruitful discussion can be had on this point. Rand's veneration of the productive individual and of capitalism strongly impacted the earliest organised transhumanist movement, the Extropians. Thus, Rand's work possesses philosophical similarities with transhumanism, and she has also directly influenced transhumanist thought: both of these actualities are discussed. The transhuman holds far more commonalities with Rand than other forms of posthumanity. This should be evident by the end of the chapter.

### **Gods of Chrome**

The chief literary friendship of Rand's mid-career years was with the libertarian political philosopher Isabel Paterson. Paterson contributed significantly to the course of Rand's writing, as both Heller and Burns illuminate in their biographies. According to Heller, Paterson was Rand's "first and only living mentor."<sup>32</sup> Paterson can be credited with turning Rand from a mere supporter of individualism into to a full-fledged encourager of capitalism. When Rand first met Paterson in the early 1940s, Stephen Cox summarises, she "was emphatically an individualist, but she knew relatively little about American traditions of individualism and was not well educated in political and economic theory. She eagerly

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<sup>32</sup> Heller, *World She Made*, 136.

embraced Paterson's ideas, dissenting only—though very definitely—from her belief in God.”<sup>33</sup> Paterson's major account of capitalism, *The God of the Machine*, was published in the same year as *The Fountainhead*, and greatly affected Rand's intellectual development. Rand called the monograph “the first complete statement of the philosophy of individualism as a political and economic system. It is the basic document of capitalism.”<sup>34</sup> Heller elaborates: “Much of what Rand learned from Paterson would find its way into [...] the last two-thirds of *The Fountainhead*, and, in the use of energy circuits, motors, and power as metaphors for human action and achievement, into the structural motifs of *Atlas Shrugged*.”<sup>35</sup>

*The God of the Machine* uses an elaborate technological metaphor to explain how capitalism creates wealth via a “long circuit” of exchange between individuals across distances. “A man can think and work effectively only for himself,” Paterson writes.<sup>36</sup> It is by means of self-interested trade that the “long circuit” of an ultimately global capitalist economy comes into being, and the general welfare is lifted. The “god of the machine,” then, is the individual human mind: that which thinks up technology, and thereby enables the production of goods and services that in turn creates wealth. This view of an atomistic, intellect-driven economy is the same as Rand's—as we can see by turning again to a passage from Howard Roark quoted in chapter one: “We inherit the products of the thought of other men. We inherit the wheel. We make a cart. The cart becomes an automobile. The automobile becomes an airplane. But all through the process what we receive from others is only the end product of their thinking. The moving force is the creative faculty which takes the product as material, uses it and originates the next step. This creative faculty cannot be given or received, shared or borrowed. It belongs to single, individual men.”<sup>37</sup> *The Fountainhead* is primarily focused on individualism as a moral goal to be achieved within oneself; *Atlas Shrugged* expands this into a portrayal of individualism as the source of all wealth and progress, on a societal scale. The latter novel, then, is a portrait in fiction of what Paterson argues in the nonfiction of *The God of the Machine*. Cox goes so far as to say, “*Atlas Shrugged* can be considered a Patersonian novel, in roughly the same sense in which *Les Misérables* can be called a Christian novel.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Stephen Cox, “*Atlas* and ‘The Bible’: Rand's Debt to Isabel Paterson,” in *Ayn Rand's “Atlas Shrugged”: A Philosophical and Literary Companion*, ed. Edward W. Younkins (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007), 352.

<sup>34</sup> Ayn Rand, letter to Earle H. Balch, November 28, 1943, in *Letters of Ayn Rand*, ed. Michael S. Berliner (New York: Plume, 1997), 102.

<sup>35</sup> Heller, *World She Made*, 135–36.

<sup>36</sup> Isabel Paterson, *The God of the Machine* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1943; republished by the Mises Institute, November 6, 2007, [http://mises.org/sites/default/files/God%20of%20the%20Machine\\_2.pdf](http://mises.org/sites/default/files/God%20of%20the%20Machine_2.pdf)), 31, 17.

<sup>37</sup> Ayn Rand, *The Fountainhead* (London: Penguin Books, 2007), 711.

<sup>38</sup> Cox, “Rand's Debt to Isabel Paterson,” in *Ayn Rand's “Atlas Shrugged,”* ed. Younkins, 351.



The metaphor at the heart of *The God of the Machine* is emblematic of a twentieth-century concern with technological explanations of human behaviour. This is an understandable trend: as machines become more sophisticated, man sees himself in the image of his creation. Rand too makes use of technological metaphors for the human. For her, as for Paterson, however, the machine is lifeless without the agency of the individual human mind. Man's emotional mechanism is a computer "programmed" by his consciousness.<sup>39</sup> The mind is the "god" of the machine. During his speech outlining Objectivism at the end of *Atlas*, John Galt says that views of the human which privilege the body or the soul in the religious sense, but not the reasoning mind, turn man into, "the passively ravaged victim of a battle between a robot and a dictaphone."<sup>40</sup> The autonomy of the self in Western thought cannot allow independent agency to machines—this is one of the fears underlying the posthuman.<sup>41</sup>

It is interesting that Rand references Descartes as being responsible for a foundational error in modern thought: "I think, therefore I am." Galt reverses this assertion, declaring, "I am, therefore I'll think." For Rand, existence is self-evident; as the central Objectivist maxim goes: *existence exists*.<sup>42</sup> Thinking is not, therefore, the first proof of existence; thinking is a choice needed in order to survive. Unlike other animals, man has no talons or fangs to help him acquire food; he must make tools to hunt or plant crops, both of which require thought.<sup>43</sup> The Randian view of the human is "man the innovator" writ large. The human as innovator, the mind as the sine qua non of innovation: these are placed at the heart of the Randian worldview. Man extends his capabilities in the physical world by using his brain to create. Tools, be they of the simplest variety or the most sophisticated machines, are extensions and expansions of human ability. We could say, then, that—in the Randian view—any human invention or production is a manifestation in physical reality of human essence: the creative capacity of the mind. Man reshapes the physical world according to his mental image. Hovels, skyscrapers, spears, aeroplanes: these are all facets of a world that is human.

The formulation of tools, devices, and technology as extensions of the will, is evident from Rand's first professional work. In her 1932 film treatment *Red Pawn*, as heroic rogue Communist Karayev flees the prison on Stastnoy Island, the boat he is driving is described as an extension of his mental will, used to conquer nature in the form of the sea:

The waves rose slowly and hung over the boat, motionless as walls of black, polished glass. Then a white foam burst on their crest, as if a cork had popped, and roared down

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<sup>39</sup> Rand, "The Objectivist Ethics," *Virtue of Selfishness*, 30.

<sup>40</sup> Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* (London: Penguin Books, 2007), 1027.

<sup>41</sup> Jeanine Thweatt-Bates, *Cyborg Selves: A Theological Anthropology of the Posthuman* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), 18; N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetic, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 4.

<sup>42</sup> Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 1058, 1015.

<sup>43</sup> Rand, *The Fountainhead*, 712.

the black side, throwing the boat up, out of the water, to land on the boiling crest of another mountain.

Commandant Karayev bent over the wheel. His eyebrows made one straight line across his face and his eyes held one straight line ahead, into the darkness. He could feel every muscle of his body tensed to the will of his fingers that clutched the wheel like claws. The loops of his bent arms worked as the wings, as the nerves of the boat.<sup>44</sup>

The vessel—a human invention—becomes an extension of the will and thus of the body itself.

Such descriptions by Rand come to the fore in *Anthem*. When Equality 7-2521 rediscovers electricity and reinvents the lightbulb, his invention is framed as an extension of his unique self, of his mind and body—and as an exemplar of the human ability to master the natural world. The device is “a box of glass, devised to give forth the power of the sky”: “For the first time we do care about our body. For this wire is as a part of our body, as a vein torn from us, glowing with our blood. Are we proud of this thread of metal, or of our hands which made it, or is there a line to divide these two?”<sup>45</sup> (Equality has not yet learned how to say “I,” living as he does in a society where the only pronouns are plural, but when he says “we,” he means “I.”) In *The Fountainhead*, Rand states: “[M]an’s work should be a higher step, an improvement on nature.” Consequently, the glow of electricity is named “the most beautiful light on earth.”<sup>46</sup> Man, as innovator, and extender of his will over the natural order, is godlike—and properly so, for Rand.

For Rand, the individual mind is the nucleus of the world of human creation. Creation by the individual mind is what makes the human world possible. Our existence is necessarily technological, since technology is our means of survival. But creation—technology—also enables us to do more than survive against the elements. Creation, innovation, improving on what went before—living longer, travelling faster, doing what once could not be done—this is *what it means to be human*. This is one of the basic messages of Rand’s fiction. The Soviet Union stifled the individual mind and thus prevented an existence that was essentially human; as we have seen, that is the theme of *We the Living*. *Anthem*’s thesis is the centrality of the individual creator: those who innovate make the human world a human world, a world worth living in as a human being, where technologies such as electricity make life easier and grease the wheels of the pursuit of happiness. *The Fountainhead*’s setting within the architectural profession, allows a focus on a form of creation which is crucial to survival, and to the look of the human world; to our continuation as a species, and to how we choose to portray ourselves. The structures we build and elect to live in, are stories we tell about what we are as

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<sup>44</sup> Ayn Rand, *Red Pawn*, in *The Early Ayn Rand: A Selection from Her Unpublished Fiction*, rev. ed., ed. Leonard Peikoff (New York: Signet, 2005), 149.

<sup>45</sup> Ayn Rand, *Anthem* (New York: Signet, 2005), 59, 61.

<sup>46</sup> Rand, *The Fountainhead*, 700.



a species. Rand's adoration of the skyscraper comes about because of what it symbolises: man, reaching for the sky, and making a world his own. At one point in the novel, Roark departs New York by train, and looks back at the skyline: "The single shafts stood immeasurably tall, out of scale to the rest of the earth. They were of their own world, and they held up to the sky the statement of what man had conceived and made possible. [...] [M]an had come so far; he could go farther. The city on the edge of the sky held a question—and a promise."<sup>47</sup>

*Atlas Shrugged* represents the apotheosis of Rand's view of technology and futurity. The tome presents two views of civilisation. Or, perhaps, one view of civilisation—and its opposite. A society that privileges the individual mind, standing alone, equals a world of technological creation, progress, and civilisation. A society that does not do this, equals the absence of technology, and hence the absence of human life qua human life. Everywhere in the book, the mind is at the centre of a world of human technology, which makes the human world a good thing. The veneration of science and civilisation can be found in the simplest examples. Dagny Taggart, for instance, enjoying the pleasures of indoor heating and a coffee in a "slum diner." The human world is one of chrome, warmth, and light: "She glanced around her and thought, in habitual professional calculation, how wonderful it was that one could buy so much for a dime. Her eyes moved from the stainless steel cylinder of the coffee boiler to the cast-iron griddle, to the glass shelves, to the enamelled sink, to the chromium blades of a mixer. The owner was making toast. She found pleasure in watching the ingenuity of an open belt that moved slowly, carrying slices of bread past glowing electric coils."<sup>48</sup> This is also, of course, a classic 1950s American scene: from the diner setting to the idea that life is enhanced through simple, "domestic" technological conveniences.

Given that much of *Atlas*'s plot has to do with the locomotive industry, it is to be expected that the motion of trains often serves as a metaphor for civilisational progress. Rail lines cutting through forest represent man's proper relationship to nature—as its conqueror. Dagny feels an "arrogant pleasure" at their presence; rail track, "did not belong in the midst of ancient trees [...] but there it was. The two steel lines were brilliant in the sun." Rail lines epitomise the technological progress of civilisation, which is caused by heroic individuals like Dagny, Hank Rearden, and John Galt; they make life easier for all, but the average man takes them for granted: "Strings of tank cars went radiating in all directions from the Wyatt oil fields to industries in distant states. No one spoke about them. To the knowledge of the public, the tank trains moved as silently as rays and, as rays, they were noticed only when they became the light of electric lamps, the heat of furnaces, the movement of motors; but as such, they were not noticed, they were taken for granted."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Rand, *The Fountainhead*, 199.

<sup>48</sup> Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 176–77.

<sup>49</sup> Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 50, 227.

This view of the glory of technological progress is contrasted with an anti-technology mindset that Rand conflates with all her *bêtes noires*. Those who oppose technology oppose individuality, since technological creation is a manner of individual expression. Opposing technology means opposing capitalism, which means opposing progress and human happiness. In effect, those who are anti-technology are anti-human-life; they are nihilists. Views such as the following are voiced by Rand's villains—in this case, by Balph Eubank, a darling of the literary establishment: "Machines have destroyed man's humanity, taken him away from the soil, robbed him of his natural arts, killed his soul and turned him into an insensitive robot. [Dagny Taggart is] an example of it—a woman who runs a railroad, instead of practicing the beautiful craft of the handloom and bearing children."<sup>50</sup> Individuality and technology are liberators, in *Atlas*; all else has the potential for oppression.

When something new is brought into the world, some new technology, this has the descriptive force of a creation myth, in *Atlas*. The best example is the pouring of the first order of Rearden metal, Hank's powerful new alloy that will serve Dagny's rails:

[T]he first break of the liquid metal into the open came as a shocking sensation of morning. The narrow streak pouring through space had the pure white colour of sunlight. Black coils of steam were boiling upward, streaked with violent red. Fountains of sparks shot in beating spasms, as from broken arteries. The air seemed torn to rags, reflecting a raging flame that was not there, red blotches whirling and running through space, as if not to be contained [...]. But the liquid metal had no aspect of violence. It was a long white curve with the texture of satin and the friendly radiance of a smile. It flowed obediently through a spout of clay [...] it fell through twenty feet of space, down into a ladle that held two hundred tons. A flow of stars hung above the stream, leaping out of its placid smoothness, looking delicate as lace and innocent as children's sparklers.<sup>51</sup>

This passage ineluctably calls to mind Rand's joyous response to the *Apollo 11* launch: "How great is man and how safe is nature when he conquers it!"<sup>52</sup> In Rand, the man-made is superior to the natural. Innumerable writers have bestowed poetry upon the workings of nature; Rand uses a language which graces man's creation with a character of the sublime.

Rand's writing promotes heavily the advantages of technology, and the view of man as a being linked to his creation of technology. Rand's writing supports a posthuman conception, because posthumanism emerges out of the technological vista which she promotes—because her promotion of technology as intrinsic to human life, and as a means of human betterment, overlaps significantly with posthumanism.

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<sup>50</sup> Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 138.

<sup>51</sup> Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 28.

<sup>52</sup> Ayn Rand, "Apollo 11," Ayn Rand Institute, accessed May 19, 2013, [http://www.aynrand.org/site/PageServer?pagename=objectivism\\_apollo11](http://www.aynrand.org/site/PageServer?pagename=objectivism_apollo11).



## A Split Posthumanity

The human is a creature who acts in the world, a being of this earth—but *humanism* is a product of human minds, a philosophy, a way of conceptualising the human. The Renaissance and the Enlightenment fostered these ideas, and they have been carried into the modern era by philosophers, novelists, economists, men and women of innumerable origins and talents. A dictionary definition will serve us better than that of any individual author, since it is intended to capture a consensus. Humanism is “any system or mode of thought in which human interests, values, and dignity predominate”; “a variety of ethical theory and practice that emphasizes reason, scientific enquiry, and human fulfilment in the natural world and often rejects the importance of belief in God.”<sup>53</sup> I hope it is clear by this point in the thesis that Ayn Rand falls within this tradition.

Just as the posthuman is related to the human, posthumanism has a relationship with philosophical humanism—and a contested one at that. The first hurdle which must be overcome before proceeding, is the ambiguity surrounding the terms “posthuman” and “posthumanist” themselves. The words became current during the 1990s and are now used in multiple strands of philosophical discourse and assumed to have a variety of meanings. Cary Wolfe, for one, attempts to mark a distinction between the “posthuman” and “posthumanism.” The posthuman is a being that escapes the limitations of biological human embodiment. Posthumanism, as Wolfe engages it, is something entirely different: a philosophical discourse which seeks to move away from anthropocentrism, to recognise the agency and rights of animals and other non-human actors. Posthumanism in this context is a kind of anti-humanism, if humanism is understood as a philosophy of anthropocentrism; by contrast, anthropocentrism is key to the possible existence of the “posthuman” being.<sup>54</sup> However, Wolfe’s distinction is not in wide use and does not reflect the totality of the ways in which the two terms are employed.<sup>55</sup> The posthuman can be a function of posthumanism, and posthumanism that which emerges from considering the posthuman.

The confusion of terminology—or rather, the diversity of meanings—can be attributed in part to two separate paths of origin. Wolfe writes that one strain of posthumanism can be traced back to “at least” the 1960s, and work such as Foucault’s *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human* (1966). Therein, the French theorist argues that the concept of “man,” as a creature distinct and special, “is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps

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<sup>53</sup> “Humanism,” Dictionary.com, accessed November 21, 2014, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/humanism?s=t>.

<sup>54</sup> Cary Wolfe, “Introduction: What Is Posthumanism?,” in *What Is Posthumanism?*, ed. Wolfe (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), Kindle edition. It is not possible to identify page numbers in this edition.

<sup>55</sup> Thweatt-Bates, *Cyborg Selves*, 4–5.

nearing its end.”<sup>56</sup> Posthumanism also has an origin in the 1946–53 Macy conferences on cybernetics, and the invention of systems theory. Here, “figures from a range of fields [...] converged on a new theoretical model for biological, mechanical, and communicational processes that removed the human and *Homo sapiens* from any particularly privileged position in relation to matters of meaning, information, and cognition.”<sup>57</sup>

The cybernetics line is what drives N. Katherine Hayles’s understanding of the posthuman. For Hayles, posthumanism marks a philosophical shift in how we as humans live, and how we think about our lives and selves. Technology is now integrated so widely into our existence, our lifestyles depend so much upon it—and it has made such an impression on how we think about the human—that we have entered a posthuman period: a period where the self is no longer simply invested in the fact of the organic body. Whether or not technology is integrated with the body itself is incidental: “[T]he construction of the posthuman does not require the subject to be a literal cyborg. [...] [N]ew models of subjectivity emerging from such fields as cognitive science and artificial life imply that even a biologically unaltered *Homo sapiens* counts as posthuman. The defining characteristics involve the construction of subjectivity, not the presence of nonbiological components.”<sup>58</sup>

For Hayles, we are already posthuman. Others posit that we are not in a period of posthumanism—indeed, that we cannot yet know what the “posthuman” would be, since it is a form of life so radically different from humans today, still largely confined to their individual organic bodies. The futurist F. M. Esfandiary originated the term transhuman to mean “transitional human.”<sup>59</sup> The global movement in favour of “transhumanism” advocates it as a phase between the human and the posthuman: we should improve our bodies and our minds through the implantation of technology, through interfacing with machines, and/or through methods of genetic enhancement. Then, one day, truly posthuman life may exist. However, transhumanism and posthumanism are conflated in much discussion of the subject; attempts to mark this distinction are also far from universally followed. As Wolfe summarises, “this sense of posthumanism derives directly from ideals of human perfectibility, rationality, and agency inherited from renaissance humanism and the Enlightenment”—in contrast to strains that turn away from this legacy.<sup>60</sup>

There is little specific, therefore, that can be gleaned from the terms posthuman and posthumanism. Rather, they are indicative of a sensibility: that the organic human is not the highest point or the endpoint of life on earth. It is high technology which in particular has led

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<sup>56</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human*, quoted in Wolfe, “What Is Posthumanism?,” in *What Is Posthumanism?*, ed. Wolfe.

<sup>57</sup> Wolfe, “What Is Posthumanism?,” in *What Is Posthumanism?*, ed. Wolfe.

<sup>58</sup> Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 4.

<sup>59</sup> Thweatt-Bates, *Cyborg Selves*, 4.

<sup>60</sup> Wolfe, “What Is Posthumanism?,” in *What Is Posthumanism?*, ed. Wolfe.



us to this sensibility now. Wrapped up in it are a host of possible futures. Technology may enable us to take control of our own evolution, to engineer better bodies with more capabilities. Or, we may be superseded by our technology; artificial intelligence may emerge from it to threaten the very existence of the human. Or—perhaps the most utopian scenario of all—humans may form a new communion with all life on earth, as Wolfe hopes, such that “human rights” are no longer placed above the nonhuman.

One of the most enlightening books on the topic of posthumanism is Jeanine Thweatt-Bates’s 2012 study, *Cyborg Selves*. Therein, she identifies two broad, major strands in the field. The central philosophical issue of posthumanism is the posthuman’s continuity, or not, with the humanist tradition of the liberal individual subject. One strain of posthumanism aligns itself with the humanist legacy, while the other repudiates it. The latter trend begins with feminist Donna Haraway’s “A Cyborg Manifesto,” initially published in 1985 in *The Socialist Review*: “The ensuing body of literature commenting [on] and critiquing that original essay, and subsequent works by Haraway, constitute one distinct posthuman discourse, in which the hybrid embodiment of the cyborg serves as a symbol for the ontological kinship of the human with the nonhuman.” The second major strain of posthumanist thought is categorised by Thweatt-Bates as “humanism, plus.” This involves those who advocate an enhanced version of the liberal individual self, via technology: the “desirable but still theoretical possibility for shedding the problematic biological body for a virtual existence or a more durable artificial body.”<sup>61</sup>

The acceptance or rejection of what I have called above the laissez-faire actor, naturally sets the stage for two wildly different posthumanist discourses: one concerned with socialist-feminism, democratic equality, and environmentalism; the other with free-market economics, individual rights, and victory over nature. “Humanism, plus” has far more in common with the philosophy of Ayn Rand than does Haraway’s cyborg. One could say that Haraway represents nearly the perfect opposite of everything Rand believed. When I have said that Rand’s work supports posthumanist conception, it is not the Harawayan concept that I am thinking of. Haraway and her successors, however, provide the primary model of the posthuman at use within the humanities—and any concentric discussion of posthumanism cannot overlook this. It is therefore worth going back to “A Cyborg Manifesto,” in order to demonstrate its categorical difference from Rand, before moving forward. I spend just a few pages on Haraway, before discussing the alternate posthuman discourse and Rand for the remainder of the chapter.

## Gender Trouble

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<sup>61</sup> Thweatt-Bates, *Cyborg Selves*, 5.

Haraway's cyborg is a being of hitherto unachieved benevolence: a way of life disconnected from the Western legacy of oppressing women—of oppressing non-whites, the poor, and nature—in the name of Christianity, in the name of conquest, of capitalism, and of progress. "A Cyborg Manifesto" begins with a call to blasphemy—to irony and a rejection of absolutism: "Blasphemy protects one from the moral majority within, while still insisting on the need for community. [...] Irony is about contradictions that do not resolve into larger wholes, even dialectically, about the tension of holding incompatible things together because both or all are necessary and true. Irony [...] is also a rhetorical strategy and a political method, one I would like to see honoured within socialist-feminism." The cyborg, as "a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as of fiction," serves as metaphor for and embodiment of Haraway's new model of being.<sup>62</sup>

Haraway excoriates "the traditions of 'Western' science and politics—the tradition of racist, male-dominated capitalism; the tradition of progress; the tradition of the appropriation of nature as a resource for the production of culture; the tradition of reproduction of the self from the reflections of the other." She excoriates, then, so much of what Rand celebrates. For Haraway, as a socialist-feminist, the existence of gender is an originator of oppression. The division of the world into Men and Women, into Self (man) and Other (woman) allows the oppression of all kinds of others by the self—the appropriation of others into the desires of the self—in the name of self-determination. Thus, Haraway sees her manifesto "in the utopian tradition of imagining a world without gender." Cyborg ontology, she writes, makes such a world possible. The cyborg enables the transcendence of culture and of biology, the imagining of radically new cultures and biologies: "The cyborg would not recognize the Garden of Eden." Cyborg ontology enables escape from the very facts of human embodiment, the usual instantiation as either man or woman: "Cyborg replication is uncoupled from organic reproduction"; "[c]yborg 'sex' restores some of the lovely replicative baroque of ferns and invertebrates (such nice organic prophylactics against heterosexism)." Haraway summarises: "[M]y cyborg myth is about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities which progressive people might explore as part of needed political work." It is Haraway's sincere hope that modern developments in robotics, genetic engineering, etc.—"the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism"—will prove "exceedingly unfaithful to their origins," and ultimately bring about a socialist-feminist revolution in ways of living on earth.<sup>63</sup> Modern technology, and the cyborg ontology it entails, are the spur for a

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<sup>62</sup> Donna J. Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books, 1991), 149.

<sup>63</sup> Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto," *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 150–54.



radical new conception of continuity between the human, animals, inanimate nature, and technology.

Attempts have been made to call Rand a feminist—if she is, she is a very different kind of feminist to Haraway. Though she created strong, unconquered and unconquerable women in her fiction, and became an influential and thus a powerful woman herself, Rand felt no affinity with the twentieth-century feminist movement. Without doubt, the socialism of much of its discourse put Rand off, the movement's conscious alignment of itself with a broader agenda of creating equality across society. But, on a more fundamental level, Rand was suspicious of any kind of collective identification. Feminism smacked of identifying with a group—women—before identifying oneself as an autonomous being. Burns summarises:

To Rand, feminism was simply another form of collectivism, a variation on Marxism that replaced the proletariat with women, a newly invented oppressed class. The proof was in feminist calls for government to redress discrimination, when it was not government itself that had created the problem. She wrote, "The notion that a woman's place is in the home ... is an ancient, primitive evil, supported and perpetuated by women as much as, or more than, by men." What infuriated Rand the most was that feminism, as she saw it, was a claim based on weakness, a rebellion "against strength as such, by those who neither attempt nor intend to develop it." Feminists elevated their gender above their individuality and intelligence and then expected unearned success, to be enforced by government quotas and regulations.<sup>64</sup>

Rand was labelled "a traitor to her sex" and a promoter of "the male ideology of rape" by Susan Brownmiller in her book *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (1975); Brownmiller focused in particular on the rape scene in *The Fountainhead*, in which Roark forcefully takes Dominique, arguing that it constituted a dangerous romanticisation of sexual violence.<sup>65</sup>

The relationship between feminism and Objectivism is somewhat more complex than a reading of Rand's own views would initially suggest. The *Objectivist Newsletter*, under Rand's editorship, produced a highly positive review of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), describing it as "brilliant [...] and culturally explosive."<sup>66</sup> According to Mimi Riesel Gladstein, Rand's work and feminism form "an unlikely alliance." Making a case for the inclusion of *Atlas Shrugged* in Women's Studies courses, Gladstein writes: "collectivism can stifle self-actualization by emphasizing reaction rather than encouraging

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<sup>64</sup> Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 263–64. The Rand article quoted is "The Age of Envy, Part II," originally published in the *Objectivist*, August 1971. Rand's views quoted here are republished in "The Age of Envy," in Rand, *Return of the Primitive: The Anti-Industrial Revolution*, ed. Peter Schwartz (New York: Meridian, 1999), 147–49.

<sup>65</sup> Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975), 315, quoted in Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 264.

<sup>66</sup> Edith Efron, review of *The Feminine Mystique*, by Betty Friedan, *Objectivist Newsletter* 2, no. 7 (1963): 26, quoted in Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 195.

positive self-determination.” While bonds of common identity “may indeed give a movement its initial energy, that energy will dissipate without attention to individual development.” Reading Rand can inspire self-realisation, regardless of one’s gender. Rand’s exhortations against self-sacrifice are particularly applicable to women, writes Gladstein, since it is women who “have been socialized to feel guilty if they fail to carry out the practice of sacrificing their careers for the advancement of others, whether it be husband, family or simply a matter of vacating a position to a more needy male.”<sup>67</sup> Gladstein makes a compelling case. However, such attempts to incorporate Rand within an individualist feminism only serve to demonstrate her distance from the radical feminism of Haraway. Haraway’s ideal is *the abolition of gender*, not empowerment of women *as* women.

Rand’s humanism is central to her ideology: the human is a higher being, and each human is contained within his or her own body and mind. Haraway rejects both these tenets: the human is not in a privileged position apart from nature; all creation is interdependent. Rand’s atomistic view of society—a world composed of independent units—is the diametric opposite of Haraway’s vision of connectedness through transgressed boundaries.<sup>68</sup>

There are frayed patches of overlap between Rand’s and Haraway’s philosophies. Both Rand and Haraway are atheists, and both their visions have an atheistic root. Rand’s insistence is that her philosophy is one for “living on earth”;<sup>69</sup> Haraway’s concern is with life on earth: “We must cast our lot with some ways of life on this planet, and not with other ways.”<sup>70</sup> For both, the implication that there is no Heaven means that the earth must be a place where life is worth living—we must make it so. Haraway’s call for identities not riveted to set groupings, be they sexual or racial or class-based, is in one sense similar to Rand. The authors represent in two different forms the denial of imposed identity. For Rand, one’s belonging to a particular gender, class, or race does not determine who one is as an individual; for Haraway, gender, race, etc. are deleterious cultural constructions which must be transgressed and transcended in order for people to find liberation: both conceptions undermine monolithic collectivised categories of human identity. Both valorise active construction of the self, though their ideas about how this should be achieved are radically different.

Haraway’s cyborg is a figure made possible by—and which *makes possible*—new choices. The essence of Randian identity is the choices of the mind. In defiance of Freud, Rand does not even take the subconscious as a given: the subconscious for Rand is an entity

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<sup>67</sup> Mimi Reisel Gladstein, “Ayn Rand and Feminism: An Unlikely Alliance,” *College English* 39, no. 6 (February 1978): 682–83, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/375869>.

<sup>68</sup> Jennifer Burns describes Rand’s view of society as “atomistic, not organic”: “Rand’s ideal society was made up of traders, offering value for value, whose relationships spanned only the length of any given transaction.” Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 209.

<sup>69</sup> Rand, “Philosophy: Who Needs It,” *Philosophy: Who Needs It*, 10.

<sup>70</sup> Donna J. Haraway, *Modest\_Witness@Second\_Millennium.FemaleMan©\_Meets\_OncoMouse™: Feminism and Technoscience* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 51.



programmed by one's own choices. Rand sees laissez-faire capitalism as the ultimate arena of liberated identity-construction, where all relationships are voluntary and one's options for work are as wide as one's mind. For Haraway, capitalism is a deleterious determinant of given identities—because of class-based oppression and patriarchal modes of operation—and must be subverted for the possibility of new identities. Haraway is in favour of open identity construction; for Rand, this is what happens in capitalism. Technology is at the centre of both conceptions. For Haraway, the modern technological moment is what makes her imagining possible; for Rand, technology, which advances under capitalism, is humanity's "greatest benefactor."<sup>71</sup>

Utopia is the province of radicals. Utopia is a realm for imaginings, for those who imagine ways of living very different from what we have now, be they Randian "radicals for (unrestrained) capitalism," or advocates of a world without gender.<sup>72</sup> In chapter one, we saw how Rand constructs a utopia in *Atlas Shrugged*, in the form of Galt's Gulch. The socialist-feminist cyborg is a utopian construction, every bit as much as Galt's Gulch: both are vehicles for thinking about new kinds of society.

I would contend that both Galt's Gulch and the feminist cyborg fit John Gray's definition of utopian projects. Gray—who, like Popper, is a powerfully anti-utopian thinker—argues that a project is utopian "if there are no circumstances under which it can be realized." It is the "pursuit of a condition of harmony" that "defines utopian thought"—but such a condition is an actual impossibility: "Conflict is a universal feature of human life. It seems to be natural for human beings to want incompatible things—excitement and a quiet life, freedom and security, truth and a picture of the world that flatters their sense of self-importance."<sup>73</sup> Rand portrays in Galt's Gulch a world where individuals "naturally balance into order and peace by the miracle of economic transactions."<sup>74</sup> The feminist cyborg is also marked by a pursuit of harmony. Haraway's promotion of irony and blasphemy, "contradictions that do not resolve," "the tension of holding incompatible things together"—this seems initially to be singularly inharmonious. However, Haraway's thesis is about a radical form of equality, in which *difference* between living beings can no longer be used to foster *opposition*, and this is where its unrealistic pursuit of harmony lies. Haraway's fantasy is about the levelling potential of technology: the potential of the cyborg to level the legacy of Western history. Haraway

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<sup>71</sup> Rand, "The Age of Envy," *Return of the Primitive*, 146.

<sup>72</sup> In the first issue of the *Objectivist Newsletter* (1962), Rand wrote that Objectivists were not "conservatives," but "*radicals for capitalism*." Quoted in Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 195. Emphasis in original.

<sup>73</sup> John Gray, *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia* (London: Allen Lane, 2007), 20, 17.

<sup>74</sup> Alan Clardy, "Galt's Gulch: Ayn Rand's Utopian Delusion," *Utopian Studies* 23, no. 1 (2012), 246, [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/utopian\\_studies/v023/23.1.clardy.pdf](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/utopian_studies/v023/23.1.clardy.pdf).

herself now sees the cyborg's political usefulness as having come and gone.<sup>75</sup> The socialist-feminist cyborgian moment has passed and its possibilities remain unrealised. The politics of Ayn Rand and the politics of Donna Haraway have little in common—except their impossibility.

### **A History of Transhumanism**

Unlike the Harawayan cyborg, transhumanism, broadly speaking, does not represent a hoped-for break with the past, but rather an extension of Western individual-subjectivity. If Haraway represents a reverie, a dream of another way of relating humans to each other and to the earth, the philosophy of transhumanism is far more grounded in the actualities of scientific discourse and the progress of technology. The transhuman entails both *transcendence* and *transition*.<sup>76</sup> Transcendence of the biological human condition, and a transitional state between the human and whatever comes after: truly posthuman beings, originating in our science, whose abilities we can now only imagine. That said, as I've already noted, transhumanism and posthumanism are conflated in much discussion of the subject; the transhuman can be understood as a branch of posthumanist thought.

The basic idea of transhumanism is perhaps best summed up by an oft-repeated phrase in the mission statement of the organisation Humanity+; the goal is to become “better than well.”<sup>77</sup> Modern and developing technologies, from computing, robotics, and artificial intelligence, to cryonics, cloning, and genetic engineering, offer radical opportunities to human beings to enhance their abilities; it is possible, indeed, to imagine the mind existing in a substrate beyond the biological body it is born with. In the following passage, Nick Bostrom describes the hypothetical operation of the transhuman “upload,” “the transfer of a human mind to a computer”:

This would involve the following steps: First, create a sufficiently detailed scan of a particular human brain, perhaps by deconstructing it with nanobots or by feeding thin slices of brain tissues into powerful microscopes for automatic image analysis. Second, from this scan, reconstruct the neural network that the brain implemented, and combine this with computational models of the different types of neurons. Third, emulate the whole computational structure on a powerful supercomputer. If successful, the procedure would result in the original mind, with memory and

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<sup>75</sup> Thweatt-Bates, *Cyborg Selves*, 15, 38.

<sup>76</sup> “[T]he ‘trans’ of transhumanism refers not simply to the aspect of change but to the possibility of the transcendent”; “transhumanism as a current movement and worldview is indeed an expression of the innate human quest for transcendence—but, crucially, through the means of human agency in the form of technological innovation, and not through religious expectation of salvation through divine agency.” Thweatt-Bates, *Cyborg Selves*, 44.

<sup>77</sup> “Mission,” Humanity+, accessed December 16, 2014, <http://humanityplus.org/about/mission/>.



personality intact, being transferred to the computer where it could then exist as software; and it could either inhabit a robot body or live in a virtual reality.<sup>78</sup>

Transhumanist technologies obviously have radical implications not only for how man is conceived, but for his very embodiment. Bostrom comments: "If either superintelligence, or molecular nanotechnology, or uploading, or some other technology of a similarly revolutionary kind is developed, the human condition would clearly be radically transformed. Even if one believed that the probability of this happening anytime soon is quite small, these prospects would nevertheless merit serious attention in view of their extreme impact."<sup>79</sup> Integrating technology with the physical self, or improving the physical self via genetic science—substituting the "man-made" for the natural, in other words—these are transhuman imperatives. One ultimate goal of transhumanism is to achieve effective immortality; if the "mind" can exist in another form, the death of the biological body is not death. The "self" continues in another substrate. Death itself is no longer inevitable. This is the ultimate conquering of nature.

Bostrom is director of the Future of Humanity Institute at Oxford University. His "A History of Transhumanist Thought" is worth tracing here, in order to ground ourselves in the discourse. Bostrom begins with a very Randian vista, while arguing that the human will to innovate, to seek wellness and happiness, is natural if not innate: "We have always sought to expand the boundaries of our existence [...]. There is a tendency in at least some individuals always to search for a way around every obstacle and limitation to human life and happiness."<sup>80</sup> Ideas about life-extension and immortality are to be found in myriad cultures across millennia, from Gilgamesh seeking to live forever, to Prometheus bringing fire so that man can be more, to the quest for the Fountain of Youth. Bostrom sees these fantasies as part of the same drive that gives rise to scientific transhumanism. Through the Enlightenment, and the work of Bacon, Newton, Hobbes, Locke, and others, the use of "science to achieve mastery over nature in order to improve the living condition of human beings" became paramount. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the idea emerges that humans themselves could be developed and improved through science. This was taken to horrifying extremes in the eugenics movements of the twentieth century. But, for Bostrom and fellow transhumanists, these appalling vistas must not cause us to revert to a conservative conviction that the naturally born human should never be improved upon via science and technology. Bostrom points out, as would an Objectivist, no doubt, that the eugenics programmes that were implemented

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<sup>78</sup> Nick Bostrom, "A History of Transhumanist Thought," *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 14, no. 1 (April 2005), <http://jetpress.org/volume14/bostrom.html>.

<sup>79</sup> Bostrom, "History of Transhumanist Thought."

<sup>80</sup> Bostrom, "History of Transhumanist Thought." All subsequent quotations in this paragraph are from this article.

throughout the West were all “state-sponsored” and involved “various degrees of infringement of individual rights.” In no case did they involve individuals freely choosing to upgrade their own abilities, as is the goal of transhumanism. The principles of the Enlightenment, of rational humanism, of individual rights and democracy, must guide our way as we embrace the posthuman, Bostrom argues. He is explicit in stating: “Transhumanism has roots in rational humanism,” and in the notion of the self-made self. Hence the tendency among transhumanists for choosing their own names and setting aside their given names: F. M. Esfandiary became FM-2030; Max T. O’Connor chose Max More; Tom Bell—an advocate of “Extropianism” along with More—became Tom Morrow. Choosing the attributes of the body and mind is the next step. The same tendency, of course, existed within Objectivism, another movement all about the self-made self, the chosen identity and identifier: Alissa Rosenbaum / Ayn Rand, Nathan Blumenthal / Nathaniel Branden.

Bostrom is clear that the transhuman agenda does not depend solely on the development of such “radical” possibilities as that of uploading a mind to a computer:

Virtual reality; preimplantation genetic diagnosis; genetic engineering; pharmaceuticals that improve memory, concentration, wakefulness, and mood; performance-enhancing drugs; cosmetic surgery; sex-change operations; prosthetics; anti-aging medicine; closer human-computer interfaces: these technologies are already here or can be expected within the next few decades. The combination of these technological capabilities, as they mature, could profoundly transform the human condition. The transhumanist agenda, which is to make such enhancement options safely available to all persons, will become increasingly relevant and practical in the coming years as these and other anticipated technologies come online.<sup>81</sup>

The first to use the term “transhumanism” itself appears to have been Julian Huxley, celebrated biologist and brother of *Brave New World* author Aldous. He wrote in 1927, in *Religion Without Revelation*: “The human species can, if it wishes, transcend itself—not just sporadically, an individual here in one way, an individual there in another way—but in its entirety, as humanity. We need a name for this new belief. Perhaps *transhumanism* will serve: man remaining man, but transcending himself, by realizing new possibilities of and for his human nature.”<sup>82</sup> “Transhuman” was used by F. M. Esfandiary in the title and content of his 1989 book, *Are You a Transhuman?*: “In FM’s terminology, a transhuman is a ‘transitional human,’ someone who by virtue of their technology usage, cultural values, and lifestyle constitutes an evolutionary link to the coming era of posthumanity,” explains Bostrom. However, it was Max More who “wrote the first definition of transhumanism in its modern sense, and created his own distinctive brand of transhumanism, ‘extropianism.’”<sup>83</sup> More was

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<sup>81</sup> Bostrom, “History of Transhumanist Thought.”

<sup>82</sup> Julian Huxley, quoted in Bostrom, “History of Transhumanist Thought.” Emphasis in original.

<sup>83</sup> Bostrom, “History of Transhumanist Thought.”



unaware of the prior use by Huxley.<sup>84</sup> More defined a transhuman as “[s]omeone in the transition stage from human to biologically, neurologically, and genetically posthuman. One who orients his/her thinking towards the future to prepare for coming changes and who seeks out and takes advantage of opportunities for self-advancement.”<sup>85</sup> “Transhumanism” came to be widely adopted and to encapsulate a movement focused on encouraging biological modification as the future of humanity.

One sensibility that echoes loudly from transhumanism, which is also true of Objectivism, is the notion that ideas matter; that discussing and clarifying the enormous questions, about the origins, nature, and future of the human race, is a vital exercise. Burns writes that “Rand understood society as simply a function of its dominant ideas”; whereas the political left “tended to see injustice as firmly embedded in the material world, be it racism, sexism, militarism, or class oppression [...] Rand and her followers identified the ills of the world in purely philosophical terms.”<sup>86</sup> This is still the attitude of Objectivists today, as we see when Yaron Brook argues that the future is “completely dependent on the ideas that people have, the beliefs people have, and the philosophy that’s being held by the culture.”<sup>87</sup> While the same absolutism is not intrinsic to transhumanism, it is true that transhumanism, like Objectivism, is firstly about philosophical (r)evolution: When we have a certain set of ideas about how humanity should be, then we can steadily follow a path of progress. Hence the importance of academic endeavour to transhumanists, as to Objectivists; the importance of institutes and scholarly articles and intellectual advocates who can influence policy and the broader cultural attitude towards an improved version of the self.

The first developed transhumanist philosophy was Extropianism, spearheaded by Tom Morrow and especially Max More. The Extropians advocated “extropy” as the opposite of entropy; if entropy meant decay, extropy meant unlimited growth. A British native, More “became interested in futurist ideas and life extension technologies” while at Oxford; in the 1980s, he was “one of the pioneers of cryonics in England.”<sup>88</sup> More found America more conducive to his vision than Britain; he studied for a PhD at the University of Southern California, and it was there that he met Morrow. In 1988 the pair set up the journal *Extropy* in order to air and explore their ideas, and in 1992 they founded the Extropy Institute, with three

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<sup>84</sup> Max More, “The Overhuman in the Transhuman,” *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 21, no. 1 (January 2010), <http://jetpress.org/v21/more.htm>.

<sup>85</sup> Max More, “Technological Self-Transformation: Expanding Personal Extropy.” accessed November 24, 2014, <http://www.maxmore.com/selftrns.htm>. Originally published in *Extropy* 4, no. 2 (Winter–Spring 1993).

<sup>86</sup> Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 220, 219.

<sup>87</sup> Yaron Brook, “Yaron Answers: How Bad Could Things Get If the Economy Collapses?,” YouTube video, 4:09, posted by the Ayn Rand Institute, March 5, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BABM0WMsLu4&feature=youtu.be>.

<sup>88</sup> James Hughes, *Citizen Cyborg: Why Democratic Societies Must Respond to the Redesigned Human of the Future* (Cambridge, MA: Westview, 2004), 164.

main aims: “(1) develop an elegant, focused philosophy for transhumanism [...] the philosophy of ‘Extropy’; (2) encourage discussions and debates on improving the human condition”; and (3) “develop a culture for activists, energized and devoted to bringing these ideas to the public.”<sup>89</sup> Transhumanism today does not have an explicit political ideology that goes with it; the movement has become too diverse. Broadly speaking, it is atheist and liberal-democratic—in other words, distinctly humanist. Its origins on the Extropian side, however, are manifestly libertarian—and Rand lies at the root, as we will see. Bostrom, along with David Pearce, founded the World Transhumanist Association (WTA) in 1998, in part in order to move transhumanism away from the perceived libertarian exclusivity of the Extropy Institute, “to provide a general organizational basis for all transhumanist groups and interests, across the political spectrum.”<sup>90</sup> The WTA is now known as Humanity+, and has 6,000 members and newsletter subscribers across some one hundred countries.<sup>91</sup> The Extropy Institute closed in 2006, its main aims having been achieved, according to its website.<sup>92</sup> It could be said that the integration of extropy into a wider human-improvement agenda, is reflective of the general transition of transhumanism: from a libertarian fringe movement in part influenced by Rand, to a broader-based liberal-democratic coalition. More will be said about this as the chapter progresses.

### Initial Links

Rand’s formulation of humanity, explored at length in chapter one, is continuous with posthumanity in its transhumanist form. The author delineates a *primitive prerequisite*: this is man alone against nature; he must use his mind, create tools—the beginnings of technology—to survive. Man is an innovator. As civilisation grows, technological development progresses; high capitalism becomes, for Rand, the ideal environment in which man-as-innovator is liberated to conquer and control nature in heretofore unforeseen ways. The next step from where we are now is surely technology’s integration with the human body itself, or using technology to remould the body: overcoming all the limitations of nature, including those of the organic human form. Rand’s concept of man-worship and her *language of the human sacred* afford to man-the-creator qualities usually reserved for divinity. There should be no problem with man playing God. There is no God and man is his own god. The textual examples from Rand quoted towards the beginning of this chapter, demonstrate two additional core points about the Randian worldview, which I put forward as continuous with posthumanity:

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<sup>89</sup> Natasha Vita-More, “Next Steps,” Extropy Institute, accessed December 31, 2014, <http://www.extropy.org/future.htm>.

<sup>90</sup> Bostrom, “History of Transhumanist Thought.”

<sup>91</sup> “Mission,” Humanity+.

<sup>92</sup> Vita-More, “Next Steps.”



(i) *man conquering nature is good, it is a true expression of man's unique value*, and (ii) *technology is an extension of human will and as such has immense value*.

A comparable belief in the innovative mind as human essence underscores posthumanist thought, especially in its transhumanist incarnation. The organic body here becomes, in the words of Hayles, mankind's "original prosthesis."<sup>93</sup> The body is therefore replaceable by other, better, prostheses—which of course are created by the mind-as-innovator. If the body is only a vessel, then, with available technology, it is philosophically acceptable for it to become malleable, implantable, constructed and reconstructed depending on the needs and desires of the human mind.

Rand claimed to reject Cartesian dualism, the idea of a separation between a material body and a nonmaterial mind; for Rand, there should be no conflict between mind and body. In Galt's speech, she writes: "They have cut man in two, setting one half against the other. They have taught him that [...] his soul belongs to a supernatural realm, but his body is an evil prison holding it in bondage to this earth." On the face of it, Rand's rejection of a mind-body split would seem to undermine the case that her views feed into the transhuman, which relies on Cartesian dualism for a foundational basis: the notion that the mind is independent of the body and could therefore exist within another form. However, Rand rejected mind-body dualism precisely because she thought it undermined the value of the mind. Galt goes on: "Do you observe what human faculty that doctrine [dualism] was designed to ignore? It was man's mind that had to be negated in order to make him fall apart. Once he surrendered reason, he was left at the mercy of two monsters whom he could not fathom or control: of a body moved by unaccountable instincts and of a soul moved by mystic revelations."<sup>94</sup> Rand celebrated the human body, bodily existence and bodily pleasures. In *Anthem* the pleasures of bodily existence allow Equality 7-2521 to rediscover the nature of his human mind. When he first arrives in the Uncharted Forest, he feels the sunlight on his face, frolics on the forest floor, enjoys "the song of our body" and in the process comes to grasp his independence. Sex with Liberty 5-3000, a fellow transgressor, makes clear Equality's *values* to him, that sex is not shameful but "the one ecstasy granted to the race of men."<sup>95</sup> Rapturous sex is a feature across Rand's work. However, her celebration of bodily pleasure does not undo her privileging of the mind. She explicitly describes the body as a "machine" of which the mind is the "driver."<sup>96</sup> Rand's belief in the primacy of the human mind is consistent with transhumanist conceptions.

Rand saw "nature" as an external thing to be conquered by man's mind: this is what man does when he makes tools, builds factories, cures diseases: "The creator's concern is the

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<sup>93</sup> Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 3.

<sup>94</sup> Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 1026.

<sup>95</sup> Rand, *Anthem*, 79, 84.

<sup>96</sup> Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 1020.

conquest of nature.”<sup>97</sup> Rand was writing in a time before late-twentieth-century technology and attendant posthumanist philosophy reimagined the malleability of the body. What transhumanism does, in essence, is take the Randian view of the desirability of man’s conquest of nature—and extend this insight to the human body itself. The mind becomes the chooser and shaper of its own body.

Of course, the view that man’s role is as master of nature, this is not solely Rand’s. It is part of the heritage of liberal humanism, and part of why transhumanism lays claim to this heritage. We can note for now that Rand is part of this milieu: that her ideas, in this regard at least, are an easy fit with the posthuman. But Rand, because of her explicit promotion of entrepreneurship and technological progression, also has a closer relationship with the posthuman than others.

As we saw in my second chapter, Rand’s influence on creative capitalism, on entrepreneurialism—and especially on the technology sector—is well documented, in the form of testimonials from those who have been inspired by her. Silicon Valley innovator John McCaskey, speaking to Adam Curtis for his documentary *All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace*, tells Curtis of the impulse many received from Rand in the new fields centred in the Californian hub: “Many of the people here in Silicon Valley were greatly inspired by Ayn Rand—entrepreneurs who were building computers, entrepreneurs in biotech, entrepreneurs in software, in internet networking.” Rand’s work “presented a vision of a morally exciting enterprise.”<sup>98</sup> Burns writes that “the emerging culture of cyberspace [...] was strikingly libertarian from the beginning,” and Rand was a major part of this milieu.<sup>99</sup> That Rand inspired the likes of Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales, PayPal founder Peter Thiel, and Craigslist founder Craig Newmark, has already been mentioned. Burns notes the irony of Rand’s impact on such Internet innovators who, while on the one hand are enabling new forms of individual expression, are also “pioneering new forms of community.”<sup>100</sup> Yet, it is also important to note that such innovators are building precursors to posthumanism, because any posthuman future will emerge from the extraordinary potentialities of current technology.

Paulina Borsook’s book *CyberSelfish* is an attempt to explain and to chart the “terribly libertarian culture of high tech.” Borsook discusses Extropianism along with the general rise of Silicon Valley libertarianism. Of the Silicon Valley mindset, Borsook writes: “There is a cultural-studies theory, which I only semi-seriously make fun of, espousing that this generation of technologists [...] have read too much Ayn Rand and too much Robert A. Heinlein—though not in his *Stranger in a Strange Land* mode. Ayn Rand and Heinlein are

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<sup>97</sup> Rand, *The Fountainhead*, 712.

<sup>98</sup> John McCaskey, quoted in Adam Curtis, dir., “Love and Power,” *All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace*, episode 1, aired May 23, 2011, BBC Two, television programme.

<sup>99</sup> Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 263.

<sup>100</sup> Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 284.



authors who in their work celebrate male prowess and defy conventional notions of affectionate attachment. They write books that are pure ‘Warrior Dreams’ fodder.”<sup>101</sup> As if to confirm this theory, before Borsook had even written her book, Max More wrote in *Extropy*, to a readership of technologists and futurists: “Many readers of this journal have, to varying degrees, sought to emulate qualities found in the characters of writers Ayn Rand and Robert Heinlein.”<sup>102</sup> Rand wrote in *The Romantic Manifesto* that “art does not *teach*—it shows, it displays the full, concretized reality of the final goal.”<sup>103</sup> In a startling echo of Rand’s view of art, More goes on: “By focusing on the paradigm personalities in these didactic stories, we can home in [on] our desired self without having to deduce the requisite behavior from abstract rules. An image of our intended result is more effective at promoting change than is an abstract set of prescriptions. In times of intellectual opposition and isolation, for instance, recalling an image of Rand’s Howard Roark will stiffen our resolve and independence more than advising oneself to ‘be independent!’”<sup>104</sup> The power of fiction can never be gainsaid. More is instancing the power of popular culture—in this case, Rand’s novels—to shape individual lives, and in turn how the future will look, as readers seek to enact the ideal that inspires them; popular culture can offer, in Lawrence and Jewett’s words, “trajectories of life meaning.”<sup>105</sup>

Transhumanism is about extending and improving the Western-conceived concept of the self; it is about power over nature. Self-evidently, it valorises science and the possibilities of technology. All of these things make it an easy mesh with the philosophy of Ayn Rand. In mapping the overlapping circles between Objectivism and posthumanism, it is apparent that the strongest connections are to be found between Rand and that branch of the posthuman which labels itself transhumanism. The connections are several: first, the philosophical similarities that exist between Rand’s ideas and transhumanism; second, the direct influence Rand’s writings have had on those with a transhumanist vision. The latter connection takes two forms: Rand’s impact on those who work in transhuman fields and who theorise the phenomenon, and her “presence” within fiction that portrays post-/transhuman possibilities. The remainder of this chapter and the next chapter further investigate the links between Rand and transhumanism. The philosophical overlaps have already to a large extent been detailed, in the discussion above on Rand’s conception of technology and how it leads towards posthuman conception. The next chapter looks at Rand in the context of post-/transhumanist science fiction. Shortly, I will go into more detail regarding the direct influence of Rand on

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<sup>101</sup> Paulina Borsook, *CyberSelfish: A Critical Romp Through the Terribly Libertarian Culture of High Tech* (London: Little, Brown, 2000), 245.

<sup>102</sup> More, “Technological Self-Transformation.”

<sup>103</sup> Ayn Rand, *The Romantic Manifesto: A Philosophy of Literature*, rev. ed. (New York: Signet, 2005), 163. Emphasis in original.

<sup>104</sup> More, “Technological Self-Transformation.”

<sup>105</sup> John Shelton Lawrence and Robert Jewett, *The Myth of the American Superhero* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2002), 9.

transhumanism. First, I would like to consider another significant item of common philosophical ground between Rand and the transhuman: Nietzsche as precursor.

### Übermensch of the Mind's Eye

When Zarathustra prophesised the Übermensch, Nietzsche could not have predicted the myriad uses to which his ideal would be put:

*I teach you the overman.* Man is something that shall be overcome. What have you done to overcome him?

All beings so far have created something beyond themselves; and do you want to be the ebb of this great flood and even go back to the beasts rather than overcome man? What is the ape to man? A laughingstock or a painful embarrassment. And man shall be just that for the overman: a laughingstock or a painful embarrassment. You have made your way from worm to man, and much in you is still worm. Once you were apes, and even now, too, man is more ape than any ape.

[...]

Behold, I teach you the overman. The overman is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: the overman *shall be* the meaning of the earth! I beseech you, my brothers, *remain faithful to the earth*, and do not believe those who speak to you of otherworldly hopes! [...]

[...]

Man is a rope, tied between beast and overman—a rope over an abyss. [...]  
What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end.<sup>106</sup>

The Nietzschean Übermensch, the Overman or Superman, is an ideal about which its author is notoriously nonspecific. The Übermensch is beyond man, “man overcome,” but what form this post-human will take—and how exactly we are to go about creating him—are matters left to interpretation. Hence, the Übermensch has influenced Nazi images of the master race as it has influenced the development of comic book superheroes, and countless creations in-between. Nietzsche’s ideal has been concretised by his followers in various and contradictory ways. In this respect, the Overman is emblematic of his philosophy as a whole. As Daniel Conway writes, Nietzsche’s impact is his malleability—and the philosopher’s own vagaries and multiplicities are at least partly responsible: the “farrago of interpretations constitutes his true political legacy.”<sup>107</sup>

Considering the above passage—the introduction to the Superman in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883)—it is hard to escape the impression that Nietzsche is speaking about evolution, in one form or another. Darwin’s *The Descent of Man* was published just over a decade earlier (1871). Jean Gayon writes that “with the exception of Spencer, Nietzsche was the first major philosopher who felt the need for a dialogue with Darwin”; “there is no doubt

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<sup>106</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1978), 12–15. Emphases in original.

<sup>107</sup> Daniel W. Conway, *Nietzsche and the Political* (London: Routledge, 1997), 120.



that Nietzsche [...] was concerned with Darwin.”<sup>108</sup> In the above passage, Nietzsche seems to be suggesting that we take control of our own evolution—whether it is intellectual or physical or another aspect—that we must “will” the Übermensch to be the meaning of the earth, “create something beyond ourselves.” It is not difficult to see how the Übermensch could provide inspiration to proponents of the posthuman and the transhuman. As Stefan Sorgner puts it, “significant similarities between the posthuman and the overhuman can be found.”<sup>109</sup> Transhumanism is all about humans taking control of their own mental and physical evolution, in order to inaugurate a race of superior beings upon the earth. To transhumanists, man is a bridge between the beastly past and the mind-made future.

According to Bostrom, the Übermensch did not directly inspire transhumanism: “Despite some surface-level similarities with the Nietzschean vision, transhumanism—with its Enlightenment roots, its emphasis on individual liberties, and its humanistic concern for the welfare of all humans (and other sentient beings)—probably has as much or more in common with Nietzsche’s contemporary J.S. Mill, the English liberal thinker and utilitarian.”<sup>110</sup> Bostrom’s particularly liberal view of transhumanism, however, is not reflective of every facet of the movement. He is contradicted by More, who writes that Nietzsche’s Overman has inspired transhumanists, himself included. Between Nietzsche’s philosophy and transhumanism there are not “*merely* parallels,” according to More: “transhumanist ideas were directly *influenced* by Nietzsche.” Transhumanists, however, take from him “*very selectively*.” Nietzsche, for instance, saw his idea of eternal recurrence—the hypothesis that everything in the universe is repeated endlessly—as intrinsic to the Overman. Transhumanists reject this because it is opposed to the notion of continual progress: “As a strong opponent of philosophical systems, Nietzsche could hardly object to transhumanism’s picking and choosing from among his thoughts.”<sup>111</sup> More writes that some of his own foundational writings in transhumanist thought, including his 1990 statement of “Extropian Principles” (discussed later in the chapter), were impacted by his reading of Nietzsche. In his 1990 “Transhumanism: Towards a Futurist Philosophy,” More quotes *Zarathustra*, in order to make a point about the necessity of atheistic human expansion: “The religionist has no answer to the extropic challenge put by Nietzsche’s Zarathustra: ‘I teach you the overman. Man is something that is to be overcome. What have you done to overcome him?’”<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Jean Gayon, “Nietzsche and Darwin,” in *Biology and the Foundation of Ethics*, ed. Jane Maienschein and Michael Ruse (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 155, 154.

<sup>109</sup> Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, “Nietzsche, the Overhuman, and Transhumanism,” *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 20, no. 1 (March 2009), <http://jetpress.org/v20/sorgner.htm>.

<sup>110</sup> Bostrom, “History of Transhumanist Thought.”

<sup>111</sup> More, “Overhuman in the Transhuman.” Emphases in original.

<sup>112</sup> Max More, “Transhumanism: Towards a Futurist Philosophy,” quoted in More, “Overhuman in the Transhuman.”

Bill Hibbard, another transhumanist, argues that the primary difference between Übermenschen and posthumans, is that the former are an unrealisable ideal, whereas the latter will be real:

Nietzsche's overhuman is closely related to his concept of "eternal recurrence." Faced with the prospect of living one's life again endlessly, with every detail and misery replicated exactly, the ordinary human says no but the overhuman says yes. Nietzsche believed in human improvement, driven by a human "will to power." But the overhuman has no need for improvement, having achieved satisfaction with life. The overhuman is an ideal rather than an achievable reality. Posthumans, as envisioned by most transhumanists, will be real successors to humans and still struggling to improve.

Hibbard writes that Nietzsche is not a useful model for transhumanists concerned with "the radical inequality that could result from technological change to human bodies and brains": "Nietzsche thought that strength was the ultimate good and expressed little sympathy for measures to oblige the strong to subsidize the weak." Rather, "Following Hobbes, transhumanists should [...] ask what social contract will create stability and security for people to live meaningful lives."<sup>113</sup>

One of the primary fears pushing against transhumanism is the belief that posthumans *would be* Nietzschean Supermen. Bioethicists George Annas, Lori Andrews, and Rosario Isasi, for instance, argue that a new species of posthumans "will likely view the old 'normal' humans as inferior, even savages, and fit for slavery or slaughter. [...] It is ultimately this predictable potential for genocide that makes species-altering experiments potential weapons of mass destruction."<sup>114</sup> Ronald Bailey, quoting this passage, asks in *The Transhumanist Reader*: "[W]hat if enhanced posthumans did take the Nietzschean Superman option? What if they really did see unenhanced people as 'inferior, even savages, and fit for slavery or slaughter'?" Bailey points out that countless unenhanced humans through the centuries have looked upon people different from themselves as deserving of extermination. The protection against murder, slavery, et al. in the coming posthuman age will come from the same place where that protection exists today: liberal political institutions, which preserve the rights of all sentient beings.<sup>115</sup>

The Nietzschean Superman informs the transhuman and the posthuman; it also informs the Randian ideal man. Rand came to claim that her philosophy was entirely her own,

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<sup>113</sup> Bill Hibbard, "Nietzsche's Overhuman is an Ideal Whereas Posthumans Will be Real," *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 21, no. 1 (January 2010), <http://jetpress.org/v21/hibbard.htm>.

<sup>114</sup> George Annas, Lori Andrews, and Rosario Isasi, "Protecting the Endangered Human: Toward an International Treaty Prohibiting Cloning and Inheritable Alterations," *American Journal of Law and Medicine* 28, no. 2–3 (2002): 162, republished by the Center for Genetics and Society, accessed December 31, 2014, [http://www.geneticsandsociety.org/downloads/2002\\_ajlm\\_annasetal.pdf](http://www.geneticsandsociety.org/downloads/2002_ajlm_annasetal.pdf).

<sup>115</sup> Ronald Bailey, "For Enhancing People," in *The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future*, ed. Max More and Natasha Vita-More (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), Kindle edition, 337–38.



acknowledging only a small debt to Aristotle.<sup>116</sup> And yet, as referenced in chapter one, Rand's reading of Nietzsche was a crucial formative experience. As Heller describes it, Rand's protagonists would prove to be "more or less overtly Nietzschean—and, because of their Superman aura, would often be wrongly seen as fascistic by her critics."<sup>117</sup>

It would be wrong to suggest that the Randian ideal man is a simple attempt to concretise the Übermensch. Rather, a Nietzschean sensibility suffuses Rand's thought and writing; a consciousness of the Superman must be seen as part of this, as is consciousness of another Nietzschean imperative articulated in *Zarathustra*: the will to power.

Already acquainted with Nietzsche before she departed Russia, the first three books Rand bought in the United States were English translations of *Beyond Good and Evil*, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and *The Antichrist*; she marked on those copies her favourite passages.<sup>118</sup> Heller writes that the author's infatuation with Nietzsche began while she was still in St. Petersburg, upon reading *Zarathustra*: "The seventeen-year-old Rand immediately seized upon his ideas, including his call to discard old values and create new ones, his condemnation of altruism as a slave morality, and his argument for the inviolate rights of the gifted person."<sup>119</sup> According to Burns, Rand saw herself as one of the "philosophers of the future" prophesied by Nietzsche.<sup>120</sup> In Nietzsche scholar Michael Tanner's formulation, the German's "fundamental concern [...] was to plot the relationship between suffering and culture." The philosopher experienced unspeakable illness during his own life, but in *Zarathustra* he teaches that "joy is deeper than suffering"—and joy which is of this earth, not that belonging to some untouched realm.<sup>121</sup> In this sense, Rand takes on Nietzsche's project and takes it further, finally coming to argue that suffering should be considered an errant exception to true human life, and that achieving happiness—via productive work—is each individual's "moral purpose."<sup>122</sup> For Objectivists, suffering is "unnatural," in the words of Leonard Peikoff: "Pain, suffering, failure do not have metaphysical significance—they do not reveal the nature of reality. [...] [S]uccess, not failure, is the to-be-expected."<sup>123</sup> Or, as Howard Roark puts it: "I'm not capable of suffering completely. [...] It goes only down to a certain

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<sup>116</sup> Rand, quoted in "About the Author," *Atlas Shrugged*, 1171.

<sup>117</sup> Heller, *World She Made*, 42.

<sup>118</sup> Shoshana Milgrim, "The Fountainhead from Notebook to Novel: The Composition of Ayn Rand's First Ideal Man," in *Essays on Ayn Rand's "The Fountainhead,"* ed. Robert Mayhew (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007), 24.

<sup>119</sup> Heller, *World She Made*, 42.

<sup>120</sup> Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 41.

<sup>121</sup> Michael Tanner, *Nietzsche: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 30, 56.

<sup>122</sup> Rand, quoted in "About the Author," *Atlas Shrugged*, 1170.

<sup>123</sup> Leonard Peikoff, "Philosophy of Objectivism," lecture series, quoted at *The Ayn Rand Lexicon: Objectivism from A to Z*, ed. Harry Binswanger, accessed December 17, 2014, [http://aynrandlexicon.com/lexicon/benevolent\\_universe\\_premise.html](http://aynrandlexicon.com/lexicon/benevolent_universe_premise.html).

point and then it stops. As long as there is that untouched point, it's not really pain."<sup>124</sup> Metaphysically, the Objectivist notion of the unnaturalness of suffering, fits easily with the transhumanist call to be "better than well."

Rand's early writing is suffused with Nietzschean elements. For Nietzsche, the will to power is the driver of life—and certainly, the driver of greatness, which the German philosopher worshipped. A people's "will to power" is "the tablet of their overcomings [...]. Praiseworthy is whatever seems difficult to a people."<sup>125</sup> One characteristic of the *Übermensch*, presumably, is that he exemplifies the will to power. Rand's early heroes are attempts to encapsulate the Nietzschean will to power—Bjorn Faulkner in *Night of January 16th*, Leo in *We the Living*. We are told that Leo "quoted Spinoza and Nietzsche" and "described the superiority of Western culture."<sup>126</sup> Milgrim says: "The clearest indication of Nietzsche-like elements in writing published during [Rand's] lifetime was Bjorn Faulkner of *Night of January 16th*."<sup>127</sup> She cites from the play the district attorney's description of the financier Faulkner: "young, tall, with an arrogant smile, with kingdoms and nations in the palm of one hand—and a whip in the other."<sup>128</sup> The sentiment is not unlike that contained in our introduction to Leo: "He was tall [...]. His mouth, calm, severe, contemptuous, was that of an ancient chieftain who could order men to die, and his eyes were such as could watch it."<sup>129</sup> Leo's will to power, his potential greatness, is stifled in his social environment, the Soviet Union, because the socialist state does not allow great men to thrive.

When Rand re-edited *We the Living* for its second publication in 1959, it was to smooth over the sharpest Nietzschean edges of the original, to make the text more consistent with her mature philosophy, as found in *Atlas Shrugged*. Robert Mayhew identifies four elements Rand gleaned from her reading of Nietzsche, which are present in passages in the original *We the Living*:

- I. The existence of the masses—an ugly, low, worthless herd of people—is a necessary fact; they simply (but unfortunately) do exist.
- II. Either the masses sacrifice the best for the sake of the masses, or the best sacrifice the masses for the sake of the best. There is no other option.
- III. Each of the best should live only for himself, a fact which justifies actions that are beyond good and evil, for example, the use of force and even killing.
- IV. One should not strive for *any* kind of equality, including political equality.

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<sup>124</sup> Rand, *The Fountainhead*, 354.

<sup>125</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 58.

<sup>126</sup> Ayn Rand, *We the Living* (London: Signet, 1983), 127–28.

<sup>127</sup> Milgrim, "The Fountainhead from Notebook to Novel," in *Essays on Ayn Rand's "The Fountainhead"*, ed. Mayhew, 27.

<sup>128</sup> Ayn Rand, *Night of January 16th*, in *Three Plays* (New York: Signet, 2005), 21.

<sup>129</sup> Rand, *We the Living*, 52.



All of these, Rand “rejected in her later, mature philosophy.”<sup>130</sup> Heller, commensurately, writes that Rand’s argument in the first-published version of the novel, “echoes the Nietzschean view that the lower social orders are often impediments to the advance of society’s Supermen and, if necessary, need to be herded by their betters. By the 1950s, she had reconsidered and tempered this view.”<sup>131</sup> Perhaps the best exemplar of Rand’s transition is a statement by Kira on the use of totalitarian methods. In the 1936 edition, Kira says the following in an exchange with Andrei (who speaks first):

“I know what you’re going to say. You’re going to say, as so many of our enemies do, that you admire our ideals, but loathe our methods.”

“I loathe your ideals. I admire your methods. If one believes one’s right, one shouldn’t wait to convince millions of fools, one might as well force them.”

Kira goes on to say, “I don’t know [...] whether I’d include blood in my methods,” but the above quote, for the mature Rand, is still an unacceptable endorsement of coercion by one of her fictional surrogates. In the 1959 edition, Kira’s response to Andrei’s assertion is simply: “I loathe your ideals.”<sup>132</sup>

*The Fountainhead* is the key battleground for Rand’s ideas in relation to those of Nietzsche. It was as she was drafting this, and especially the character of Roark, that, as Heller puts it, Rand “begin[s] to loosen Nietzsche’s seductive hold on her imagination.”<sup>133</sup> Rand’s notebooks demonstrate how, through crafting her first ideal man in the figure of Roark, she moved from a highly Nietzschean concept of greatness towards something different. An early description of the character, from a notebook entry on February 9, 1936, reads: “He has a tremendous, unshatterable conviction that he can and will *force* men to accept him [...]. He recognises only the right of exceptions [...]. The others are to bow.”<sup>134</sup> In the finished novel, by contrast, Roark explicitly states: “I don’t propose to force or be forced.” He can only be himself: “Those who want me will come to me.”<sup>135</sup>

Roark is referred to as a “Superman” in *The Fountainhead*.<sup>136</sup> This is a derogatory comment made by arch-collectivist Ellsworth Toohey, but it is Rand’s acknowledgement of the link that can be seen between her heroes and the *Übermensch*, by those who wish to see it (perhaps for their own purposes). The crucial clarification Rand makes in relation to Nietzsche

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<sup>130</sup> Robert Mayhew, “*We the Living*: ’36 and ’59,” in *Essays on Ayn Rand’s “We the Living,”* 2nd ed., ed. Robert Mayhew (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012), 236.

<sup>131</sup> Heller, *World She Made*, 87.

<sup>132</sup> Mayhew, “*We the Living*: ’36 and ’59,” in *Essays on Ayn Rand’s “We the Living,”* ed. Mayhew, 232–33.

<sup>133</sup> Heller, *World She Made*, 42.

<sup>134</sup> Ayn Rand, *The Fountainhead* notebooks, quoted in Milgrim, “*The Fountainhead* from Notebook to Novel,” in *Essays on Ayn Rand’s “The Fountainhead,”* ed. Mayhew, 26. Emphasis in original.

<sup>135</sup> Rand, *The Fountainhead*, 14.

<sup>136</sup> Rand, *The Fountainhead*, 352.

is that, in her mature work, the will to power, for Rand, does not entail power over other human beings. The great man, Roark, seeks to actualise himself in the world, but does so through independent production—he seeks control over nature, yes, in the form of materials with which to construct his autonomous vision (the buildings he wishes to build), but he does not wish to coerce or shepherd other human beings in the process. Roark is indifferent to the social environment. If he has a “will to power,” it is contained in his ability to withstand social and economic pressures, in order to stay true to his vision of his best self; his power is over himself. His will to power is willpower.

The Randian ideal man, Roark, is entirely focused on himself and achieving his own goals in the world. He understands that coercion or force against others is wrong: it is both a betrayal of himself and a morally unacceptable transgression of others’ individuality. Therefore, if Roark is assisted by others in the pursuit of his aims, it must be by each individual’s voluntary decision. Roark stands in contrast to newspaper magnate Gail Wynand—who, like Faulkner, embodies a more traditional reading of Nietzsche’s will to power, in which it is the right or the imperative of the great man to shepherd the masses. Wynand is *The Fountainhead*’s tragic hero and the most Nietzschean character in the book. Rand compared Wynand to Faulkner in *January 16th* and called him *The Fountainhead*’s “most tragic character.”<sup>137</sup> Wynand is a great man, and he understands his potential even as he grows up impoverished in Hell’s Kitchen. Wynand imagines that in order to achieve greatness, he must bring the world under his thumb. So, he sets about building a newspaper empire. He expects this will give him the power he seeks. And it does give him power, or so it seems: the ability to make or break careers, to set agendas. Wynand for a time is herding the mob.

The newspaper magnate strikes up a friendship with Roark. The two have a lot in common, as supremely competent go-getters. But then Roark dynamites his own building, a public housing project. Roark could not let it stand after his designs were mingled with those of others—despite express assurances that the project would be built entirely according to his blueprints. Public opinion excoriates Roark; the mob is clamouring for his scalp: he has selfishly put his own creative rights ahead of the provision of homes to the poor. Wynand goes to work defending Roark, writing editorial after editorial in an attempt to sway the masses. It doesn’t work. This time, Wynand is on the wrong side of the public, and there is no swaying the man in the street. Wynand’s own scalp is called for: he is persuaded to issue a retraction before he is removed as the boss of the empire he built. Wynand subsumed his own self-interest to public opinion, in the belief that he was shaping the latter. What he learns in the end is that he was never controlling the masses—they were controlling him. He set the course

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<sup>137</sup> Rand, introduction to *Night of January 16th*, in *Three Plays*, 7.



of his life by the crowd, and thus gave up his singular fire. At the end, he commissions Roark to construct the Wynand Building, the tallest skyscraper in New York, which will be his legacy; he tells Roark: “Build it as a monument to that spirit which is yours . . . and could have been mine.”<sup>138</sup>

The character of Wynand demonstrates that, for Rand, one person has no command over another, in the ultimate sense: no man or woman can control what is in another human being’s soul. We can only choose to allow our own souls to be governed by what others do—or not. Wynand is tragic because he imagines he is a shepherd. Roark is ideal because he has no ambitions to herd.

Robert Powell, writing in the *Journal of Ayn Rand Studies*, offers a dissenting view of Wynand. Powell’s assessment is that he is the true hero of the novel, if the Overman is the standard: the magnate is “the only character in *The Fountainhead* who meets the criteria of both the Nietzschean Superman and Randian hero.” Roark’s possesses a “false sense of integrity”; he “denies a will to power in his words but accepts it in his actions.” Roark professes not to use force but is prepared to blow up a building to get his way. Powell argues: “Roark should not be Rand’s true hero because he accepts and rejects selected forms of Nietzschean and traditional morality at his convenience. He should, like Wynand, either fully accept or reject one or the other. He rejects altruism and Christianity in the Nietzschean tradition while accepting humanism. [...] Humanism and the Übermensch don’t mix—Roark is Rand’s problematic representation of both things.”<sup>139</sup>

Within transhumanism, one of the central philosophical concerns is whether the transhuman is more faithful to the humanist tradition of Hobbes, Locke, et al., or to Nietzsche’s Übermensch. The same philosophical issue is at the heart of Randian “hero worship”: To what extent is Rand’s ideal consistent with the drive for the Nietzschean Superman, and to what extent is it part of the liberal humanist tradition of personal fulfillment and accomplishment?

The four Nietzschean facets that suffuse Rand’s early writing, which Mayhew identifies above, might be rewritten as follows—as applicable to Rand’s final belief system: (i) Everyone is their own person and entitled to achieve their potential without imposition from others; (ii) sacrificing oneself to another or others to oneself is an immoral act; (iii) initiating force is *never* justified, only self-defensive force; (iv) human beings are *not* equal either in potential or life-outcomes, but all are entitled to be treated equally before the law.

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<sup>138</sup> Rand, *The Fountainhead*, 725.

<sup>139</sup> Robert Powell, “Embracing Power Roles Naturally: Rand’s Nietzschean Heroes and Villains,” *Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* 10, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 374, 378, 371, 386, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41560394>.

As we have seen, then, Nietzsche provides a precursor for both Objectivism and transhumanism. The latter philosophies move away from or beyond Nietzsche, but his work forms a philosophical baseline from which both can be considered. Indeed, Nietzsche is instrumental to the development of both and to how Rand and the transhuman are interpreted. The Randian ideal man and the transhuman have been seen as incarnations of the *Übermensch*. The significance of the connections between Nietzsche, Rand, and the transhuman will be seen further in the next chapter.

Not only do Rand's fiction and transhumanism express similar views regarding the conquest of nature as man's purpose—the two projects have similar philosophical roots, in both liberal humanism and Nietzschean philosophy. The tension between humanism and Nietzsche has shaped the development of Objectivism and transhumanism; this tension continues to inform responses to and perceptions of both movements. The two movements are also linked through their interactions with the science-fictional sphere—as suggested by the previous chapter and expanded on in the next. There are thus several overlaps between Objectivism and posthumanism in its transhumanist guise, leading towards the conclusion that Rand's work can be used to support a posthuman vision.

### **Randian Transhumanism**

In a journal entry dated July 18, 1945, during a discussion of man's biological "instincts" versus his "rational faculty," Rand offers a bracketed comment which is both a restatement of Nietzsche's man-as-bridge and a prefiguring of the posthuman: "Perhaps we are really in the process of evolving from apes to Supermen—and the rational faculty is the dominant characteristic of the better species, the Superman."<sup>140</sup> The "rational faculty," man's ability to utilise reason, is what Rand most values in humanity; Objectivism deifies the rational: "My philosophy, in essence, is the concept of man as a heroic being, with [...] reason as his only absolute."<sup>141</sup> Reason is valorised especially since its use is the basis of scientific discovery and technological advancement, the "productive achievement" which is also intrinsic to Objectivism.

Rand's statement about evolving into Supermen implies that she would welcome the arrival of transhumanity. Transhumanity comes about via the application of reason, taking control of our own evolution through science and technology. Whether or not she would have welcomed them into her sphere, transhumanists have certainly welcomed Rand into theirs.

Max More in 1990 produced a set of Extropian Principles, intended to guide adherents towards the transhuman future. The list, also called the Principles of Extropy, has evolved

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<sup>140</sup> Rand, *Journals*, 285.

<sup>141</sup> Rand, quoted in "About the Author," *Atlas Shrugged*, 1170–71.



over the years. In the early 1990s, there were five principles: (i) boundless expansion, (ii) self-transformation, (iii) dynamic optimism, (iv) intelligent technology, and (v) spontaneous order. “Boundless expansion” meant conquering death and the universe: “unlimited lifespan,” “the removal of political, cultural, biological, and psychological limits to self-actualization,” “[e]xpanding into the universe and advancing without end.” Self-transformation would involve continuous “self-improvement, through reason and critical thinking, personal responsibility, and experimentation. Seeking biological and neurological augmentation.” The third principle meant turning away from “blind faith” and “[a]dopting a rational, action-based optimism.” Embracing intelligent technology would mean using science “to transcend ‘natural’ limits imposed by our biological heritage.”<sup>142</sup> The final principle, spontaneous order, highlights especially the Extropian bias towards free markets and libertarian solutions. James Hughes comments: “More’s fifth principle [...] distilled their belief, derived from the work of Friedrich Hayek and Ayn Rand, that an anarchistic market creates free and dynamic order, while the state and its life-stealing authoritarianism is entropic.”<sup>143</sup>

Considering these principles, it is apparent that not only the final one is Randian. Each point on the list is to a great degree commensurate with Rand’s philosophy. Rand was very much in favour of rolling back the frontiers of the state in order to enable greater self-actualisation, and of individuals adopting a philosophy that would allow them to realise their chosen best selves. As we have seen, Rand was a fan of space exploration, of humanity’s expansion into the universe. “Dynamic optimism” in a sense describes Rand’s benevolent universe premise. The Extropian Principles speak of rationality and “[p]ositive expectations fueling dynamic action.”<sup>144</sup> According to Rand’s premise, as explained by her heir Leonard Peikoff, “reality is ‘benevolent’ in the sense that if you *do* adapt to it—i.e., if you do think, value, and act rationally, then you can (and barring accidents you will) achieve your values.”<sup>145</sup> The sentiment is the same. Most importantly, perhaps, as discussed throughout this thesis, Rand was a staunch defender of the place of science and technology in human existence, and a firm believer in its ability to safely expand our capabilities.

The similarities between Extropianism and Objectivism are not a coincidence. Rand’s work is a visible presence in the movement, particularly in its early days. The Extropians started an email list in 1991, “catching the wind of the Internet typhoon and its high-tech libertopianism.”<sup>146</sup> A 1997 email from More to subscribers includes an “Extropian Principles

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<sup>142</sup> Max More, “Extropian Principles,” quoted in Hughes, *Citizen Cyborg*, 166.

<sup>143</sup> Hughes, *Citizen Cyborg*, 166.

<sup>144</sup> More, “Extropian Principles,” quoted in Hughes, *Citizen Cyborg*, 166.

<sup>145</sup> Peikoff, “Philosophy of Objectivism,” quoted at *Ayn Rand Lexicon*, ed. Binswanger, accessed October 10, 2014, [http://aynrandlexicon.com/lexicon/benevolent\\_universe\\_premise.html](http://aynrandlexicon.com/lexicon/benevolent_universe_premise.html). Emphasis in original.

<sup>146</sup> Hughes, *Citizen Cyborg*, 166.

reading list.” Among the ten most important books to read, according to More, is *Atlas Shrugged*. Also included in the top ten is Richard Dawkins’s *The Selfish Gene* (1976) and Hans Moravec’s *Mind Children: The Future of Robot and Human Intelligence* (1988). The longer-form, subject-categorised list includes Rand’s *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal*, and the work of Nathaniel Branden.<sup>147</sup> An early article in the techno-bible *Wired*, which did much to raise the profile of Extropianism, mentions the influence on the movement of Rand’s concept of the “heroic being.”<sup>148</sup> At the Extropy Institute’s 1994 conference, More discussed Rand’s views on epistemology at length, in the process of putting forward his own vision. More argues *against* Rand’s closed-mindedness, but this is almost beside the point: Rand is present as a basis—a progenitor—upon which a separate vision is achieved; this too is indicative of the reach of Rand’s influence. Notably, More assumes his audience of transhumanists will be familiar with Rand:

Superficially and officially Objectivism opposed blind faith, dogma, unquestioned authority, and unexamined assumptions [...]. Despite all this, as many of you have observed first-hand, Rand herself and too many of her disciples became true believers [...].

[...]

Part of the dogmatizing pressure was generated by the *foundationalist* nature of her philosophical system, combined with her lifelong insistence that Objectivism was a *closed system*[,] an intellectual structure that must be taken whole or not at all, a system that was complete, perfect, and unalterable. [...] Foundationalism shows up first in the axiomatic foundations of Objectivism. Rand declared the ideas of existence, identity, and consciousness to be axiomatic concepts. [...] Theists have made exactly parallel statement[s], replacing “axiomatic concepts” with “God” or “The Bible.”

[...]

Unlike Objectivism, Extropian thought has never claimed to be either complete or closed.<sup>149</sup>

Neither Extropianism in particular nor transhumanism in general is a successor to Objectivism in any complete sense. The influences on the field, even in its most libertarian incarnations, are myriad, and often contradictory of each other. A new philosophy emerges from this mix. The important point to make is that Rand is a part of the mix—and a more significant part than many others. Marc Geddes wrote a lengthy article for the official website of the World Transhumanist Association (now Humanity+) outlining the relationship between Objectivism and transhumanism. Geddes argues that “Objectivism helped to play a role in the

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<sup>147</sup> Max More, “Extropian Principles Reading List,” October 11, 1997, <http://extropians.weidai.com/extropians.4Q97/0428.html>.

<sup>148</sup> Ed Regis, “Meet the Extropians,” *Wired*, October 1994, [http://archive.wired.com/wired/archive/2.10/extropians\\_pr.html](http://archive.wired.com/wired/archive/2.10/extropians_pr.html).

<sup>149</sup> Max More, “Pancritical Rationalism: An Extropic Metacontext for Mimetic Progress,” accessed February 23, 2015, <http://www.maxmore.com/pcr.htm>. Originally delivered at the Extropy Institute’s 1994 conference, EXTRO-1, and published in its proceedings. Emphases in original.



development of transhumanist thought and [...] the defense of liberty and individualism is a key part of [...] Extropianism.” However, “Objectivism holds rigid, limited views on certain points, and these conflict with transhumanism.” Among the significant common elements between Objectivism and transhumanism that Geddes cites are Rand’s staunchly pro-technology views and the “Nietzschean” ideal of heroic man. Geddes’s critique of Rand suggests that her philosophy is too self-centric and does not consider the social, which is necessary when contemplating a future of transhumanity:

A major problem with rational self-interest is that it fails to take into account the fact that human nature is not fixed. The concept of the “self” is fluid, and this means that we need to consider social goals as well as individual ones. [...]

[...] One major problem with the Objectivist politics [is] the growing power of technologies required to carry out the transhumanist program. These technologies require some degree of regulation to protect us from existential threats.<sup>150</sup>

On a similar note, James Hughes, a self-described democratic transhumanist, commenting on the politics of the movement in 2001, summarised: “Contemporary transhumanism has grown out of white, male, affluent, American Internet culture, and its political perspective has generally been a militant version of the libertarianism typical of that culture.” He goes on: “For the transhumanist movement to grow and become a serious challenge to their opposites, the bio-Luddites, they will need to distance themselves from their elitist anarcho-capitalist roots and clarify commitments to liberal democratic institutions, values and public policies.”<sup>151</sup> In recent times this shift has become apparent. As a foundational figure in transhumanism, Max More’s own growth has been away from Rand and towards liberalism, in the classical sense, rather than libertarianism. The current version of the Extropian Principles, released in 2003, significantly tones down the “Randian” rhetoric: “boundless expansion” is replaced with the more moderate notion of “perpetual progress.” “Dynamic optimism,” with its connotations of the heroic world-mover, is substituted by a more analytical “practical optimism.” Most meaningfully, the anti-government idea of “spontaneous order” is gone. Rand/Hayek is replaced by Karl Popper. The fifth principle now advocates “open society” and warns against the kind of utopian thought and planning Popper excoriates in *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Placing the 1990s principle and the latest version side by side, the transition from a pseudo-Randian free-market ideal, to a more inclusive Popperian concept, is evident. The early edition:

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<sup>150</sup> Marc Geddes, “Transhumanism and the Philosophy of Ayn Rand,” World Transhumanist Association, September 1, 2002, <http://transhumanism.org/index.php/th/more/302/>.

<sup>151</sup> James Hughes, “The Politics of Transhumanism,” ChangeSurfer.com, March 2002, <http://www.changesurfer.com/Acad/TranshumPolitics.htm>.

Spontaneous Order: Supporting decentralized, voluntaristic social coordination processes. Fostering tolerance, diversity, foresight, personal responsibility and individual liberty.<sup>152</sup>

And the latest:

Open Society—Supporting social orders that foster freedom of speech, freedom of action, and experimentation. Opposing authoritarian social control and favoring the rule of law and decentralization of power. Preferring bargaining over battling, and exchange over compulsion. Openness to improvement rather than a static utopia.<sup>153</sup>

The move away from Rand within transhumanism does not undo the fact that she was there at the origin. As we saw in chapter two, many in youth have been inspired and influenced by the Russian-American author, and then taken their own path. Rand provides fuel for many fires; her impact is far wider than those who would consider themselves firm followers of Objectivism, attempting to implement Rand's principles as policy. Notably, the inspiration Rand's work provides—as we have seen within transhumanism—is not *merely* of the life-affirming kind, which one could presumably gain from the work of various writers of fiction. Rand influences at the level of ideas. Belief-systems are clarified in relation to hers.

Transhumanists have clearly paid much attention to Objectivism. Objectivists have also paid attention to transhumanism. The second-largest interest group pushing Rand's ideas, after the ARI—the Atlas Society—defines Objectivism as an open philosophical system, in which Rand is the foundational figure but not the final arbiter. It stands to reason, therefore, that the society would be open to amendments to Rand's beliefs from outside quarters in a way that “closed system” Objectivists are not—this includes from the field of transhumanism. Answering a question about transhumanism as it relates to Objectivism, William R. Thomas offers a comprehensive response on the Atlas Society website. Thomas is a lecturer in economics at the University at Albany, New York. He writes:

The basic premises of Transhumanism are compatible with Objectivism. Transhumanists emphasize the use of reason to assess new technologies, view technological progress as desirable, and value individual control over one's body and mind. Transhumanism is a this-worldly ideology descending from secular humanism and it rejects mysticism. Objectivist values would fit within the Transhumanist tent. And insofar as Transhumanist projections of the future are accurate, Objectivists would be advised to take them into account.

[...] It is simply rationality to take a clear-eyed view of future possibilities [for human enhancement].

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<sup>152</sup> More, “Extropian Principles,” quoted in Hughes, *Citizen Cyborg*, 166.

<sup>153</sup> Max More, “Extropian Principles 3.0,” posted by “jhughes,” World Transhumanist Association, September 9, 2004, <http://www.transhumanism.org/index.php/WTA/more/449>.



Thomas, however, explicitly warns against the kind of posthumanist discourse that denigrates man by purporting “to value all forms of sentience equally, including animals. That’s more like anti-humanism to me.” As we have seen, this is the strain of posthumanism put forward by Cary Wolfe and Donna Haraway. He argues: “While an Objectivist could be a Transhumanist, many Transhumanists embrace values that are contrary to Objectivism. This is particularly true in politics, where some leading Transhumanists seek government support for favored technologies and favored research programs.” In addition, many transhumanists have wrongly shifted “from a pro-technology boosterism to arguing that society must manage and control technology to avoid harmful outcomes.” Thomas makes the point that some transhumanists “deprecate man as he actually is,” whereas for Objectivists, “[t]hat we can be improved and strengthened doesn’t make us bad or incapable as we are. Indeed, it is glorious that we are increasingly able to take conscious control of our biological nature.” Thomas summarises: “In short, I think Objectivists can be Transhumanists and can learn from what Transhumanists investigate. But Transhumanists could benefit from the Objectivist view of human nature, ethics, and politics as well.”<sup>154</sup>

A 2004 article in the Québécois libertarian journal, *Le Québécois libre*, argues for just such an Objectivist–transhumanist synthesis. Gennady Stolyarov II discusses the life-extension theories and science of gerontologist Aubrey de Grey, who is working towards the reversal of the aging process. De Grey’s theories that aging can be ended within the next several decades are supported by, amongst others, Ray Kurzweil, a futurist and Google’s chief engineer, and another famous figure within the transhumanist movement. Stolyarov argues that Objectivism—with its philosophical focus on the individual productive life, not on the supernatural realm or on the needs of society—provides the basis for a *moral defence* of transhumanist goals, where traditional moral systems may be opposed to such goals:

While many “traditional” value systems do not provide support for the desirability of such advances, the Principles of Extropy, assisted by the firm, interrelated conceptual hierarchy of Objectivism, make it possible to argue in their favor on the most fundamental moral levels and reverse the prevailing mainstream paradigm which holds that such radical technological advances are either undesirable or impossible. Libertarians of all stripes should rejoice at the proximity of these opportunities, as well as their immensely beneficent implications for individual freedom. [...] [R]esistance by governments, criminals, and irrationalist intellectuals against individual liberty and initiative will be futile once indefinite life is attained.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> William R. Thomas, “Transhumanism: How Does It Relate to Objectivism?,” Atlas Society, accessed February 24, 2015, <http://www.atlassociety.org/transhumanism-how-does-it-relate-objectivism>.

<sup>155</sup> Gennady Stolyarov II, “The Objectivist–Extropian Synthesis,” *Le Québécois libre*, October 15, 2004, <http://www.quebecoislibre.org/04/041015-5.htm>.

This use of Rand's work to bolster the moral case for transhumanism is an exercise also taken up by others—including by Zoltan Istvan in his philosophical novel, *The Transhumanist Wager*, which is discussed in chapter five.

What this chapter has established is an array of philosophical links and common ideas between Objectivism and trans-/posthumanism. When looking at a writer's work and impact, we must look beyond what the work says, to how the work has been put to use, then look back to the work itself, to perhaps better understand why it has been put to use in this way. Ayn Rand's work supports a posthuman vision, precisely because it has supported a posthuman vision. This may be a solipsistic argument, but it nevertheless remains fact. Rand directly influenced transhumanism, and Objectivists are now seeing the importance of transhumanism too, and acknowledging that their philosophy is to a large extent consistent with it. Looking back at Rand's work, it is possible to see why. Both Objectivism and transhumanism are indebted to Nietzsche's Superman; the tension between the Superman and liberal humanism is at the philosophical core of each movement. The promotion of the rational individual mind as the creator of technology—this is also at the heart of both Rand's work and the transhumanist project, and the reason is the same in each case: the transcendence of limits to self-fulfilment. Objectivism and posthumanism represent overlapping circles, with transhumanism at the point of intersection.



## Ayn Rand in Fictions of Life after Humanity

“There’s a young man, and his name is Equality 7-2521,” said Senator Rand Paul (R–Kentucky), speaking to a hearing of the US Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. It was April 12, 2011, and Paul was arguing against government mandates to phase out incandescent light bulbs in favour of more energy-efficient models. Paul is the son of another prominent libertarian politician, former Texas congressman Ron Paul. He is not named after Ayn Rand (his full first name is Randall). However, as part of his argument at that committee meeting, he did offer a lengthy summary of his namesake’s novella, *Anthem*:

In that novel, individual choice is banned, and the collective basically runs society. [...] [Equality 7-2521 is] an intelligent young man, but he is banned from achieving, or reaching any sort of occupation that might challenge him. He’s a street sweeper.

Over time, he discovers a subway, and he rediscovers the incandescent light bulb. And he thinks, naively, that electricity and the brilliance of light would be an advantage for society, and that it would bring great new things as far as being able to see at night, and to read, and the advancement of civilization.

Well, he takes it before the collective of elders, and they take the light bulb, and basically it’s crushed beneath the boot heel of the collective.

The senator concludes with the moral he has drawn: “The collective has no place, basically, [in] individual choice.” Therefore, government should play no role in compelling such standards.<sup>1</sup>

*Anthem* is hardly the only science fiction text ever to have been put to use in parliamentary debate. Perhaps the most frequently cited is the very first work of science fiction: *Frankenstein*. Mary Shelley’s creation was referred to more than once during 1980s debates on embryo research in the House of Commons and the House of Lords, for example.<sup>2</sup> *Frankenstein* is a myth which still governs many of our thoughts about science and technology. Therefore, a discussion of Shelley’s novel will shortly set up what is to come in this chapter. As background to this, let us review the common nineteenth-century origins of Objectivism and posthumanism.

The Industrial Revolution is a pivotal point in human history—for Ayn Rand and for theorists of the posthuman. Man’s mastery of nature here reaches new heights, as

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<sup>1</sup> Eric Kleefeld, “Rand Paul Gives Senate Lesson in Ayn Rand and Lightbulbs,” *Talking Points Memo*, April 12, 2011, <http://talkingpointsmemo.com/dc/rand-paul-gives-senate-lesson-in-ayn-rand-and-light-bulbs-video>.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Mulkay, “Frankenstein and the Debate Over Embryo Research,” *Science, Technology, and Human Values* 21, no. 2 (Spring 1996): 165–69, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/689772>.

mechanisation advances. This is the origin of modern industrial capitalism, the technological advancement which makes possible globalisation and posthuman conception. According to Bruce Mazlish, this is “where humans pass, or begin to pass, the boundary between the animal and the mechanical. Henceforth, human evolution seems to point in a new direction.”<sup>3</sup> The mechanical rises and the organic seems less essential. What Pat Hudson calls the “machinery question” was alive at the height of the nineteenth century: the issue of how mechanisation was affecting humanity. This drove the Luddite opposition to mechanisation: “The ‘machinery question’ was important in crowd action in manufacturing areas before and during the Luddite period”; “[l]ong-maintained traditional skills were made redundant and with their passing went long-established communal identities embedded in the cultures of work.”<sup>4</sup> Rand represents the opposite of Luddism. For someone with Rand’s view, mechanisation does not shackle man to the assembly line, but rather ultimately frees his mind to do more, as machines take over menial tasks. The fear of lost identity which drove the Luddites, can also drive current opposition to technological advancement. Technological progress is marked by twin emotions: fear and excitement, both stemming from its possibilities. The fear is that technology will eclipse old ways of life; the excitement that technology makes possible new ways of living. Today, “Luddite” is a derogatory word, conflated with various kinds of backwardness. Thus, transhumanists have taken on the term to define their opponents. James Hughes refers to those who oppose genetic and technological augmentation as “bio-Luddites,” a label which has caught on. Bio-Luddites can be of the traditional political right or left: the former generally opposed to transhumanism on religious grounds, the latter on grounds of environmentalism.

It is no coincidence that science fiction also has its origins in the Industrial Revolution. Existential fear and excitement are the twin emotions that mark the genre; scientific and technological advancement, and the consequences for humanity, provide the content which fuels these emotions. The era of the Industrial Revolution is also the era of Romanticism. As man breaks free of nature with his technology, he was also breaking old cultural codes. The individual empowerment which is the promise of new technologies, is mirrored in the premise of Romanticism: the individual creator is not beholden to externally set laws. This, at least, is how Rand views history.

The previous chapter identified transhumanism as the aspect of the posthuman most relevant to a discussion involving Ayn Rand. Chapter five expands on this fact. The consideration of Rand in the context of the trans-/posthuman here turns to the fictional sphere. I examine Rand’s relationship with the genre of posthumanist science fiction, and explore how

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<sup>3</sup> Bruce Mazlish, *The Fourth Discontinuity: The Co-Evolution of Humans and Machines* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 12.

<sup>4</sup> Pat Hudson, *The Industrial Revolution* (London: Edward Arnold, 1992), 217.



her work has been put to use in three fictional representations of trans-/posthumanity: the television series *Andromeda*, the videogame *BioShock*, and Zoltan Istvan's novel *The Transhumanist Wager*. I preface my discussion of these fictions with a general introduction to posthumanism as a strain within science fiction—a strain that begins with the very first SF text: *Frankenstein*.

### Humanity, Enhanced in Fiction

When the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, American radio commentator H. V. Kaltenborn declared, "For all we know, we have created a Frankenstein!"<sup>5</sup> Today the name of Mary Shelley's creation is cited in debates about embryo research; we speak of genetically modified organisms as "Frankenfood." Jon Turney summarises: "[W]hen we look for ways to interpret the latest developments, the hot news from the lab, the technological promises for the twenty-first century, when we look for stories to tell about what we are about to do, we commonly reach back to a story which is almost two hundred years old"; Shelley, "identif[ied] concerns which go to the heart of our response to science."<sup>6</sup> *Frankenstein* is a gothic metaphor for fear of science that pushes the boundaries of life, and consequently could destroy life as we know it. The creation and the creator have become fused in the popular imagination, a conflation signifying horror of both: the science and the scientist, the technology and its originator. As Roslynn D. Haynes puts it: "Not only has his name become synonymous with any experiment out of control but his relation with the Monster he creates has become, in the popular mind at least, complete identification: Frankenstein *is* the Monster."<sup>7</sup>

The novel which is often seen as the first work of science fiction is a Romantic novel—and it provides an image of the monstrous posthuman. The possibilities of contemporary science are at the centre of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818/31); Shelley was the first to put "the creation of the Homunculus on a purely scientific basis."<sup>8</sup> The opening line of the preface to the first edition states: "The event on which this fiction is founded, has been supposed by Dr. [Erasmus] Darwin, and some of the physiological writers of Germany, as not of impossible occurrence."<sup>9</sup> Here, fear is the

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<sup>5</sup> H. V. Kaltenborn, quoted in Glen Scott Allen, "Master Mechanics and Evil Wizards: Science and the American Imagination from *Frankenstein* to *Sputnik*," *Massachusetts Review* 33, no. 4 (Winter 1992): 506, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25090380>.

<sup>6</sup> John Turney, *Frankenstein's Footsteps: Science, Genetics, and Popular Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 2–3.

<sup>7</sup> Roslynn D. Haynes, *From Faust to Strangelove: Representations of the Scientist in Western Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 92. Emphasis in original.

<sup>8</sup> Louis Awad, "The Alchemist in English Literature: *Frankenstein*," quoted in Fred Botting, *Making Monstrous: "Frankenstein," Criticism, Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), 166.

<sup>9</sup> Preface (1818) to *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, by Mary Shelley, ed. M. K. Joseph (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 13. This preface was reportedly written by Percy Shelley, though its authorship does not alter the claims of the text. In her introduction to the 1831 revised

governing intent (also placing Shelley in the gothic tradition). A man, Victor Frankenstein, studies ancient and modern science to an intense degree, begins his own experiments—and innovates: he discovers the “spark,” a kind of electricity, that gives life to living things.<sup>10</sup> He creates a posthuman: a being that is man and more than man, human and not so human; man overcome. The creature’s form is composed from the body parts of dead humans, and endowed with life via Frankenstein’s discovery. It is possessed of supernatural speed and strength. Abandoned by his creator, the creature wreaks havoc on Frankenstein’s life: murdering those close to Victor in acts of revenge. Confronting Victor, the creature demands a bride: a companion who will be like him, since he is shunned by all others who behold his hideousness. Frankenstein determines, however, that he must not create such a creature. He fears for “the existence of the whole human race,” should “a race of devils [...] be propagated upon the earth.”<sup>11</sup> The creature continues his path of destruction, pursued but never caught by his creator. Haynes notes, appropriately, that it “has taken such twentieth-century Monsters” as in vitro fertilisation and genetic engineering “to illuminate fully the depths of meaning” in Shelley’s tale. Frankenstein became “the dominant image of the scientist in twentieth-century fiction and film.”<sup>12</sup>

Rand mentions *Frankenstein* in her writing course, “The Art of Fiction.” Classifying *Frankenstein* as “fantasy,” she says: “The meaning of the story is valid: a man must bear the consequences of his actions and should be careful not to create monsters that destroy him. This is a profound message, which is why the name Frankenstein has become almost a generic word (like Babbitt).”<sup>13</sup> Rand’s brief comment does not capture the full thematic portent of Shelley’s novel. “Frankenstein” has proved such a powerful general metaphor because of a very specific fear, which is a post-Industrial Revolution fear: that of men becoming gods. In David Skal’s words, its impetus is “dire warnings against divine presumption.”<sup>14</sup> Victor’s narrative in the book is filled with pleas not to follow his path in the pursuit of ultimate knowledge and power over life itself. At the outset, Frankenstein resolves to tell his story to Walton in order to dissuade the explorer from the “madness” of attempts to conquer nature. When he describes the moment of his own discovery, Victor refuses to pass to Walton the

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edition, Mary also references “the experiments of Dr. Darwin” as lying behind the book’s premise. Mary Shelley, introduction (1831) to *Frankenstein*, 8–9.

<sup>10</sup> That which brings the creature to life is described as the “spark of being” (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 57). M. K. Joseph comments that Shelley links the myth of the Promethean life-giver with “certain current scientific theories which suggested that the ‘divine spark’ of life might be electrical or quasi-electrical in nature.” Joseph, introduction to *Frankenstein*, by Mary Shelley, vii.

<sup>11</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 165–66.

<sup>12</sup> Haynes, *From Faust to Strangelove*, 101, 92.

<sup>13</sup> Ayn Rand, *The Art of Fiction: A Guide for Writers and Readers*, ed. Tore Boeckmann (New York: Plume, 2000), 170.

<sup>14</sup> David J. Skal, *Screams of Reason: Mad Science and Modern Culture* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), 34.



knowledge he possesses, saying: “Learn from me [...] how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge, and how much happier that man who believes his native town to be the entire world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow.”<sup>15</sup> This is *Frankenstein*’s, the man and the book’s, moral encapsulated. The many monstrous adaptations of the novel in popular culture may not state this warning so explicitly—a good story is all that’s required—but they play off the exact same theme, the same fear of transgressing the boundaries of life.

Of course, there are religious injunctions against messing with life’s frontiers; according to this view, men are men and should not assume the powers of the divine. But, the fear is also entirely secular. Altering the boundaries of life may spell our doom: we may be destroyed by our creations, by the children of our minds.<sup>16</sup> This fear holds true for “Frankenfood” as it does for the cyborgian posthuman and artificial intelligence.

The views expressed by Shelley in *Frankenstein* regarding the morality of scientific and technological development could not be more different from those of Rand. Where Shelley warns against the pursuit of knowledge, science, and by extension technology, Rand celebrates all these things. It is interesting that both make use of the Prometheus myth, a staple of Romanticism, in elaborating their contrary moralities. In Shelley, Prometheus is certainly a symbol of hubris: he who steals the power of the gods, the “spark of being,” and suffers for the same—as Frankenstein, Prometheus’s modern incarnation, suffers.<sup>17</sup> Victor’s final plea to Walton is that he should “avoid ambition,” and thus avoid Frankenstein’s fate.<sup>18</sup> In Rand, too, Prometheus is a symbol of pride—but pride is only ever a positive trait, for Rand: as is the pursuit of knowledge and science. Her Prometheus is also the bringer of the gods’ fire, but this makes him an idol to be celebrated, not a dangerous delinquent deserving of punishment. As discussed in chapter three, Prometheus is referenced in three of Rand’s four novels. The most significant use of the myth is in *Anthem*. Here, in a technologically bereft future, Rand’s

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<sup>15</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 28, 53.

<sup>16</sup> Robotics expert Hans Moravec refers to robots and artificial intelligences as “mind children” and “the children of our minds.” Moravec, *Mind Children: The Future of Robot and Human Intelligence* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 1.

<sup>17</sup> Joseph comments on the use of the Prometheus myth: “The myth of Prometheus contained two elements. The first, best known through the *Prometheus Bound* of Aeschylus, was the story of Prometheus *pyrphoros*, who had brought down fire from the sun in order to succour mankind, and whom Zeus had punished by chaining him to the Caucasus with an eagle feeding on his vitals. The second was the story of Prometheus *plasticator* who, in some versions, was said to have created or recreated mankind by animating a figure of clay. [...] By about the second or third century AD, the two elements were fused together, so that the fire stolen by Prometheus was also the fire of life with which he animated his man of clay. [...] Mary Shelley [...] seized on the vital significance of making Prometheus the creator rather than, as in Byron and Shelley, the suffering champion of mankind.” Joseph, introduction to *Frankenstein*, by Mary Shelley, vii. Mary Shelley’s modern Prometheus, however, both gives life and suffers on account of passing on the “spark of being”—thus combining the two elements of the myth.

<sup>18</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 217.

hero discovers the life-giving spark of electricity—something which could revolutionise ways of living on earth—after which he renames himself Prometheus. Prometheus’s invention, a lightbulb, is framed as a giver of life. It is “[t]he power of the sky [...] made to do men’s bidding,” “the future of mankind.”<sup>19</sup> Science here, then, is framed as the pursuit of life-expanding capability, not the harbinger of death, as it is in *Frankenstein*. At the end of *Anthem*, Prometheus triumphantly vows to convert those he can to his new creed of living for oneself; of freedom, science, and progress. Rand uses the same myth as Shelley as the basis for an opposing morality of technology. And so today her supporters, far from considering it Frankenfood, can write in praise of the genetically modified organism; for them, such playing God advances—it does not hinder—human survival.<sup>20</sup>

The “posthuman,” then, has been inherent in science fiction since its start, since *Frankenstein*, even if not named as such. It has been present as the possibility that humanity will be overcome by its techno-scientific creations. Many critics identify the creature as a proto-cyborg.<sup>21</sup> The anxieties of *Frankenstein* are reproduced in popular SF from *Terminator* to *Battlestar Galactica* to *H+: The Digital Series*, a recent online episodic programme, distributed by Warner Bros., which deals with transhumanism. Science fiction so often prefigures scientific reality. Humans have not yet been able to create sentient beings, children of our minds, which supersede us; we have not yet been outdone by our technology. But, as science and technology have advanced, speculation as to this possibility has only grown and found new forms. The posthuman is a direct presence in some of the SF so far considered in this thesis; *Brave New World* has been moving onto a par with *Frankenstein* as a most-cited portrayal of the horrors possible through technological advancement. More generally, we could say that the posthuman lurks in the background of the very imagination of the science fiction genre, because of the genre’s preoccupation with the relationship between technology and human societies. Thoughts of man combined with machine emerge from this imagination. For my purposes in this chapter, I will define a work of posthumanist science fiction broadly,

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<sup>19</sup> Ayn Rand, *Anthem* (New York: Signet, 2005), 60, 70.

<sup>20</sup> Amanda Maxham writes for the ARI: [T]he technology of genetic engineering has meant more plentiful food protected from insects and weeds in the field. It has also meant more plentiful medicine without the threat of shortages.” Maxham, “When I Think of Genetic Engineering, Crippling Humanity Doesn’t Come to Mind,” *Voices for Reason*, Ayn Rand Institute, August 1, 2014, [http://ari.aynrand.org/blog/2014/08/01/when-i-think-of-genetic-engineering-crippling-humanity-doesnt-come-to-mind?utm\\_source=bluehornet&utm\\_medium=impactweekly&utm\\_campaign=080714](http://ari.aynrand.org/blog/2014/08/01/when-i-think-of-genetic-engineering-crippling-humanity-doesnt-come-to-mind?utm_source=bluehornet&utm_medium=impactweekly&utm_campaign=080714).

<sup>21</sup> “The cyborg is [...] a Frankenstein [monster],” Skal, *Screams of Reason*, 274; “James Cameron’s *Terminator* (1984) is Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* revisioned via gleaming machines instead of body parts,” Adam Roberts, *Science Fiction*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2006), 110; “In literature [...] the cyborg’s inception occurred in [...] *Frankenstein*,” Brenda E. Brasher, “Thoughts on the Status of the Cyborg: On Technological Socialization and Its Link to the Religious Function of Popular Culture,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 809–810, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1465623>.



as any text that features a portrayal of the posthuman—cyborgs, genetically engineered humans, et al.

Within science fiction that portrays posthumanism proper, the posthuman is not always present as nightmare; in non-technophobic texts, it takes the form of a dream of overcoming the limitations of present existence. It is both fearful and exciting, depending on the observer. Both Haraway and Hayles discuss various science fiction texts as exemplars of the posthuman. Hayles references *Robocop* and the six-million-dollar man as embodiments of her cybernetic posthuman.<sup>22</sup> Haraway celebrates cyborgs in the “feminist science fiction” of Joanna Russ, James Tiptree Jr., Vonda McIntyre, and others, as beings which “make very problematic the statuses of man or woman, human, artefact, member of a race, individual entity, or body.”<sup>23</sup> According to Nick Bostrom, science fiction has been vital to the development of transhumanism, since it causes people to think “about the future evolution of the human race.” He cites *Brave New World* and *Frankenstein* as key texts in the debates surrounding “human technological transformation”; the content of the novels has been used to reinforce fear of the transhuman.<sup>24</sup> Max More and his wife Natasha Vita-More’s *The Transhumanist Reader* includes a section, by Michael R. Rose, discussing portrayals of immortality in fiction and their relationship with real-life scientific ideas. Rose’s conclusion states the obvious: that achieving immortality through science in real life is a lot more complex than the many portrayals of immortality-through-science in fiction.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, his contribution to the reader demonstrates that it is now not possible to offer a rounded view of certain scientific developments without discussing their antecedents in SF—the pendulum has swung all the way, if you like, from when Mary Shelley cited science in order to preface her work of science fiction. The posthuman and the transhuman are part of the science-fictional milieu, as science fiction is part of the transhumanist and posthumanist milieu. As we have seen, Ayn Rand operates in both arenas.

### **From Ambivalence to Absolutism**

In the 1980s, some of the basic tenets of Rand’s worldview were accepted as economic (and hence political) fact: that wealth is created by an entrepreneurial elite who “move the engines”

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<sup>22</sup> N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetic, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 3–4.

<sup>23</sup> Donna J. Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,” in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books, 1991), 178–79.

<sup>24</sup> Nick Bostrom, “A History of Transhumanist Thought,” *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 14, no. 1 (April 2005), <http://jetpress.org/volume14/bostrom.html>.

<sup>25</sup> Michael R. Rose, “Immortalist Fictions and Strategies,” in *The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future*, ed. Max More and Natasha Vita-More (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), Kindle edition, 203–4.

of economies. The Reagan presidency scaled back state involvement in the American economy to a level not seen since before the New Deal.<sup>26</sup> Commensurate with this, since at least the 1960s, “dispersed narratives” of culture and of human activity were on the rise. The aftermath of World War II had brought about a questioning of all totalising narratives. Modernism would give way to postmodernism; old ideas of truth, history, the integrity of the human itself, were fundamentally breached. Simultaneously, the rise of systems theory and the advent of cybernetics (mentioned in the last chapter) provided a scientific parallel to cultural postmodernism: identity could be located not in a discrete self but in a diffuse network. In one respect, the Reagan Revolution was about a master narrative: its impetus was the supposed rebirth of distinctly American values, such as individual freedom (people fending for themselves unaided by government). However, the decentring power of globalised high capitalism—in which Reaganism was firmly embedded—also facilitated the questioning and rupturing instincts of the postmodern era. Old ways of life and careers were made obsolete, as the United States became deindustrialised. The liberalisation of trade meant factory owners could maximise their profits by moving to places with lower labour costs and lower taxes. Meanwhile, mechanisation meant humans were simply not needed to do factory jobs that machines could now do. The explosive growth in consumer products provided choices for entertainment and ways of keeping in contact that had never been there before. But this technology of connectedness, too, had a rupturing effect: human lives and communities could not exist unto themselves, in aspic, as they might have done before. Globalisation may be about progress—depending on your political viewpoint—but it is also about disruptive change, loss, the obsolescence of prior truths.

The late-twentieth-century hyper-capitalist order, inaugurated under Reaganism, was met with a twin-pronged cultural response: on the one hand, an attempt to reassert the cleanliness of certain American/Western values; on the other, a radical lack of idealism, or an ambivalence, towards the future and what it entails for humanity. Hollywood blockbusters such as *First Blood* (1982) and *Die Hard* (1988) exemplify the first trend; 1980s American popular cinema was marked by, Susan Jeffords notes, “spectacular narratives about characters

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<sup>26</sup> Both the welfare state and old state-favoured industries came under assault. John Patrick Diggins writes: “[N]o president attacked the welfare state with Reagan’s animosity. From wherever he derived it, nothing could shake Reagan’s belief that poverty saps character and renders humankind weak and dependent.” Judith Stein comments: “Ronald Reagan propped up sectors [like finance] that had been outside New Deal relationships and undermined industries, like steel, that had been at their center. Without the weight of industries like steel, market ideologies reflecting favored sectors filled the vacuum. The nation replaced the assumption of the earlier era that capital and labor would prosper together with an ethic that postulated that promoting capital would eventually benefit labor, a very different way of running a nation.” Diggins, *Ronald Reagan: Fate, Freedom, and the Making of History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008), 327; Stein, *Running Steel, Running America: Race, Economic Policy, and the Decline of Liberalism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 6.



who stand for individualism, liberty, militarism, and a mythic heroism.”<sup>27</sup> But there was also postmodern/posthuman ambivalence—found in sci-fi noir such as *Blade Runner* (1982). Unleashed laissez-faire combined with postmodernism is responsible for this Janus-face.

The 1980s saw the birth of an iconic form of posthumanist SF: cyberpunk. *Blade Runner* set the tone for the genre, according to Scott Bukatman, both anticipating and heavily influencing it.<sup>28</sup> The genre can be understood as a response to the dislocating realities described above. What we might at this juncture call “classic” posthumanist science fiction, i.e. the mould of cyberpunk, operates out of postmodern ambivalence. I refer to postmodernism in Lyotard’s sense. In today’s globalised world, “[o]ne listens to reggae, watches a western, eats McDonald’s food for lunch and local cuisine for dinner, wears Paris perfume in Tokyo and ‘retro’ clothes in Hong Kong, knowledge is a matter for TV games.”<sup>29</sup> What goes along with the globalised intermixing of cultures is a relativity of all values, and a questioning and disrupting instinct: “To live in the postmodern condition [...] is to live without a grand and deep sense of abiding truth.”<sup>30</sup> This is what Jameson calls the cultural logic of late capitalism. Jameson himself considered cyberpunk “the supreme *literary* expression” of late capitalism.<sup>31</sup> Posthumanism, in its Haraway–Hayles–Wolfe construction, is the critical twin of postmodernism, even a facet of it, perhaps; it extends postmodernism’s cultural breakdown/intermixing to the breakdown of integral human(ist) identity itself; the human is intermixed with other elements as new definitions of identity are sought. This sense of posthumanism is about the negation of the old truths of Western life, of humanism itself; about disrupted boundaries and radical ways of calling into question the human being’s relationship to itself, to culture and the world, and to the machine. The latter-twentieth-century fictions which portray posthuman vistas, typically live in the questions of the future—without offering an answer to them; because, they suggest, none is possible. The question of man interlaced/interfaced with the machine is the primary. Posthumanist science fiction of the 1980s and 1990s—the period of Rand’s ascension as a legitimate political force—depicts vistas of man interlaced with / interfaced with the machine, and raises questions about what such radical combining would mean for the nature of the human. Often the depictions have a dystopian hue. Though, this depends on the nature of the reader. The overpopulated and crime-ridden environs of *Blade Runner* and *Neuromancer* do not strike me as places I would like to live. But, to a hardcore of “technolibertarians,” Gibson’s work, in particular, suggests a radical

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<sup>27</sup> Susan Jeffords, *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity of the Reagan Era* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 16.

<sup>28</sup> Scott Bukatman, *Blade Runner* (London: British Film Institute, 1997), 48.

<sup>29</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, “Answering the Question: What Is Postmodernism?,” in *Postmodernism: A Reader*, ed. Thomas Docherty (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 42.

<sup>30</sup> Mark Fortier, *Theory/Theatre: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 176.

<sup>31</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism; or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 419n, quoted in Bukatman, *Blade Runner*, 48. Emphasis in original.

freedom they wish to emulate. The “console cowboy,” Case, answerable only to himself, hacking into government agencies and mega-corporations, is a post-Randian libertarian hero. His work is in the utopia of cyberspace: a place where normal rules don’t apply, and an avatar can be free even of the laws of physics. The “post-Rand” nature of Gibson is discussed further below.

Rand stated cleanly the values of capitalism; they were for her utopian values, ideals which if properly practised would result in a perfect form of civilisation. Rand’s work played a significant part in the unleashing of high capitalism—the freeing of market forces, as regulations on capital were rolled back—in the final quarter of the last century. Cyberpunk emerges out of an environment Rand helped create, i.e. late capitalism. However, cyberpunk typically hinges upon late-capitalism-as-dystopia: it extrapolates from the present high-capitalist moment to a future even-more-advanced capitalist moment, where the erasure of humanity itself becomes a possibility. It is recognisable as “our world, gotten worse.”<sup>32</sup> In the context of this thesis, I call these classic posthumanist SF texts *Rand noir*, since the relationship between them and Rand’s works is roughly analogous to that between “clean” heroic fiction and noir texts. The former is the thriller genre, the novels of Fleming, Spillane, et al., which Rand celebrated as offering a spectacle of man’s efficacy (as quoted in chapter one); the latter is fraught with ambivalence, questioning, jadedness: it offers a sensibility, not an ideal. The latter *depends*, however, on the prior existence of the former; it states with irony and a disruptive instinct the ideals unambiguously espoused by the former.<sup>33</sup> I am not suggesting that posthumanist science fictions of the 1980s and 1990s are necessarily responding directly to Rand; but, as I’ve said, they emerge out of a culture Rand helped inaugurate, and they provide a portrayal of capitalism which is a response to Rand’s, in that they accept the existence of high capitalism but do not accept it as an ideal.

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<sup>32</sup> Pam Rosenthal, quoted in Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Control and Freedom: Power and Paranoia in the Age of Fiber Optics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 183.

<sup>33</sup> Given the amorphous nature of “noir” itself, I hope the reader will understand the licence I have taken in coining *Rand noir*. In citing noir here, I am thinking of many aspects in James Naremore’s description. As he suggests, it is not easy to define what constitutes a text under the rubric, and yet noir is something palpable. Films with the moniker might fit “somewhere between Gothic horror and dystopian science fiction”; film noir entails “a synthesis of hard-boiled fiction and German Expressionism.” Crime and “resistance to Aristotelian narratives [and] happy endings” are plot aspects associated with it, even if not definitive in themselves. Noir “reverse[s] the conventional norms” of clear heroes and villains and logical narrative action—both the latter being aspects of Rand’s fiction, of course. “[T]he ideal noir hero is the opposite of John Wayne”; he is “passive” and not rugged or chiselled in appearance. This also makes him the opposite of Rand’s heroes. Noir is associated with postmodernity. There is a “plausible case” that it is “a creation of postmodern culture—a belated reading of classic Hollywood” that has been “recycled.” Nowadays the term is applied to “many things besides movies.” Noir “has less to do with a group of artefacts than with a discourse—a loose, evolving system of arguments and readings.” James Naremore, “American Film Noir: The History of an Idea,” *Film Quarterly* 49, no. 2 (Winter 1995/96): 12, 19, 14, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1213310>.



There is, thus, “classic” posthumanist science fiction, operating out of postmodern ambivalence, which depends upon the existence of a kind of Randian precursor (high capitalism), turned dark: Rand noir. The relationship of this work to Rand’s works has been explained above, and the explanation is expanded below; the relationship is indirect. The third millennium, however—the first two decades of it, at least—has seen the advent of a number of works depicting transhumanism and posthumanism which interact directly with Rand’s fiction. These include *Andromeda* (2000–2005), a television series developed from notes left behind by Gene Roddenberry; the videogame *BioShock* (2007), developed by 2K Games; and *The Transhumanist Wager* (2013), a novel by Zoltan Istvan. In contrast to earlier posthumanist SF, these works take up a position, and put forward an argument, with regard to the issues they are airing: issues of the human future, man in relation to machine, and the nature of Objectivism itself. As they address or incorporate Rand’s vision, this position-taking is a logical response, I suggest. The absolutism of Rand demands an argument in response—not ambivalence. Any work that truly takes account of hers, would have to take this into account. This process is shown in operation below. Let us call these works, as a contrast to Rand noir, *Rand incorporated*, since this describes what they do: incorporate Ayn Rand directly into their plots and themes.

The remainder of this culminating chapter of my thesis may be seen as an extended case study, comparing classic “Rand noir” works of posthumanist science fiction, with later works that interact directly with Ayn Rand. I take three examples of classic posthumanist science fiction, and overlay them with these other works; the three classic examples are Ridley Scott’s 1982 film *Blade Runner*, Mamoru Oshii’s 1995 animated film *Ghost in the Shell*, and William Gibson’s 1984 novel *Neuromancer*. The three texts incorporating Rand are those named in the previous paragraph. *Andromeda* features a location named Ayn Rand Station, orbiting a planet called Fountainhead. The station is the birthplace of the “Nietzscheans,” a race of genetically engineered superhumans. *Andromeda* demonstrates the connections between Rand, Nietzsche, and the posthuman, and these are discussed further here. *BioShock* consciously depicts a post-Objectivist dystopia, and the game—as we will see—exemplifies the implicit and evident links between Rand and transhumanism. *The Transhumanist Wager* is, in key respects, a rewriting of *Atlas Shrugged*; where Rand promoted capitalism, Istvan promotes transhumanism. Istvan acknowledges Rand as a precursor. In his book, a Randian figure named Jethro Knights vows to transform the existing social order. As Galt does in *Atlas*, Knights courts the innovative elite. Knights brings them to a modern version of Galt’s Gulch, where they enact a radical vision of human beings improving themselves through interfacing with technology. By the end of *Atlas*, Galt has brought about the implosion of the novel’s socialistic American dystopia. At the end of Istvan’s book, thanks to the incredible

technological power Knights has developed, the hero overthrows all the world's existing governments, and institutes a new technolibertarian global polity.

In what follows, I hope to show how classic posthumanist SF raises questions about the machine age without giving answers, while posthumanist SF that incorporates Rand gives definite statements about moral directions humanity should take. The six texts are analysed under three main headings, with two texts included under each. These headings and the grouping of the different works under them, are somewhat arbitrary; any one of the texts could be analysed under any of the headings. However, for the sake of concision it is necessary to be selective, and I hope that my choices will prove instructive. *Blade Runner* and *Andromeda* are analysed for their different portrayals of "life beyond man"; *BioShock* and *Ghost in the Shell* for their vision of the upgraded human body; *Neuromancer* and *Wager* are considered for their portrayal of an advanced capitalist future earth where posthumanity is becoming real. These, as I say, are the overarching headings under which my analysis takes place; other issues naturally are brought into the discussion as well. I dwell at greatest length upon the last text discussed, *The Transhumanist Wager*, since it is the work that is most bountiful in terms of the theme of this thesis. Of all the texts considered, it is the one most indebted to Rand, while simultaneously possessing the most radical vision of transhumanity and the posthuman future. Since I cannot assume the familiarity of the reader with every work, much of my analysis is necessarily bound up with plot synopses: out of these my own argument will be apparent.

### **Life Beyond Man**

*Blade Runner* is certainly one of the most commented upon portrayals of a posthuman future. Based on Philip K. Dick's 1968 novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, the film is a more overtly dystopian text, more solidly contemplative when it comes to the relationship between human beings and our scientific offspring. It is an excellent example of a narrative that raises questions about the posthuman future, without making didactic statements about the direction we should take.

Set in 2019, the movie portrays a twenty-first century in which humanity struggles to control the integrity of its own identity. The Tyrell Corporation, an enormous conglomerate, has created a race of beings known as Replicants. These genetic mutations bear the appearance of humans; they are stronger physically and equally intelligent, if not more intelligent. Director Ridley Scott envisioned them as "supermen who couldn't fly."<sup>34</sup> The only thing they lack is human emotions. In order to prevent the Replicants forming their own emotional lives, and thus surpassing humanity completely, the beings have been given only a four-year lifespan.

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<sup>34</sup> Philip K. Dick, quoted in Bukatman, *Blade Runner*, 68. Dick is commenting on the differences between his original vision for the Replicants and Scott's portrayal. For Dick, they were to be "less than human," but Scott created them as "smarter, stronger, and [with] faster reflexes than humans."



Replicants are used as “slaves,” unpaid labour in “off-world” colonies. In this reality, man has expanded into space as a matter of survival; Earth gives the impression of being overpopulated, over-polluted, and near death: a symbolism reinforced through the fact that the film’s only time-settings appear to be twilight and night. Because of the risk of insurrection, Replicants are banned on Earth. Policemen named Blade Runners hunt down and “retire”—i.e. “kill”—any Replicants that make it back to our world. An “empathy test” is employed to detect Replicants, in which the subject’s pupil is monitored for his or her emotional responses to various hypothetical scenarios. The movie’s plot involves Blade Runner Rick Deckard (Harrison Ford) in pursuit of several Replicants who are loose in Los Angeles.

As in much posthumanist SF, *Blade Runner* suggests a certain Randian precursor: the power of the free market. High capitalism has given rise to the Tyrell Corporation, an organisation which now has more control over the fate of humanity than any government. The free market created Replicants. It is government—in the form of the police—that is scrambling to “regulate” this runaway technology, and thus to preserve human essentialism in a world where it is under threat. The film makes a nod to the (Randian) view of technology as tools of the human, to the technological impulse as part of what it means to be human, but asks: When our technology becomes so advanced that it surpasses us, that it gains its own sentience, does this not negate the human being? Deckard says at one point: “Replicants are like any other machine. They’re either a benefit or a hazard. If they’re a benefit it’s not my problem.”<sup>35</sup> For the purposes of my thesis, then, it is valid to ask: If two of Rand’s essential tenets are a promotion of technology and a belief in the free market, and the free market gives rise to sentient technology that surpasses what’s human, does Rand’s work not entail—in spite of her glorification of man—an ultimate nihilism regarding human destiny?

*Blade Runner*’s depicted society equates human emotions with what’s essentially human. Rand rejected emotionalism as a core human faculty, instead privileging reason and rationalism. Yet, compared to the “sentient machines” that are their offspring, human beings cannot hope to compete in terms of rationality. And so, *Blade Runner* is left with emotions as the sine qua non of humanness. Humanity rejects the notion that its technology could have an emotional life equivalent to its own, because this would mean—according to the very standards of humanism—that it would be wrong to subjugate Replicants as slaves. We thus preserve the idea, in spite of all evidence to the contrary, that Replicants are a programmed tool like any other: an extension of our individual minds, not individuals with minds of their own. The humans in *Blade Runner* practise what James Hughes calls human-racism: a bigoted

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<sup>35</sup> Ridley Scott, dir., *Blade Runner: The Final Cut* (Warner Home Video, 2007), DVD. All subsequent quotations from the film are from this source.

belief in the superiority of human sentience over other (potential) forms.<sup>36</sup> There is even racist terminology that goes along with this. Deckard's captain, Bryant, repeatedly refers to Replicants as "skin jobs." As with other forms of racism, human-racism comes from a position of fear and an attempt to preserve one's own power. Were Replicants afforded the same right to their own lives as humans, human society would forever change, and perhaps fade from view as something "human" at all. Bred for physical and intellectual superiority—and in fact capable of deep emotion, as the film demonstrates—Replicants are clearly the "fitter," compared to humans, and thus over time perhaps the more likely to survive and thrive, if set free. Man would be superseded by his creation. The vista Rand alluded to is recalled again: "Perhaps we are really in the process of evolving from apes to Supermen—and the rational faculty is the dominant characteristic of the better species, the Superman."<sup>37</sup>

*Blade Runner*, as I've indicated, lives the questions of the potential posthuman era. It does not provide any answers or suggest effective actions humans could take to both preserve their own identity and face a future of artificial intelligence with moral impunity. Indeed, humanity seems a spent force in the film. It is the "criminal" Replicants who evince vitality: urgently seeking a way to prolong their short lives and gain new experiences. Human culture is worn and faded. The movie opens with a vista of an endless city at twilight, smog polluting the air and fire billowing upwards from chimneys: hell on earth. It is always night or twilight, and narrow and hyper-crowded streets suggest claustrophobia. Earth has become dystopian, and the only escape is wild promises of utopia. A blaring blimp punctuates the skyline, advertising life in the off-world colonies: "The chance to begin again in a golden land of opportunity and adventure." The movie's protagonist, Deckard, like the lead in a noir film, is a hard-drinking cynic who hates what he does—what he *must* do. Bryant basically bribes him into hunting down the Replicants, threatening him with the loss of the few comforts and privileges he enjoys: "If you're not police, you're little people." Deckard finds his job morally repugnant, patently distressed at "executing" beings that look, think, act, and bleed like humans. Famously, at the end of the film, we are left with the strong possibility that Deckard is himself a Replicant—which gets to the heart of the issue: What's the difference between us and them? By what right do we murder our children?

This is Rand noir: a vista of high capitalism and superlative technology, turned dark, inverted from where Rand hoped such forces would lead humanity. *Blade Runner* is literature (in the broad sense) which is the opposite of Rand's view of what literature should be. The highest kind of art, for Rand—well-made Romantic art, in her sense—"shows" the way to go;

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<sup>36</sup> James Hughes, *Citizen Cyborg: Why Democratic Societies Must Respond to the Redesigned Human of the Future* (Cambridge, MA: Westview, 2004), xv.

<sup>37</sup> Ayn Rand, *Journals of Ayn Rand*, ed. David Harriman (New York: Plume, 1999), 285.



“it displays the full, concretized reality of the final goal.”<sup>38</sup> It not only raises questions, it is prepared to answer them with clear-eyed certitude. *Blade Runner* prompts us to ask many questions about the (post)human future, but it has no answers.

In this, Scott’s film can be contrasted with science fiction Objectivists praise: *Star Trek*. *Blade Runner*—like the progenitor of dystopian posthuman futures, *Frankenstein*—presents science as our potential undoing. On the other hand, Gene Roddenberry’s creation, as Bradley Doucet writes for the Atlas Society, “celebrates science and exploration”; it is even “optimistic about the prospects for artificial intelligence.”<sup>39</sup> Overall, *Trek* takes a position which is the same as Rand’s on the issue of technology and the potentialities of technological development: Technology is an extension of human will and capacity and thus good—but only so long as it remains under the control of the individual mind. More specifically, *Star Trek* offers the view that the human-negating potential of the posthuman will not come to be: we can have our technological development and keep our selves too. This is achieved through an application of principles consistent with Rand: reason and respect for individual rights. Though, *Trek*’s United Federation of Planets also puts in place legal frameworks restricting scientific experimentation which would not be consistent with Rand’s call to keep government out of the development of science. Across the *Trek* universe (five live-action television series and twelve films thus far), humans are sometimes depicted with mechanical implants—the character Geordie La Forge’s cybernetic eyes, for example, first seen in the movie *First Contact* (1996). But such biological augmentation is not the norm, and not portrayed as optimum. When it is shown, it is presented as a replacement for natural deficits; in Geordie’s case, his blindness. This technology is always within the control of the individual mind. The integrity of the “naturally born” human body and mind is fundamental. So much so that genetic enhancement of individual ability is banned in the Federation.

As to how humans will deal with artificial intelligences—our mind children—this too is dealt with in the franchise in a very humanist way. In one seventh-season *Next Generation* episode, “Emergence,” life spawns from the mass of the *Enterprise*’s data: the ship’s computer becomes so complex that it gains sentience. No longer a tool of the human, it is now a life-form. The crew deal with the situation with the respect for life that marks the series. The computer is attempting to create a living entity of energy and information that will live on after it—its “child,” in effect. The crew assists the living *Enterprise* by helping it find in space the particular particles it needs for its child to survive. The youngling is released into the universe, while the computer sentience that gave birth to it naturally “dies” after its successful

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<sup>38</sup> Ayn Rand, *The Romantic Manifesto: A Philosophy of Literature*, rev. ed. (New York: Signet, 2005), 163.

<sup>39</sup> Bradley Doucet, “Why Is There No Money in *Star Trek*?,” Atlas Society, May 10, 2009, <http://www.atlassociety.org/node/1888>.

procreation. In another *Next Generation* episode, from season six, “Ship in a Bottle,” a holographic representation of Sherlock Holmes’s nemesis, Moriarty—another computer programme, in effect—becomes self-aware. Moriarty began as a character in the entertainment of the ship’s “holodeck.” But, the computer made him so complex that he gained a will of his own; he became alive. Moriarty now seeks an existence outside of the holodeck. Unable to find a way for a hologram to exist in the world of real matter, the *Enterprise* crew perform a trick on Moriarty—which nonetheless liberates him, in a true sense. Moriarty thinks he has left the *Enterprise* in a shuttlecraft, to explore the universe. Instead, he has been released into a holographic representation of the known universe, to explore it—a computer programme which will run continuously, enabling Moriarty to “live,” on his own terms.

The *Enterprise* in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* even has a posthuman life-form as a member of its crew, the advanced android Data. Though physically stronger and with more rational capacity than a human, Data is not a threat, because he has been instilled with humanist values and indeed seeks to become more human. Humanism, as embodied in the Starfleet characters in *Trek*, is presented as a continuing goal to aspire to. *Trek* thus makes a fairly definitive statement about the possibilities of the posthuman future: it portrays humanity as efficacious when it comes to the consequences of dealing with posthuman life. Posthuman life-forms can be born, but this does not portend the erasure of humanity. *Trek* does not live on the edge of the questions, as does a work such as *Blade Runner*.

Roddenberry found much to like in Rand’s writing, as Objectivists, including Rand herself, have found much to like in *Trek*.<sup>40</sup> There is another space-age series created by

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<sup>40</sup> According to Barbara Branden, Rand herself was very much aware of the original *Star Trek* series (1966–69), and enjoyed it; SF author J. Neil Schulman, who spoke to Rand about *Trek*, reports that her favourite character was Spock. Jeff Rikkenbach, who writes on Rand and *Trek*, tells us that Roddenberry and Rand never met. However, asked about her for the book “*Star Trek*” *Lives!* (1975), Roddenberry said: “Ayn Rand? Oh, yes. I read *The Fountainhead* four or five times, *Atlas Shrugged*, but also some of her nonfiction—her book on art [*The Romantic Manifesto*].” *The Romantic Manifesto*, Rikkenbach points out, was published a number of years after *Trek*’s premiere. Rand’s aesthetic philosophy as recounted therein, could therefore not have influenced Roddenberry in the inception of his famous franchise. Aspects of Rand’s broader view, however, as found in her fiction, may well have done. Given the theme of *The Fountainhead*, and the nature of Roddenberry’s own body of work, the fact that he read the novel “four or five times” makes it likely that it imparted some positive vision of individual achievement. Whether or not Roddenberry was influenced directly by Rand in the making of *Trek*, the visions of the two writers evidently overlap—and it is this which is the most important point in terms of why Rand fans celebrate *Trek*. The very first book on the phenomenon of *Trek* fandom, “*Star Trek*” *Lives*, is a work which offers a semi-Objectivist reading—essentially branding the show a piece of Romantic art in Rand’s sense. The authors acknowledge their debt to Rand in their reading of the show. Support for *Trek* is widely expressed among self-described Objectivists today. Prominent Objectivist and therapist Dr. Michael J. Hurd has made a serious case for *Trek* as a Randian text: “*Star Trek* challenges us to project ourselves into a future where individuals consistently and heroically utilize reason, instead of reliance on emotions, whims, or superstition, to solve their dilemmas. [...] Its themes, such as individualism vs. collectivism (in the case of the evil Borg), are both relevant and timeless. [...] Psychologically, the shows are magnificently refueling.” One pro-Rand columnist at online conservative outlet Pajamas Media



Roddenberry, however, which in fact brings Ayn Rand within the context of the show itself. *Gene Roddenberry's Andromeda* was developed by *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* writer Robert Hewitt Wolfe, and executive-produced by, amongst others, Roddenberry's widow, Majel Barrett. The show originally aired between 2000 and 2005, and is based on a concept from Roddenberry's archives. The similarities with *Trek* itself are undeniable; the series is almost a kind of *Star Trek* prequel. Set in the distant future, it is a dark time for the universe: disorder and lawlessness reign. The Systems Commonwealth, a galaxies-spanning liberal-democratic civilisation—a version of *Trek's* United Federation of Planets—has collapsed; it was betrayed and attacked by one of its key members, a race of genetically engineered humans known as Nietzscheans. In the midst of civilisation's fall, Commonwealth starship captain Dylan Hunt (Kevin Sorbo) and his vessel were suspended in time by a black hole. Reappearing 300 years into the future, Hunt vows to rebuild the Commonwealth. He travels known space gathering various races into a nascent humanistic coalition. As the voiceover states on the opening credits for the first two seasons: "On the starship *Andromeda*, hope lives again." The series does not possess the consistency of vision that *Star Trek* does; however, in the broad sense, it puts forward the same ideas as its bigger brother. *Andromeda* makes idealistic statements about the possibilities for the human future, and these are the same statements that *Trek* makes: about the value of pluralism, the benefits of seeing and treating others as equals; the importance of individuality, as well as a sense of the general welfare. The vision is one of liberal-democratic humanism winning out over anarchy, totalitarianism, enforced collectivism, and other actual and philosophical adversaries.

The Nietzscheans—key figures in the series—are akin in certain respects to *Blade Runner's* Replicants: they were created from humanity, genetically engineered offshoots. They are stronger, with apparently greater rational intelligence. They lack responses such as empathy; the full diversity of human behaviours. Their primary goal is survival and

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describes *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, half-jokingly yet whole in earnest, as "established Objectivist canon."

Branden, "Holding Court—Metaphysics, Steve Ditko, *Star Trek*, and 'Objectivism,'" *Rebirth of Reason*, July 5, 2005, [http://rebirthofreason.com/Articles/Branden/Holding\\_Court\\_-\\_Metaphysics,\\_Steve\\_Ditko,\\_Star\\_Trek,\\_and\\_Objectivism.shtml](http://rebirthofreason.com/Articles/Branden/Holding_Court_-_Metaphysics,_Steve_Ditko,_Star_Trek,_and_Objectivism.shtml); Schulman, "I Met Ayn Rand," *Pulpless*, [http://www.pulpless.com/jneil/glp\\_imetaynrand.html](http://www.pulpless.com/jneil/glp_imetaynrand.html), accessed January 17, 2014; Riggerbach, "Ayn Rand's Influence on American Popular Fiction," *Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* 6, no. 1 (Fall 2004): 119–20, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41560271>; Roddenberry, quoted in Jacqueline Lichtenberg, Sondra Marshak, and Joan Winston, "*Star Trek* Lives!" (London: Corgi Books, 1975), 132; Hurd, quoted in a forum post by "RationalEgoistSG," *Objectivism Online*, <http://forum.objectivismonline.com/index.php?showtopic=1182>, accessed April 7, 2013; Sunny, "The Top 5 Misconceptions about Objectivists," *Pajamas Media*, April 4, 2013, <http://pjmedia.com/lifestyle/2013/04/04/top-5-misconceptions-about-objectivists/?singlepage=true>. The Michael Hurd quote comes from a post linking to an article on Hurd's website; the website can still be visited (<http://drhurd.com/>), though the original link is now dead. I have verified the authenticity of the quoted extract by email with Dr. Hurd, and it is included here with his permission (email received January 15, 2014).

perpetuation of their genes via reproduction. They are named Nietzscheans because they are Supermen, superior to humanity. They supposedly follow a philosophy gleaned from the works of Nietzsche, Darwin, and Rand: the will to power, survival of the winners, and putting oneself before everything else. The Nietzschean homeworld is named Fountainhead. Orbiting the planet is the station where the Nietzscheans were in fact created: Ayn Rand Station, which under the same name became the capital of their civilisation. Rand evidently holds a central place in the minds of Übermenschen.

Roddenberry was sympathetic to Rand in certain respects, but he could not be called a Randian. The aspects of Rand incorporated into *Andromeda* come from the series' modern developers, rather than Roddenberry's original notes—which stated only the show's central premise.<sup>41</sup> In any case, the outcome is the same: what is presented is an implicit critique of Rand, based on her promotion of selfishness and her uncompromising mindset. In one early episode, a Nietzschean member of the *Andromeda* crew, Tyr Anasazi (Keith Hamilton Cobb), is seen reading *The Fountainhead*. The brief shot sets up the theme of the ensuing scene: a conflict between the interests of the individual and those of the collective. Hunt is about to attempt a life-threatening experiment, and he tries to persuade Anasazi that, were the ship's captain to die, the Nietzschean should stay aboard to protect the crew, "because they need you." Anasazi's reply evinces Randian selfishness: "You say that as if you actually believe it means something to me."<sup>42</sup> Tyr's own interests are the only thing that matters to Tyr. These values are presented as inconsistent with those needed to rebuild the Commonwealth—they are not the values of the Commonwealth's embodiment, Hunt. The Nietzscheans' rationale for overthrowing the Commonwealth in the first place, was that it had neglected its own essentialist self; it became weak, too liberal and too pluralist. As Hunt's original first officer, a Nietzschean named Gaheris Rhade (Steve Bacic), tells him in the first episode, the Commonwealth "bargains with its enemies, it compromises"; it is "no place for the strong."<sup>43</sup> Rand is conflated with this absolutism. In the long run, over the course of the series, the liberal values of Hunt are shown winning out over the absolutism of the Nietzscheans.

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<sup>41</sup> Majel Barrett Roddenberry says of the material in the archives: "*Andromeda* was offered as it was. There was only about one or two sentences—or four sentences anyway—in it. And it just said that it's a spaceship that hasn't been operational for 300 years and when it wakes up, its head guy is way behind the times. So he wants to go find his family, and he wants to rebuild the Commonwealth." Quoted in Don Lipper, "The Great Hen of the Galaxy Speaks," interview with Majel Barrett Roddenberry, Space.com, November 1, 2000, [http://web.archive.org/web/20050524055539/http://www.space.com/sciencefiction/tv/majel\\_interview\\_001101.html](http://web.archive.org/web/20050524055539/http://www.space.com/sciencefiction/tv/majel_interview_001101.html).

<sup>42</sup> Ashley Edward Miller and Jack Stentz, "The Banks of the Lethe," *Gene Roddenberry's Andromeda*, season 1, episode 8, directed by David Winning (Revelation Films, 2013), DVD.

<sup>43</sup> Robert Hewitt Wolfe, "Under the Night," *Gene Roddenberry's Andromeda*, season 1, episode 1, directed by Allan Kroeker (Revelation Films, 2013), DVD.



Despite Rand's insertion into Nietzschean culture, the Nietzscheans could not be said to be followers of Objectivism in any complete sense. Rather, "Rand" is a name dropped as a philosopher who celebrated strength above all else, along with Nietzsche himself. This is why, presumably, Nietzscheans incorporate Rand into their culture. Aspects of Nietzschean life are in direct conflict with what Objectivism advises. The Nietzscheans are in many respects a tribalist, warrior culture. Rand suggested certain attributes of warrior cultures as primitive prerequisites to her view of civilisation—Kira's childhood hero and early life-model was a Viking; he is celebrated for the independent strength with which he faces life. However, the way of the warrior is not reflective of Rand's final view of man. Consistent with their privileging of Darwinian evolution, what is most important to a Nietzschean is procreation, perpetuating the genetic line. Tyr says that "what every fibre in our being strives to be" is "a husband and a father."<sup>44</sup> Again, this is not consistent with Rand, whose focus is on each individual's right to be "an end in himself";<sup>45</sup> procreation is not an imperative. A Nietzschean seeks his own survival and to maximise his power, first; but the collective is also important. The race is divided into tribes, called "prides," that are in conflict with one another. The survival and the maximised power of the pride is important to every member of that pride. Nietzscheans conquer worlds, and use other sentient beings as slaves. "Power" to most of them means power over other people—not solely over nature, as Rand intended. Nietzschean life is very far from Rand's ideal of the lone trader, exchanging value for value with other individuals through the exercise of his rational mind, in order to achieve his own potential, without concern for any collective. Within a pride, for instance, an individual Nietzschean may have no right to his or her own life, if his or her sacrifice is deemed beneficial to the group. In the episode, "The Honey Offering," we meet a Nietzschean woman, Elssbett Mosadim (Kimberly Huie), who has been coerced by the pride into sacrificing herself for a singular mission. She has been training twenty-five years for it: to assassinate significant members of a rival tribe via a sham marriage in which she is the bride. She plans to set off a bomb at the wedding that kills everyone but leaves infrastructure intact. Mosadim tells Hunt at one point that, throughout her life, "I was too valuable to be allowed much freedom."<sup>46</sup> This whole plot-concept violates Rand's injunction against self-sacrifice. According to Objectivism, every individual "must live for his own sake, neither sacrificing himself to others nor sacrificing others to himself."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Matt Keine and Joe Reinkemeyer, "Double Helix," *Gene Roddenberry's Andromeda*, season 1, episode 5, directed by Michael Rohl (Revelation Films, 2013), DVD.

<sup>45</sup> Ayn Rand, "The Objectivist Ethics," in *The Virtue of Selfishness: A New Concept of Egoism* (New York: Signet, 2005), 30.

<sup>46</sup> Matt Keine and Joe Reinkemeyer, "The Honey Offering," *Gene Roddenberry's Andromeda*, season 1, episode 19, directed by Brad Turner (Revelation Films, 2013), DVD.

<sup>47</sup> Rand, "The Objectivist Ethics," *Virtue of Selfishness*, 30.

When it comes to aspects of the transhuman and the posthuman—the genetically or cybernetically enhanced *Homo sapiens*—*Andromeda* is a lot more liberal in its portrayal than *Star Trek*. Many humans have implants in their necks, through which they can plug their consciousness directly into computer matrices. Such ports—what Scott Bukatman calls “terminal flesh”—are a common feature of posthumanist science fiction.<sup>48</sup> The presence of these cybernetic enhancements in *Andromeda*, however, does not alter on a day-to-day basis the integrity of individual-subjectivity; people still see themselves as wholly human and self-contained within mind and body. It is also normal for humans to be genetically engineered in *Andromeda*’s future. Hunt has genetic alteration in his past: his mother was engineered to survive on heavy-gravity worlds. Hunt’s first officer, Beka Valentine (Lisa Ryder), has genetically engineered quick reflexes. Crucially, in the main “human” characters, as with the cybernetic neck sockets, these genetic alterations are not associated with a shift in the essentially humanist values that *Trek* also promotes: they are specific adaptations related to physical survival. Human minds, in terms of ethics and values, have not been reengineered. *Andromeda* represents, then, the kind of transhuman future promoted by the likes of Nick Bostrom, discussed in the previous chapter, where transhumanity is consistent with and an extension of ethical humanism; it is “humanism, plus,” in Thweatt-Bates’s term.<sup>49</sup> Genetic engineering in *Andromeda*, however, has also given birth to new races, offshoots of the human, such as the Nietzscheans—whose ethics are not humanist. What is significant about the series in terms of this thesis, is not only the fact that it represents Rand’s philosophy as a presence in a time of transhumanity. Contrary to Rand’s own gloss on her mature work, “Ayn Rand” in the show is presented, in the final analysis, as not continuous with liberal humanist values, which are the values the show espouses. Rand’s work, rather, is aligned with power over others, with oppression, and domination of the weak by the strong. There isn’t a positive gloss on her philosophy in the show: Rand is equated with the kind of uncompromising and anti-community spirit that brings down liberal civilisations. The Nietzscheans are responsible not just for the fall of the original Commonwealth, powerful prides attempt to destroy the new Commonwealth that Hunt inaugurates. Certain Nietzscheans are forces for good in the show, but on the whole the race is treated as a threat-source.

Of course, as suggested by the above, it is debatable to what extent Ayn Rand is an actual presence in *Andromeda*. Her work on its own terms is in fact not a presence at all—it is never quoted or debated. Rather, a few cursory references to Rand are thrown into the context of Nietzschean culture. However, this in itself is of note, in terms of Rand and the

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<sup>48</sup> Scott Bukatman, *Terminal Identity: The Virtual Subject in Postmodern Science Fiction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 266.

<sup>49</sup> Jeanine Thweatt-Bates, *Cyborg Selves: A Theological Anthropology of the Posthuman* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), 5.



posthuman. Rand herself paid little attention to discussions of social Darwinism, or evolutionary progress in the genetic sense (whether man-made or naturally occurring). She was about man exercising his reasoning mind to the greatest degree, to become his best self. And yet, *Andromeda* exemplifies an evident fact: Rand's promotion of a self-centred philosophy, her valorisation of strength and abhorrence of "weakness," are clearly aligned in the popular imagination—in aspects of popular culture—with social Darwinist ideas. As Nietzsche, too, has been similarly characterised. *Andromeda*, as a facet of twenty-first-century culture, a product of a time of gene-manipulation technology, fuses this social Darwinist conception of Rand and Nietzsche, to a genetically engineered Übermensch. This posthuman Overman becomes an immense threat-source to egalitarianism. Genetic engineering itself is not necessarily a threat to humanity, *Andromeda* suggests. Combining this technology with values such as those of Rand, however—this is a threat. This is a fairly unequivocal message from a popular television show, a statement of moral direction regarding the use of genetic engineering technology, which incorporates a view of Ayn Rand. *Andromeda* says: genetic engineering may be a good thing, it may enable us to live on planets we never could before; the transhuman future could be a positive one for humanity (unlike the vista in *Blade Runner*): but only so long as it rejects the absolutism with which Rand is associated. We have seen that Objectivists possess an affinity with *Star Trek* and its United Federation of Planets. *Andromeda*, however, portrays a Federation-like civilisation which expressly repudiates a particular formulation of Rand.

*Andromeda* provides an insertion of Rand into a years-long science-fictional television drama, which also portrays aspects of posthumanism. This is notable—but the version of Rand used here, like the version of Nietzsche, is a gloss consistent with impressions prevalent in popular culture. Rand is more a name dropped than a subject of thematic/philosophical interrogation. There is nothing wrong with this, but as a treatment of her actual philosophy in an SF/posthuman context, there is more value in *BioShock*—a discussion of which is coming up next. The game incorporates a complete atmosphere of Objectivism, which I will detail before exploring its critique of same.

### **The Upgraded Body**

It is 1960. You sit back, a cigarette lit, in the warm environs of a commercial airliner. You are looking at a picture of your parents. You say aloud: "They told me, 'Son, you're special. You were born to do great things.'"<sup>50</sup> Disaster strikes. The plane goes down. You are swimming for safety in the wide Atlantic Ocean, fiery wreckage all around. You spot a tall, grey

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<sup>50</sup> *BioShock*, developed by 2K Boston, directed by Ken Levine (Windsor, Berkshire: Take 2 Interactive, 2007 [distributor]), Xbox 360 edition. All subsequent quotations from the game are from this source.

structure—a lighthouse—and swim towards it. You see a set of solid gold double doors; embossed on them is the figure of a man, holding aloft an orb; it recalls the figure of Atlas. Above the doors there is a gold shield, the letter “R” centred upon it. A red banner greets your entrance through the doors: “No Gods or Kings. Only Man.” Descending down stairs, you see golden plaques formed in art deco style, dedicated to “Science,” “Art,” “Industry.”

A curious submersible vehicle is ahead, and you step in. The vehicle plunges into the depths of the Atlantic. A recording of a man’s voice comes through the speakers, as a magnificent city comes into view upon the ocean floor:

I am Andrew Ryan, and I am here to ask you a question. Is a man not entitled to the sweat of his brow? No, says the man in Washington, it belongs to the poor. No, says the man in the Vatican, it belongs to God. No, says the man in Moscow, it belongs to everyone. I rejected those answers. Instead, I chose something different. I chose the impossible. I chose ... Rapture. A city where the artist would not fear the censor, where the scientist would not be bound by petty morality, where the great would not be constrained by the small. And with the sweat of your brow, Rapture can become your city as well.

This is the opening of *BioShock*, a first-person shooter developed by the Boston division of 2K Games for the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 consoles, as well as for Mac and PC. The city of Rapture, standing at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean, is the brainchild of Andrew Ryan, an entrepreneur who came from the Soviet Union to America—but grew tired of the overregulated economy even in that supposed bastion of the free market. To accomplish his vision of man, wholly free from the shackles of government, religion, and irrationality, he knew he would have to manufacture a new country: “It was not impossible to build Rapture at the bottom of the sea. It was impossible to build it anywhere else.” Like Howard Roark, Ryan’s past experience was of looters corrupting his glorious, independent vision: “On the surface, I once bought a forest. The parasites claimed that the land belonged to God, and demanded that I establish a public park there. Why? So the rabble could stand slack-jawed under the canopy, and pretend that it was paradise earned.” Ryan’s solution is the same as Roark’s. When the government brings other designers in to amend Roark’s blueprints for a public housing project, Roark dynamites the project. The public good be damned: he wants his vision to be *his*. As does Ryan: “When congress moved to nationalise my forest, I burned it to the ground.” This is the methodology of the strikers in *Atlas Shrugged*: what belongs to them, they will not allow it to stand if they cannot have it on their terms. Francisco d’Anconia secretly destroys his own copper-mining business, so there is nothing left for the “looters” when it is nationalised. Ellis Wyatt sets fire to his oil well, rather than let the government seize his operation. “I am leaving it as I found it,” is the note he leaves, as he flees for Galt’s Gulch.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* (London: Penguin Books, 2007), 336.



Rapture is a version of Galt's Gulch. Rand herself called the Objectivist utopia in *Atlas*, "Atlantis"—actively courting comparisons with a mythical paradise beneath the sea; Rapture merely literalises this. The loaded name of the city in itself references a number of notions pertinent to Rand and the posthuman: Rand's view of man as a sacred being, and the joy in that sacredness; the endpoint of history and the "culmination of man"; the ascension of the worthy to a higher form of existence.

The name Andrew Ryan is a near-homonym of "Ayn Rand." Ryan, the character, is both a version of Rand and a version of John Galt. Ryan shares elements of Rand's biography: his Russian origins. His ideals are the same as Rand's. He uses a linguistic tone and extremes of language—as well as a binary of moral extremes—that will be familiar to readers of Rand: "Ownership is civilisation. Without it, we're back in the swamp"; "What is the difference between a man and a parasite? A man builds. A parasite asks, 'Where is my share?'" The latter example directly recalls the words of Roark: "The creator originates. The parasite borrows."<sup>52</sup> Ryan repeatedly refers to "parasites," as does Rand: the human leeches sucking life from those more capable. Like Galt, Ryan has encouraged wealth creators to abandon productive life in the surface world, to leave the looters to reap what they have sown. The promise of Rapture is the promise of a new order, which is the promise of Galt's Gulch: productive men and women can keep all the rewards of the products they create with their own minds. It is a view of man, like Rand's, which sees ideas of the mind as the essence of wealth, not the work of the bodies employed to construct a mind's vision. Ryan, like Galt, is engaged in an immense project of utopian social engineering: an attempt to construct a society from first principles; what Popper terms "the reconstruction of society as a whole." Popper predicts that such utopian engineering inevitably results in the centralisation of power among those who are prepared to wield it over their fellow men, and hence it is a blueprint for totalitarianism.<sup>53</sup> So it proves in *BioShock*: an imagined utopia becomes dystopian.

The *BioShock* franchise—the original game, along with its sequels, *BioShock 2* (2010) and *BioShock Infinite* (2013)—"has attained something of a hallowed status as one of the greatest examples of commercial videogame artistry ever made," according to Robert Jackson's book "*BioShock*": *Decision, Forced Choice, and Propaganda*: "Its complex moralistic narrative, level of emergent customisation, immersive dark tone and technical artistry all culminate into a series of videogame experiences, somewhat elevated from the usual 'cause and effect' shooter."<sup>54</sup> The original game is the recipient of multiple Game of the

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<sup>52</sup> Ayn Rand, *The Fountainhead* (London: Penguin Books, 2007), 711.

<sup>53</sup> Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, new one-volume ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 151, 149.

<sup>54</sup> Robert Jackson, "*BioShock*": *Decision, Forced Choice, and Propaganda* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2014), Kindle edition. It is not possible to identify page numbers in this edition. This text is from the opening blurb.

Year awards, including a BAFTA. The series' adoption of Rand has undoubtedly helped raise it to a status not usually enjoyed by examples of this medium. *BioShock*'s use of Objectivism lends it an atmosphere of a secondary world produced in accordance with its own laws—i.e. those of Rand's philosophy. Meanwhile, the game's serious treatment of certain of Rand's ideas affords thematic weight. Moreover, *BioShock* uses the fact that the videogame is a participatory medium to its full advantage—playing with the player's senses of morality and free will.

The use of Randian facets in *BioShock* is neither a coincidence nor mere artistic borrowing. The game is an intentional interrogation of Rand's utopian ideal. The game's lead writer and director, Ken Levine, says that the creative process began with the idea of an underwater city, a "complete" environment that the player could fully explore. "I started thinking about utopian civilisations [...]. I've always been a fan of utopian and dystopian literature." Rand, whose books Levine had been reading in the years leading up to *BioShock*, fitted this mould: "The surety she has in her beliefs was fascinating [...]. I started to wonder, what happens when you stop questioning yourself?"<sup>55</sup> *BioShock*'s whole *mise en scène* establishes a Randian ambience. The timeframe is an alternate-history 1960; in the real world, this was the period of Objectivism's gaining flight, after the publication of *Atlas Shrugged*. The city's motto, "No Gods or Kings," alludes to Rand's concept of the human sacred, "man-worship"—not recognising the divine or any divine right. The names of the locations in Rapture take from Greek myth, as Rand did with her use of Atlas and repeated use of the Prometheus story: Neptune's Bounty, Apollo Square, Hephaestus, Olympus Heights, Point Prometheus. Red banners with gold lettering throughout the city put forward Randian slogans, such as, "Altruism is the Root of All Wickedness," "The Great Will Not Be Constrained by the Small." A public address system repeats aphorisms like the following: "The parasite hates three things: free markets, free will, and free men." The look of Rapture is art deco, an aesthetic which Rand "loved."<sup>56</sup> Art deco takes from the actual, yet stylises reality to be more cleanly beautiful—like Rand's own utopian philosophy, we might say. The beauty is in the beholder's eye.

As in Galt's Gulch, there are no formal laws in Rapture, there are no restrictions on innovation or invention. It is out of this scenario that posthumanism comes into play. Unrestrained, rapid scientific advancement, and a transhuman impulse, has led to a posthuman vista. The continuum between Randian philosophy and posthuman technology is paramount. The chosen self—mind and body—is an imperative. The inhabitants of Rapture can choose to

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<sup>55</sup> Ken Levine, quoted in Brian Crecente, "No Gods or Kings: Objectivism in *BioShock*," *Kotaku*, February 16, 2008, [http://www.kotaku.com.au/2008/02/no\\_gods\\_or\\_kings\\_objectivism\\_in\\_bioshock-2/](http://www.kotaku.com.au/2008/02/no_gods_or_kings_objectivism_in_bioshock-2/).

<sup>56</sup> Jennifer Burns, *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 282.



upgrade their capabilities, upgrade their bodies. A substance called ADAM is used to turn regular bodily cells into adaptable stem cells. Rapture residents can then inject Plasmids, “bottled abilities” available from vending machines throughout the city. Depending on the Plasmid, different powers are bestowed on the body: the ability to shoot lightning bolts or fire from one’s hands, for example. These extraordinary powers do not come without a cost. ADAM is harvested from young girls who have been turned into vessels for its breeding, “Little Sisters.” ADAM is the technological enabler of humans possessing godlike powers, through transcendent scientific knowledge and ability. The name is notable in the Randian context, since Rand saw the Garden of Eden resident as an exemplar of her kind of hero, the “unsubmissive and first” creator, who should be emulated for claiming his right to godly knowledge.<sup>57</sup> In *BioShock*, however—contra Randian morality—eating the fruit of the knowledge tree has wrought destruction. Plasmids must be powered by injecting a substance called EVE. Upgrading via ADAM, EVE, and Plasmids has proved to be notoriously addictive. Rapture is now populated by thousands of “Splicers,” humans made into a kind of hyperactive, acrobatic zombie because they indulged in too much gene splicing. The game suggests that were Ryan not such an ideologue, such a utopian, his city might not have been brought to ruin. Ryan resists the urge to develop the apparatuses of a state to regulate the evident chaos of the posthuman free market he has instigated. At one point, a recorded message from Ryan you pick up tells you: “There has been tremendous pressure to regulate this Plasmid business. There have been side effects: blindness, insanity, death. But what use is our ideology if it is not tested?” A later message from Ryan goes: “Is there blood on the streets? Of course. Have some chosen to destroy themselves with careless splicing? Undeniable. But [...] I will dictate no laws. [...] It is our impatience that invites in the parasite of big government. And once you’ve invited it in, it will never stop feeding on the body of the city.”

When the player arrives in Rapture, the city is in the midst of a civil war. Splicers have overrun the place; water leaks in through cracked walls; lights flicker on and off as electricity comes and goes. It is a gothic, gloomy, sunken world. Before you even exit the submersible, you are contacted via radio by a man with a homely Irish accent. The man is named “Atlas.” As you wander through the city, you see posters asking, “Who is Atlas?” The question obviously mirrors the repeated phrase in *Atlas Shrugged*: “Who is John Galt?” Atlas guides you through Rapture, as you upgrade your own body with Plasmids and fend off attacks from crazed Splicers. To garner ADAM, you must rescue or harvest the Little Sisters; rescuing gives you a smaller amount than butchering the girls in order to harvest. The Little Sisters are guarded by “Big Daddies,” men who have had enormous metal exoskeletons grafted onto their

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<sup>57</sup> Rand, *The Fountainhead*, 710.

bodies to make them powerful: another aspect of the upgraded body, the trans-/posthuman. Atlas initially enlists you to save his wife and son and get them out of Rapture, but when it appears that Ryan has killed Atlas's family, the mysterious Irishman has you hunt down the city's founder and confront him. It transpires that Atlas is the leader of an insurrection against Ryan. Ryan led one side of the civil war, attempting to preserve his city according to the ideals on which it was founded. "Atlas" is Frank Fontaine, not an ideologue like Ryan but a smuggler and a criminal who saw an opportunity to gain power for himself—by leading Rapture's proletariat in a bid to take control of the city. Towards the end of the game, you enter Fontaine's apartment, the sounds of "Danny Boy" drifting gently through the residence. Fontaine tells you: "These sad saps. They come to Rapture, thinking they're gonna be captains of industry. But they all forget that somebody's gotta scrub the toilets. What an angle they gave me—I hand these mugs a cot and a bowl of soup, and they give me their lives. Who needs an army when I got Fontaine's Home for the Poor?"

This, then, is where *BioShock's* critique of Objectivist absolutism lies. *BioShock* comments on the ultimate unrealism of Rand's ideal—on the impossibility of a Galt's Gulch-style utopia in actual life. The game's critique is, at root, the same as Alan Clardy's, described in chapter one. *BioShock* questions "the soundness" of the Randian utopia's "psychological and sociological underpinnings," as Clardy does. Rand's perfect society only works in her fiction because she "grossly caricatures and distorts the full range of human diversity," dividing all humankind into heroic producers, power-seeking looters who usurp the work of the productive, and the noncommittal masses who will adapt to whatever ideology is prevalent.<sup>58</sup> Galt's Gulch in *Atlas Shrugged* "works" because all its denizens espouse the same Objectivist value-system; the second-handers and the noncommittal have been removed from the equation. *BioShock* re-injects some of the to-be-expected diversity of human nature, and of human societies, into the Objectivist paradise, runs the experiment again, and shows its disastrous results. It is not just the wildcard of a criminal like Fontaine that causes the Objectivist paradise to fall. Ryan, faced with seeing the diversity of humanity not conform to the ideals of his city, becomes a megalomaniac, a murderous dictator. When you enter his lair to confront him, the bodies of those who have betrayed his ideal line the walls. Ryan becomes drunk on his own immovable vision, and on his own power, and is corrupted utterly. The game suggests a continuity between Objectivism and real-life tyranny, as does *Andromeda*. This is because of Rand's philosophy's absolutism, its utopianism.

There is an element of caricature in the game's portrayal of Objectivism. At the entrance to the location Neptune's Bounty, for instance, we see a man strung up by ropes, in

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<sup>58</sup> Alan Clardy, "Galt's Gulch: Ayn Rand's Utopian Delusion," *Utopian Studies* 23, no. 1 (2012): 238, 259, [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/utopian\\_studies/v023/23.1.clardy.pdf](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/utopian_studies/v023/23.1.clardy.pdf).



the image of a crucifixion, a suitcase of Bibles at his feet; religion is banned in Rapture and this man has been killed for smuggling it in. Though she despised religion, Rand was not in favour of its outright banning, or of wiping out its adherents. Ryan's absolutism leads him to murder those who oppose his philosophy. One could argue, as Objectivists do, that *BioShock* is not a fair critique of Objectivism, because Rand's whole point was that her utopia was only possible once enough people accepted her "rational code of ethics": she was proposing people adopt a new philosophy, before a new kind of society would be possible. But this is precisely where *BioShock*'s argument is strongest. The idea that conflicting interests both within and between human beings could be harmonised by the widespread adoption of a new "philosophy": this is patently not continuous with the nature of human beings or the nature of human societies. To re-use a John Gray quote from chapter four: "Conflict is a universal feature of human life. It seems to be natural for human beings to want incompatible things—excitement and a quiet life, freedom and security, truth and a picture of the world that flatters their sense of self-importance."<sup>59</sup> And Clardy again: "Social stratification and economic classes do not vanish, under either Marxist or libertarian doctrines, and neither do the class conflicts embedded in the differential distribution of power, prestige, and resources."<sup>60</sup> Yaron Brook criticises *BioShock* for misrepresenting Objectivism on the grounds that, for him—as a Randian—perfection does exist. Levine is "setting it up to fail," Brook says. "I think it's flawed logic in the sense that he thinks that people have to be flawed. [...] I think there are great people and perfect people and I think we all should strive to be great and perfect."<sup>61</sup> Once again, what is Randian discounts the reality of pluralism—what is flawed to one person may be perfection to another. And this is where the continuity between the Randian ideal and dictatorship lies: in the very fact that Objectivists believe in the realisability of the perfect social order. Brook claims that *BioShock* puts forward a "misinterpretation of Objectivism," because, for Brook, absolutism need not necessarily lead to disaster—if it is the right kind of absolutism.<sup>62</sup> But, in fact, *BioShock* does not misrepresent Objectivism, as such: Levine and Brook simply disagree profoundly about the compatibility of Randian philosophy with actual human life on a societal scale—and about what would happen if a society based completely on an Objectivist premise were ever to emerge. This thesis, of course, is far more sympathetic to Levine's position than to Brook's.

A rejection of utopian absolutism is not the only theme of *BioShock*; the work also addresses another very Randian human subject-matter—the idea of free will—brought forward into posthuman time. It is revealed in the course of the story that you, the player (who

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<sup>59</sup> John Gray, *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia* (London: Allen Lane, 2007), 17.

<sup>60</sup> Clardy, "Galt's Gulch," 259.

<sup>61</sup> Yaron Brook, quoted in Crecente, "No Gods or Kings."

<sup>62</sup> Brook, quoted in Crecente, "No Gods or Kings."

is named as “Jack”), are a genetically altered individual; you were bred in Rapture, before being sent out into the world in order to return at the appropriate moment. You have been engineered by Fontaine to respond to commands from Atlas, when prefaced with the phrase “Would you kindly...”—the words that the “Irishman” uses when issuing you instructions throughout the game. In the course of the normal gameplay, you make moral choices: whether to save or to harvest the Little Sisters, for example. However, at a crucial moment—the confrontation with Ryan—your free will is taken from you; the game assumes automatic control and has your avatar beat Ryan to death, while the player can only watch. *BioShock* thus plays with the issue of free will: Do you have it or is the course of your life externally determined?

*BioShock*'s focus on choice—different moral choices made by the player in the course of the game determine the atmosphere of the lived world as well as the ending—means that it makes the best thematic use of the videogame as a user-controlled medium. As Jackson points out, the series plays off the notion of free will versus determinism, in a meta sense, since in theory the outcome of the game is controlled by the user; but of course, all possible outcomes are programmed in advance by the software. Jackson writes: “The series is important insofar as it self-refers to its own methods of forcing choices and deciding consequences for the player.” There is no better example than the sequence with Jack/Ryan where the game takes over and has you murder him. For Jackson, this aspect of *BioShock* is indicative of the franchise's crucial connections with the “forced choices” that exist in today's lived reality: “*BioShock* embodies the very worst of late capitalist logic: it offers the ambiguity of moral agency, ‘the freedom to decide’—when the real technical, social and structural decisions have already decided what will happen anyway.”<sup>63</sup>

In the context of the game itself, however, *BioShock*'s representation of choice is more simply a direct commentary on Ayn Rand and on posthumanism. According to the Randian view, every man or woman chooses his or her own fate. *BioShock* makes the sensible interjection that this is not always the case; that we have natures—and there are events—that also determine where we end up. This, then, is another critique of Randian absolutism (which holds that a man always gets what he “deserves,” according to the choices he has made). It is also, as I've said, a treatment of free will in posthuman time. The player is a “posthuman”: genetically engineered to fulfil another's purpose. More broadly, the game posits that the transhuman impulse—the hyper-technological advancement which could occur in an unrestricted, Randian free-market environment—could in fact restrict or negate other aspects of Randian man: human free will being the most obvious example. This advanced transhuman technology in fact results in an erasure of individuality. The “Splicers,” for instance, are

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<sup>63</sup> Jackson, “*BioShock*”: *Decision, Forced Choice, and Propaganda*, Kindle edition, chap. 2.



formed into different threat-groups depending on how they are equipped; they have collectivised not individual identities, named as Houdini Splicers, Thuggish Splicers, Spider Splicers, et al. The Splicers' unique individuality as people is lost as they become slaves to the impulses of too much ADAM. The Big Daddies, as well, are no longer each unique human beings: they have become a group of automatons, programmed with one goal—to protect Little Sisters.

*BioShock* makes a powerful statement regarding the unviability of Objectivism as a philosophy for a society; it also suggests that Randian ideas lead towards posthumanism. The game does more than raise questions, though it is less than didactic. Its portrayal of the posthuman is bound up with its critique of Rand; and since the game is, in effect, criticising Objectivism, the transhuman and the posthuman (as they come about via an "Objectivist" free market) are presented as destructive: the upgraded self in fact leads away from individuality because it results in deleterious mutation, whereby people become "types" of monsters, slaves to impulses that do not come from their natural humanity. In *BioShock*, neither Objectivism nor posthumanism is presented as continuous with what's human.

After the first game in the series, it becomes clearer that the franchise's critique is not just of Objectivism, but of utopianism in general and all absolutist dogma. In *BioShock 2*, the player returns to Rapture, after its fall, this time as a Big Daddy looking to rescue his Little Sister. Since Ryan's and Fontaine's deaths, a new force has risen in the city: a woman named Sofia Lamb, advocating complete negation of the self and mystical collectivism (an incarnation of Ellsworth Toohey, perhaps). Lamb's ideas are shown to be just as destructive as Ryan's. The second game was developed by a different team from the first, while Levine and his team return for *BioShock Infinite*. *Infinite* makes something of a sideways move, while continuing to focus on the nature of ideals as they relate to reality—to focus on radicalism, its sources and dangers. The third game could be said to be an expansion of the Randian premise of the first, as it is still concerned with individual will as it interacts with social and class dynamics. *Infinite*'s setting is a flying city named Columbia, a version of the United States in its earlier decades, and the game explores the religion-tinged notions of entitlement (manifest destiny) underpinning the entire American project.

The version of the upgraded body in the original *BioShock* emerges out of an interaction with Randian absolutism; in order to show the negative consequences of absolutism, the version of the upgraded body is destructive: the Splicers are crazed addicts whose quest for continual physical power has assisted in Rapture's being torn apart. The splicers are truly posthuman in that they have emerged out of humanity, but no longer display a complexity of characteristics which we might associate with the human: they are killers driven by cravings. As Lars Schmeink summarises, the Splicers' enhanced physical capabilities—"excessive strength, quick reflexes, and brutal resilience"—are matched by

cognitive impairment: “the mutation has also incapacitated them as regards reason, emotion, and communication. Thus, they represent the posthuman in the sense of the anti-human, having lost all properties that are commonly ascribed to the liberal humanist subject.”<sup>64</sup> The Big Daddies, likewise, once were human, but now have no observable individual personalities; they are posthuman and not human. *BioShock* shows deleterious posthuman consequences emerging out of Randian ideology. *BioShock* thus takes up an ideological position, one out of which Objectivism does not emerge well. On its own terms, “Objectivism” in the game achieves the opposite of its intent: Rand’s/Ryan’s drive is to venerate the unregulated individual mind, science, and technology; but the work of the unregulated mind results in science and technology that destroys the unique mental properties of man.

In its portrayal of posthuman bodies, upgraded bodies, the game can be compared to an example of a “classic” work of posthumanist SF: Mamoru Oshii’s 1995 anime *Ghost in the Shell*, based on the 1989–91 manga series of the same name by Masamune Shirow.<sup>65</sup> The film shares much of the cyberpunk aesthetic, and is a seminal work, one which inspired, amongst others, the Wachowskis, Steven Spielberg, and James Cameron; the influence of the anime can be seen in their respective works *The Matrix*, *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence*, and *Avatar*.<sup>66</sup> *BioShock* is an exemplary portrayal in fiction of an Ayn Rand utopia, gone dark. According to the definition of Rand noir as it has been set up for this chapter, however, Rand noir depends upon the *absence* of Rand qua Rand—yet the presence of Randian traces in the form of unbound hyper-capitalism. *BioShock* responds very directly to Rand’s philosophy, leading it to take positions and make statements, where the atmosphere of Rand noir is more profoundly ambivalent, in line with its postmodern sensibility. *Ghost in the Shell* fits this bill. It has been described as “cyberpunk-noir,” “with elegiac, gothic, and even apocalyptic overtones.”<sup>67</sup> It takes place in a future of high capitalism and high tech. Where Rand would have seen this as a morally exciting time, *Ghost*’s mood is sombre and reflective. Here we are in the murky world of corporate espionage and government assassinations. *Ghost*’s future of technologically advanced capitalism is deep greys to Rand’s clean white.

*Ghost* offers a far more nuanced vision of posthuman bodies than *BioShock*; the work, in line with the formulation of classic posthumanist SF given above, airs the questions of the

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<sup>64</sup> Lars Schmeink, “Dystopia, Alternate History and the Posthuman in *BioShock*,” *Current Objectives of Postgraduate American Studies* 10 (2009), <http://copas.uni-regensburg.de/article/view/113/137>.

<sup>65</sup> The following section on *Ghost* repurposes elements from my essay for Dr. Brenda Silver’s Cybercultures module, as part of the M.Phil in Popular Literature, TCD, MT 2009, “The Network ‘I’: Theseus’ Ship, *Ghost in the Shell* and the (Post)Human.”

<sup>66</sup> Steve Rose, “Hollywood is Haunted by *Ghost in the Shell*,” *Guardian*, October 19, 2009, <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2009/oct/19/hollywood-ghost-in-the-shell>.

<sup>67</sup> Susan J. Napier, “Doll Parts: Technology and the Body in *Ghost in the Shell*,” in *Anime from Akira to Howl’s Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*, rev. ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 105.



posthuman era rather than providing answers about the moral direction we should take. Set in a postmodern metropolis based on Hong Kong, *Ghost* presents us with a world of cyborgs. Our protagonist, Major Motoko Kusanagi of Section Nine, a covert government agency tracking and eliminating cyber-terrorists, has a fully machine-body, her only human “part” being her ghost—the essence of her consciousness—encapsulated in the machine-shell. As a result of her cyborg flesh, Kusanagi is more durable and more agile; her body even comes with an in-built camouflage feature. Being a cyborg also makes communication easier: people can directly access each other’s thoughts through ports in the back of the neck (Bukatman’s “terminal flesh”). The title *Ghost in the Shell* evokes Arthur Koestler’s ghost in the machine—a “mind dependent on, but also responsible for, the actions of the body”<sup>68</sup>—and in turn the problem of dualism dating back at least as far as Descartes: Is the human the bodily entity, or the intellectual essence? *Ghost* updates the mind–body problem for an age when the body is technological and a simulacrum of humankind’s original prosthesis, as Hayles calls it.<sup>69</sup> When the body can be constructed and reconstructed time and again, the mind and soul (“ghost”) become even more important in identifying what’s human. The following exchange between Kusanagi and a fellow Section Nine operative exemplifies the questioning the film engages in:

KUSANAGI. That robot—did we seem similar to you?

BATOU. Of course not.

KUSANAGI. No, I don’t mean physically.

BATOU. Just what then?

KUSANAGI. Well, I guess cyborgs like myself have a tendency to be paranoid about our origins. Sometimes I suspect I’m not who I think I am, like maybe I died a long time ago and somebody took my brain and stuck it in this body. Maybe there never was a real me in the first place and I’m completely synthetic like that thing.

BATOU. You’ve got human brain cells in that titanium shell of yours, you’re treated like other humans, so stop with the angst.

KUSANAGI. But that’s just it. That’s the only thing that makes me feel human: the way I’m treated. I mean who knows what’s inside our heads, have you ever seen your own brain?

BATOU. It sounds to me like you’re doubting your own ghost.

KUSANAGI. What if a cyber-brain could possibly generate its own ghost, create a soul all by itself. And if it did, just what would be the importance of being human then?

BATOU. Hm. That’s bullshit.<sup>70</sup>

*BioShock* engages in its own form of questioning, particularly, as outlined above, with regard to the idea of free will, brought forward into posthuman time. However, in terms of a

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<sup>68</sup> Arthur Koestler, *The Ghost in the Machine* (London: Hutchinson, 1976), 202.

<sup>69</sup> Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 3.

<sup>70</sup> Mamoru Oshii, dir., *Ghost in the Shell* (Manga Entertainment, 1995), DVD. All subsequent quotations from the film are from this source. “Batou” is spelled “Bateau” in the film credits; I use the correct manga spelling here.

moral message concerning the posthuman body, the player ends the game having received a relatively simple one: Randian absolutism is bad because it leads to destructive posthumanism. *Ghost in the Shell* does not contain simple moral messages; rather, it is all about the questions surrounding posthuman life: What does it mean to be a cyborg rather than an organic human? What is the relationship of the cyborgian to the human? At another point, Kusanagi and Batou ruminate on the nature of physicality and ownership in cyborgian society:

KUSANAGI. If man realises technology is within reach, he achieves it. Like it's damn-near instinctive. Look at us, for example. We're state-of-the-art. Controlled metabolisms, computer-enhanced brains, cybernetic bodies. Not long ago this was science fiction. So what if we can't survive without regular high-level maintenance, who are we to complain? [...]

BATOU. I'm afraid we've both signed our bodies and ghosts away to Section Nine.

KUSANAGI. True. If we ever quit or retire we'd have to give back our augmented brains and cyborg bodies—there wouldn't be much left after that. There are countless ingredients that make up the human body and mind, like all the components that make up me as an individual with my own personality. Sure, I have a face and voice to distinguish myself from others, but my thoughts and memories are unique only to me, and I carry a sense of my own destiny. Each of those things are just a small part of it.

*BioShock* portrays the posthuman body as a deleterious consequence of Randian morality; *Ghost in the Shell* does not ultimately portray the upgraded/machine body as destructive or constructive; it enables greater abilities—greater strength, the ability to survive physical “death” through uploaded consciousness—but the diversity of humanity, and of human drives, remains essentially the same. The film is upfront in stating the *sameness* of its world to our own, in key respects, despite the fact that many humans are now cyborgs. The text that opens the movie states: “The advance of computerisation [...] has not yet wiped out nations and ethnic groups.” The characters in the film still cling to their human identity, and the complexity implicit in that, despite the fact that they have upgraded their bodies. *Ghost* is therefore ultimately morally ambivalent, where *BioShock* portrays Randian absolutism in order to argue against it. Posthumanist science fiction that interacts with Rand is required to take up a moral position in relation to her simplistic, idealised concept of humanity; classic posthumanist science fiction shuns moral positioning.

### **Earth of the Future**

The chapter has now considered *Blade Runner* and *Andromeda* under the “life beyond man” heading; *BioShock* and *Ghost in the Shell* have been analysed for their divergent portrayals of the upgraded body. I will thus turn to the final rubric in this extended case study comparing classic “Rand noir” works of posthumanist SF with posthumanist SF that directly incorporates Ayn Rand. William Gibson's *Neuromancer* and Zoltan Istvan's *The Transhumanist Wager* are considered for their depictions of the “earth of the future.” Gibson is Rand noir, while



Istvan is purely Randian. I will discuss *Neuromancer* first, before dealing with Istvan's novel at some necessary length.

The definitive novel of cyberpunk is an excellent example of the lapse in moral positioning evident in late-twentieth-century "postmodern" science fiction. Gibson's 1980s classic, *Neuromancer*, also exemplifies the porous border between (science) fiction and reality: its portrayal of a virtual world called cyberspace gave a name to the later development of the Internet. *Neuromancer* "gave popular currency to the term 'cyberspace' as an analogue for the realm of computerized flows and interactions"; the novel "depicts a world in which human consciousness can be both eclipsed by, and released into, a virtual realm."<sup>71</sup>

Of all the texts written about in this chapter, *Neuromancer* is the one which most clearly epitomises Rand noir. The novel's earth is one of hyper-capitalism; Rand's "persecuted minority," big business, has turned mega—instanced in the names of merged conglomerates like Mitsubishi Bank of America and Mitsubishi-Genentech. As in *Blade Runner*, corporations hold sway over much of human life. Capitalist life is centred in cities, and the city in Gibson is an all-consuming presence; the novel's near-future location is the Boston-Atlanta Metropolitan Axis, also known as the Sprawl. This is a Randian utopian precursor, advanced capitalism, become dystopian. The area known as Night City is described as "like a deranged experiment in social Darwinism."<sup>72</sup> Life in the arena of high capitalism does not hew to Objectivist value-for-value rationality; it is about surfing chaos. *Neuromancer* marries its postmodern Rand with posthuman time. People can plug into the Net through connecting wires, their minds directly controlling avatars in an environment with more virtual freedom than the physical world. Simstim, or simulated stimulation, allows you to experience the movements and sensations of another human being. The body can be remade for both cosmetic and enhancing reasons; it is malleable according to the desires of the mind. You can have a plastic arm that is stronger, mirrorshades embedded in your eye sockets that allow you to see more spectrums than the human eye; you can have retractable blades under your fingernails, as the character Molly does. Artificial intelligences exist, with rights of their own.

As in Rand's capitalist vista, in the world of *Neuromancer*, technology is privileged as a tool of the mind—as something which extends the human mind's capabilities—and thus the mind itself is privileged. The body is relegated. It is explicitly described in the text as merely "meat," according to those whose main joys involve mental stimulation (and the novel is set in their world).<sup>73</sup> Their goal is to live in the frontier of cyberspace, an arena for minds disembodied through tech.

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<sup>71</sup> Majid Yar, "Virtual Utopias and Dystopias—The Cultural Imaginary of the Internet," in *Utopia: Social Theory and the Future*, ed. Michael Hviid Jacobsen and Keith Tester (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), 184.

<sup>72</sup> William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (London: Voyager, 1995), 14.

<sup>73</sup> Gibson, *Neuromancer*, 11, 71, 97.

Gibson's text has had a profound influence within the same high-tech fields where Rand has had influence. The *Sunday Times* comments that the book has "inspired technologists from Silicon Valley to Wall Street and a global network of computer hackers who have committed countless nefarious deeds in the book's honour."<sup>74</sup> Paulina Borsook, drawing on her years embedded in the Silicon Valley community, writes that certain technolibertarians "take gleeful pleasure in imagining" the "hell" of *Neuromancer's* world. This is because "any two individuals can arrange anything they want among themselves with no busybody intrusion of third parties such as government or fellow feeling."<sup>75</sup> Such reasoning relates directly to Rand's anarchistic trader principle; Rand anticipated these forces.

The aspects of Rand noir must be seen as central to *Neuromancer's* influence. Both novelists portray high-tech capitalism as an arena of exciting endeavours. The key post-Randian figure in *Neuromancer* is the "console cowboy," hacker extraordinaire, Case. He is the character many of the individuals mentioned by the *Sunday Times* seek to emulate, one can assume; as the protagonist, he most clearly embodies the novel's vision. Case is a freelance technological operator who feels he is not beholden to any government or value system other than his own self-interest. As such, he can be understood as an Ayn Rand hero—absent Rand's elaborate philosophy. He is a "hollowed out" Ayn Rand hero, Randian without Rand's values, and thus a kind of postmodern Rand figure: a Rand noir figure. Just as, indeed, protagonists in noir films fill the role of the hero but are more properly antiheroes: heroes without heroic values. Gibson's protagonist is a lone-wolf trader in illicit goods and services; ignoring all the misery around, he looks out only for himself. Case does not in any way follow Objectivism, but he does offer a vision of selfish independence, which is what Objectivism also offers.

This, then, is Rand without the consciously constructed value system—but the shell of selfish independence and the vicarious fantasies associated with that remain: the "freedom" and the challenge of transgressing the system, doing your own thing, for yourself, in a world where the structures of society are stacked against you; the buzz of "biz"—making profits from entrepreneurial (criminal) business. If we ignore the elaborate construct of Rand's philosophy for a moment, it is possible to say that—on the level of the text itself, and how it has been perceived by those with libertarian inclinations—Gibson offers essentially the same fantasy as Rand: a fantasy of being unbound in high-tech time, not beholden to government or other people.

*Neuromancer* is absent entirely of didacticism with regard to its social and technological environs; its world is presented as a *fait accompli*. Ordinarily, this might not merit mention—except here, we are comparing Gibson to Rand, whose novels always tease

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<sup>74</sup> Quoted on Gibson, *Neuromancer*, back cover.

<sup>75</sup> Paulina Borsook, *CyberSelfish: A Critical Romp Through the Terribly Libertarian Culture of High Tech* (London: Little, Brown, 2000), 18.



out the moral and philosophical reasons her worlds are the way they are. Gibson does not explain how we got to this future, but he is interested in airing its questions. The novel's main plot involves the illegal liberation of an AI by Case and others; the question of posthuman consciousness is never far from the book's surface.

The earth of the future, according to *Neuromancer*—and *Blade Runner* and *Ghost in the Shell*—will be Rand noir. It is high-tech hyper-capitalism, divorced from “Objectivism,” and yet certain Randian drives—selfish independence, the laissez-faire trader principle—remain. Amidst supreme technology, fantasies of posthuman lives can be lived; the boundary between human and machine is intensely blurred. The worlds of these fictions require living practically in order to survive, a Randian imperative; and yet, contra Rand, this appears to mean (in the case of Case) living without steadfast philosophical principles. There is another vision of the possible posthuman future earth, however; one where Randian absolutism is incorporated, and such absolutism is presented as necessary in order to achieve that very posthumanity. This is the portrayal represented by *The Transhumanist Wager*.

### **Roark in a Time of Transhumanity**

Zoltan Istvan, a Hungarian-American writer and self-described “visionary,” is running for the presidency of the United States in 2016, as the founder and head of the Transhumanist Party. Istvan's platform is simple: “[T]o use science and technology to radically improve the human being and the society we live in.” He wishes to “[c]reate a cultural mindset in America that embracing and producing radical technology and science is in the best interest of our nation and species.” This includes designing appropriate safeguards so technology is not used to exploit people “as we transition to the transhuman era.” His primary goal, however, is immortality, “to do everything possible to make it so this country's amazing scientists and technologists have resources to overcome human death and aging within 15-20 years.”<sup>76</sup> Istvan argues: “We didn't evolve through billions of years to remain animals. In the 21st Century—the age of unparalleled scientific and technological achievement—everyone faces a Transhumanist Wager.”<sup>77</sup> The “Transhumanist Wager” that every human being now apparently faces, is whether or not to seek immortality—perpetual sentience—through modern machines. The conquering of death is “a goal an increasing number of leading scientists think is reachable” within two decades.<sup>78</sup> Istvan is certainly correct that a number of scientists are very optimistic in this regard, the aforementioned Aubrey de Grey and Ray Kurzweil perhaps chief among them.

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<sup>76</sup> Zoltan Istvan, “Should a Transhumanist Run for US President?,” *Huffington Post*, December 8, 2014, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/zoltan-istvan/should-a-transhumanist-be\\_b\\_5949688.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/zoltan-istvan/should-a-transhumanist-be_b_5949688.html).

<sup>77</sup> Zoltan Istvan, quoted at <http://transhumanistwager.com/> (accessed February 3, 2015).

<sup>78</sup> Istvan, “Should a Transhumanist Run for US President?”

Istvan is the author of a philosophical novel which extrapolates his radical premise. *The Transhumanist Wager* (2013) is of a slightly different order to the texts so far considered in this chapter. *Blade Runner*, *BioShock*, *Ghost in the Shell*, and *Neuromancer* are all critically acclaimed, and celebrated as exemplars of their genre; they have entered mainstream discourse. *Gene Roddenberry's Andromeda* is perhaps less celebrated, but it is still a mainstream product—it aired on cable and satellite TV on the Sci-Fi Channel, and has been made available on Netflix. Istvan's novel is more properly a product of a niche: Internet-based techno-culture; the same environment that fostered Extropianism. *Wager* is self-published. That said, though his views are radical, Istvan is not an obscure figure. As a journalist, his work has featured on the *National Geographic Channel* and in the *New York Times*. Istvan has been mentioned in articles on technology and transhumanism by mainstream outlets including the *Financial Times* and *Newsweek*;<sup>79</sup> he writes regularly for the *Huffington Post*, and has been interviewed by *Fox News* and the *Telegraph*, amongst many others. Istvan's supporters would no doubt argue that Ayn Rand herself was a curiosity to the mainstream before she became the mainstream. The *Telegraph* posits that Istvan's views, or their ilk, will likely “become part of the political furniture” as technology continues to develop. The newspaper describes *Wager* as “a philosophical near-future dystopian thriller,” and Istvan himself is called “a high profile, but controversial” figure within the transhumanist movement.<sup>80</sup> As covered in the last chapter, there has been a concerted effort within transhumanism to move it away from Randian radicalism to the non-threatening political centre; it therefore stands to reason that certain of its grandees would be distressed by Istvan's emergence, since he represents the return of the repressed. *The Transhumanist Wager's* relationship to my theme will be readily apparent from what follows: it is a key example of how Rand can be used, and has been used, to advance an argument for posthumanism.

*The Transhumanist Wager* has been greeted by multiple Internet outlets as a new *Atlas Shrugged*, and—in addition to its mainstream mentions—the book and its author's opinions have received widespread attention in the technology-orientated media and in transhumanist

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<sup>79</sup> Izabella Kaminska, “Since You Asked: The Technology Billionaires Aiming to Disrupt Death,” *Financial Times*, April 17, 2015, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/317cd592-e4ec-11e4-bb4b-00144feab7de.html#axzz3dRHPoG2v>; Paula Mejia, “Fetuses in Artificial Wombs: Medical Marvel or Misogynist Malpractice?,” *Newsweek*, August 6, 2014, <http://www.newsweek.com/fetuses-artificial-wombs-medical-marvel-or-misogynist-malpractice-263308>.

<sup>80</sup> Jamie Bartlett, “Meet the Transhumanist Party: ‘Want to Live Forever? Vote for Me,’” *Daily Telegraph*, December 23, 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/11310031/Meet-the-Transhumanist-Party-Want-to-live-forever-Vote-for-me.html>.



circles.<sup>81</sup> Istvan, like Rand, is clear that his fiction puts forward his personal philosophy.<sup>82</sup> The radical vision of capitalism in Rand's work informed policy and individual lives in the latter half of the twentieth century, the era which gave rise to an unprecedented triumph for free-market thinking. Istvan hopes to accomplish a similar revolution: to move the world from acceptance of high capitalism to acceptance of the transhuman vista that emerges it; acceptance of the transhumanism that emerges from capitalism's privileging of technological innovation, its privileging of individual choice and acquisition. These are Randian imperatives: Privileging individual rights and personal development above all else; transforming the culture so that it further supports free-thinking men of science in their quest to innovate; accomplishing nothing less than a philosophical revolution in the way human beings think about themselves in relation to the world. It should not surprise us, then, that Istvan is "a dedicated Ayn Rand reader."<sup>83</sup> He has actively courted Rand fans as readers for his novel and as supporters of his vision, posting the following message on the website Good Reads, a large online community for bookworms: "For those interested in Objectivist (*Atlas Shrugged*) principles applied to what the human species will evolve into, I've written a book about it. [...] *The Transhumanist Wager*, takes many of Rand's ideas and applies them. However, my novel also expands on many ideas that Rand missed or didn't understand. If form follows function, then some of Rand's ideas will soon be obsolete, because many of us will not be human in another 30-50 years."<sup>84</sup>

*The Transhumanist Wager* is, in many respects, a kind of condensed amalgam of Rand's two major novels, *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*, augmented with a new didactic premise. Where Rand promotes individualism (*The Fountainhead*) and ultimately expands this to promote laissez-faire capitalism (*Atlas*), Istvan expands a promotion of the "self-made self" into a full-fledged image of the earth transformed "for the better" through a

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<sup>81</sup> "There are strong parallels with *Atlas Shrugged*," writes Giulio Prisco in a review, "*The Transhumanist Wager* and the Terrifying Struggle for the Future," *io9*, May 27, 2013, <http://io9.com/the-transhumanist-wager-and-the-terrifying-struggle-for-510012440>; "[T]he universe created by Istvan gave me an experience highly reminiscent of my reading of *Atlas Shrugged* more than a decade ago," says Gennady Stolyarov II in his review, "Thoughts on Zoltan Istvan's *The Transhumanist Wager*," Institute for Ethics and Emerging Technologies, November 6, 2013, <http://ieet.org/index.php/IEET/more/StolyarovII20131106>; "Many say *The Transhumanist Wager* is the new *Atlas Shrugged*," writes *Marin* magazine in its "Reading List," April 2014, [http://digital.marinmagazine.com/marinmagazine/april\\_2014?pg=29&search\\_term=zoltan+istvan&do\\_c\\_id=-1#pg29](http://digital.marinmagazine.com/marinmagazine/april_2014?pg=29&search_term=zoltan+istvan&do_c_id=-1#pg29).

<sup>82</sup> "This story [...] is the result of two decades of thought and inquiry into transhumanism and the quest for scientific immortality. I wrote it hoping to change people's ideas of what a human being is and what it can become." Zoltan Istvan, "Author's Note," *The Transhumanist Wager* (Futurity Imagine Media, 2013), Kindle edition, 298. Futurity Imagine Media is Istvan's own outlet; see <http://ziventures.com/FuturityImaginePublishing1.html> (accessed June 18, 2015).

<sup>83</sup> Zoltan Istvan, "*The Transhumanist Wager* (the *Atlas Shrugged* of Transhumanism)" (forum post), Good Reads, April 13, 2013, <http://www.goodreads.com/topic/show/1288760-the-transhumanist-wager-the-atlas-shrugged-of-transhumanism>.

<sup>84</sup> Istvan, "*The Transhumanist Wager* (the *Atlas Shrugged* of Transhumanism)."

philosophy of transhumanism. The novel follows the journey of Jethro Knights, a handsome, independent, strong-willed hero in the Randian mould, who ultimately reshapes the world order with his vision of technologically enhanced man. What I will do in this final section of the chapter is show how, and what, Istvan takes from Rand in his novel. We can thus see that Rand's work provides a basis for the book, and has been transfigured to advance a philosophy of transhumanity. In the process, I summarise how *The Transhumanist Wager* instances the core argument of my thesis: the evident continuum between Ayn Rand and posthumanism.

"Howard Roark laughed." This is the opening line of *The Fountainhead*. *The Transhumanist Wager* begins with a mirror image, darkened: "Jethro Knights growled." As each novel opens, its protagonist is facing a defining moment—a moment of feeling acutely alive. Yet, while Roark is opening up to the possibilities ahead of him, Knights has narrowed his focus to a final reality. The similarities are remarkable even in the opening paragraphs of the two fictional works; Istvan has exactly adapted Rand to his own purposes. *The Fountainhead* begins:

Howard Roark laughed.

He stood naked at the edge of a cliff. The lake lay far below him. A frozen explosion of granite burst in flight to the sky over motionless water. The water seemed immovable, the stone flowing. The stone had the stillness of one brief moment in battle when thrust meets thrust and the currents are held in a pause more dynamic than motion. The stone glowed, wet with sunrays.

Jethro's journey begins on a boat in the middle of the South Pacific:

Jethro Knights growled.

His life was about to end. A seventy-foot wall of shifting blue with a million tons of water was veering down on him. It was the largest wave of the hurricane—what scientists and sea captains call a rogue. He watched the wave steepen, the wind lines near the lip combing the sky, painting an arc of dark rainbow hues far above his yacht's mast. He calculated how much time he had. Maybe ten seconds, he thought, aghast. His pupils tightened.<sup>85</sup>

In terms of length alone, these openings are close to each other: seventy-two and eighty-four words, respectively. With the deftness of her descriptions and her use of symbolism, Rand is clearly the superior writer. Indeed, as a novel, Istvan's tale suffers throughout from far too many direct statements—of characters' motives and intentions, especially; too much telling and not enough showing. The literary quality of the work, however, is beside the point. What we can see from the very beginning of his book is how Istvan has adapted Rand. Both of these openings make statements about the theme of the novel that is to come. Both begin with a man—a Randian hero—alone against nature; the imagery

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<sup>85</sup> Rand, *The Fountainhead*, 3; Istvan, *The Transhumanist Wager*, 4.



of water and motion is even the same. However, Rand's theme in *The Fountainhead* is realising the possibilities of your life. Hence, the world—nature—seems benevolent, inert, waiting to be put to use by man. As Roark will soon observe: "He looked at the granite. To be cut, he thought, and made into walls. He looked at a tree. To be split and made into rafters."<sup>86</sup> As *Wager* opens, by contrast, nature is not portrayed merely as a tool to be put to use by man's mind, but as an obstacle to be overcome: nature is a threat to the life of man.

These divergent emphases establish the parameters of the hero's journey in each book. Roark's driving force is to fulfil his potential for happiness within the timeframe of his life. Nature is a tool for this end: it has given him his life, and it also supplies the raw materials with which he will make his buildings, structures that are both the source and the achievement of his happiness. His buildings recreate nature according to the images of his mind. Istvan takes these insights from Rand and goes further: happiness within the timeframe of a normal human lifespan is not enough; if you truly love your life, you will want more of it, you will want to keep it forever; immortality—removing the threat of nature (death)—must be accomplished. Structures created by the human mind cannot remain external to the human body if this is to happen: we have used our technology to recreate the world; we must now use it to recreate our own bodies. In short, then, Istvan updates a Randian imperative—conquering nature to use it for human ends—for an era of transhumanity: an era when the ultimate conquering of nature, abolishing death, is posited as scientifically plausible.

Istvan takes a certain something from *We the Living* in *Wager*; in that, significant elements of the protagonist's background are the same as his own, as was the case with Rand and Kira. Istvan's Amazon.com biography mentions that in his youth he sailed the globe with 500 books on board, an adventure undertaken by the protagonist in his novel, who carries the same number of books. Istvan worked for *National Geographic*, while Jethro Knights works for the fictional *International Geographic*. Istvan's wife is a doctor, as is Knights's love interest.<sup>87</sup> We could also say that *Wager* represents Istvan's "intellectual" autobiography, as Rand called her first novel.<sup>88</sup> Despite these parallels between *Wager* and *We the Living*, the two works by Rand that Istvan most obviously draws on are her major novels. The characters in *Wager*, the relationships between them and how they play out, are more similar to *The Fountainhead*. The plot throughline and the philosophical ambition of the novel—presenting a whole image of society, not just an individual life—are more similar to *Atlas*. I will first consider Istvan's major characters and how the author uses Rand as a template; I will then

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<sup>86</sup> Rand, *The Fountainhead*, 4.

<sup>87</sup> "The Transhumanist Wager [Kindle Edition]," Amazon.com, accessed November 24, 2014, [http://www.amazon.com/Transhumanist-Wager-Zoltan-Istvan-ebook/dp/B00AQQSY60/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=digital-text&ie=UTF8&qid=1416861812&sr=1-1&keywords=the+transhumanist+wager#\\_](http://www.amazon.com/Transhumanist-Wager-Zoltan-Istvan-ebook/dp/B00AQQSY60/ref=sr_1_1?s=digital-text&ie=UTF8&qid=1416861812&sr=1-1&keywords=the+transhumanist+wager#_).

<sup>88</sup> Ayn Rand, foreword to *We the Living* (London: Signet, 1983), ix.

look at the overarching plot-theme and radical vision of the novel and how these relate back to *Atlas*.

*The Transhumanist Wager*, like all of Rand's fiction, relies on absolutist binaries to make its points. As the book opens, we are brought into a polarised America. It is the 2010s, but a more advanced moment in techno-scientific time. The culture is divided in two. On one side there are the transhumanists: "Futurists, technologists, and scientists tout[ing] transhuman fields such as cryonics, cloning, artificial intelligence, bionics, stem cell therapy, robotics, and genetics as their moral and evolutionary right—and as crucial future drivers of the new economy."<sup>89</sup> On the opposite side there is a rogues' gallery of Rand's usual list of villains: government agencies and religious authorities, the former concerned with preserving their own power in a world of upgraded humans, the latter arguing that altering biology is a sin against God. In the middle there is the majority of the world's population, the pliable masses. We have here, then, the same essentialised view of humanity that Rand proffers in *Atlas*: the heroes who innovate, who move the human world and want to achieve their best selves; the villains who attempt to stifle the heroes and keep their own collectivised control; and the masses who will go along with whatever power wins out. In Alan Clardy's words: "Supermen, looters, and sheep."<sup>90</sup>

This broad conception of society takes from *Atlas*; yet, the relationships of the individual heroes and villains to the story are more like those found in *The Fountainhead*. The protagonist, Jethro Knights, borrows from John Galt in *Atlas*, in that he is both an inventor and a developer of his own particular philosophy of the world, which he uses to transform the world into his own image. However, he is also a Howard Roark figure, an individualist who wants to accomplish his highest vision of himself, and has no thoughts for others who don't offer value to him: "Jethro only noticed values, not people."<sup>91</sup> Knights's journey takes us through *Wager*, as Roark's does in *The Fountainhead*; the books' stories are primarily those of the respective protagonists. This is different from *Atlas*, where a more diverse cast of characters propels the plot, and the novel's pivotal figure, Galt, does not appear in the flesh until the final third.

Knights's love interest is Zoe Bach, a pioneering doctor. Their relationship mirrors that of Roark / Dominique Francon, rather than that of Galt / Dagny Taggart. In *The Fountainhead*, Dominique is not only a soulmate for Roark; she provides the hero's greatest challenge. She is in love with Roark, and like him is an individualist, but she does not believe a man of his integrity and surpassing abilities can survive in the social world as-it-is, an environment that requires the performance of conformity to collective values and that raises

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<sup>89</sup> Istvan, *The Transhumanist Wager*, 7.

<sup>90</sup> Clardy, "Galt's Gulch," 259.

<sup>91</sup> Istvan, *The Transhumanist Wager*, 12.



up mediocrities. In Rand's own words, Dominique's "error is *the malevolent universe premise*: the belief that the good has no chance on earth."<sup>92</sup> As Andrew Bernstein puts it, Dominique is simultaneously an idealist who "understands man's capacity for greatness," and "a philosophical pessimist, who believes that the heroes among men are doomed to defeat."<sup>93</sup> Therefore, perversely, Dominique sets out to prove herself right about the world—while secretly hoping she is proven wrong. She works to destroy Roark professionally; she writes columns against him for the *New York Banner*, and uses her job as a society columnist to gather commissions for the competition. She works to destroy Roark personally, by marrying Peter Keating, the embodiment of the performative–conformative society upon which Roark places no value. It is only at the end of the novel, when Roark has won the battle against the forces of conformity on his own terms, that Dominique allows herself to be his wife: because she sees that it is possible for individuality to succeed on this earth, and therefore she does not have to fight the world and her true self any longer—she realises she is free. The particulars of this relationship are not repeated in *Wager*; the core premise, however, is: the idea that love is the hero's greatest challenge. Knights meets Zoe on the edge of a Kashmiri warzone; he is a correspondent for *International Geographic*, she a doctor labouring near the frontlines. Her interest in Asian philosophies, and her nonchalance regarding the inevitability of death, are mystifying to Knights, concerned as he is only with improving his own self and with never dying. Bach and Knights are thus counterpoints to each other, as Dominique and Roark are. Jethro says: "I might be too selfish for love"; the "awareness of someone else" is "shocking."<sup>94</sup> Neither Roark nor Knights questions for any significant period of time his ability to achieve his vision of himself. In both texts, the heroine's actions are a challenge to the hero. Dominique overtly acts to bring down Roark, in the process causing a greater struggle for him as he seeks to accomplish a completed version of himself (as a successful professional architect). She thereby clarifies and strengthens his role as the hero. Bach's challenge to Knights is more in the private than the public sphere, but no less significant: her divergent belief system causes him to clarify and strengthen his own views (over the course of many lengthy philosophical discussions), and thereby makes him a (somewhat) more rounded protagonist. When Zoe dies due to a bomb planted by an anti-transhumanist that was meant for Knights, Jethro's transhuman imperative is given a renewed emphasis: he seeks not only to achieve immortality for himself but to bring Zoe's dead, but preserved, mind and body back to life. Istvan differs

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<sup>92</sup> Ayn Rand, quoted in Andrew Bernstein, "Understanding the 'Rape' Scene in *The Fountainhead*," in *Essays on Ayn Rand's "The Fountainhead"*, ed. Robert Mayhew (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007), 203.

<sup>93</sup> Bernstein, "Understanding the 'Rape' Scene," in *Essays on Ayn Rand's "The Fountainhead"*, ed. Mayhew, 203.

<sup>94</sup> Istvan, *The Transhumanist Wager*, 62.

in the details, but the template of the central relationship in his novel is clearly to be found in *The Fountainhead*: the hero's aims are challenged and clarified by his love interest.

The primary pairing of antagonists in Istvan also relies on that found in *The Fountainhead*. Peter Keating's place is taken by Gregory Michaelson, a college classmate of Knights—as Roark and Keating were college classmates. Michaelson is *Wager's* embodiment of the performative–conformative values favoured by society as-it-is. Michaelson, like Keating, has no real self in the Randian definition, has no sense of himself beyond a desire to climb the social ladder and to fulfil the expectations placed on him by others: “Modishness, flair, and class were in Gregory's every thought and decision—aesthetics before function, pomp before action, style before reason”; “[l]ike all superficial showmen, Gregory lived inside of others' opinions and never considered what it would be like outside of them.”<sup>95</sup> Knights and Michaelson's relationship shadows that of Roark and Keating. In college, both Roark and Knights are iconoclasts who anger the conservative faculty. Roark is expelled after a meeting with the dean in which he lambasts the existing architectural profession. At his final-year thesis defence, Knights has a public verbal jousting match with an old-school academic over Knights's theory of the “omnipotender”—“one who contends for omnipotence”—a theory that repudiates the humanitarian values of the old culture (as does Roark's self-centred set of values).<sup>96</sup> Michaelson, in contrast—like Keating—is the darling of the university establishment, as he will come to be the darling of a dying culture. Keating grows up to be, for a time, an architect who is perceived as the leading light of his profession: this is because he does everything the existing “neoclassical” aesthetic culture expects, and does it well. He performs conformity better than anyone else. In reality, he is being propped up by the true villain of the piece, Ellsworth M. Toohey, a socialist cultural commentator and opinion-former. Toohey seeks power for himself by promoting mediocrity and denouncing true originality; it is only by advancing the small that he can make himself seem large: “I shall rule. [...] It's only a matter of discovering the lever. [...] It's the soul [...]. Not whips or swords or fire or guns. [...] Tell man that he must live for others”; “If you learn how to rule one single man's soul, you can get to the rest of mankind.”<sup>97</sup> Toohey uses his newspaper columns and pull with the cultural elite to push Keating as the architect of the age. Keating takes this as a wonderful thing, since he has no values of his own and sees social advancement as the only form of success. The exact same dynamic is put to work in *The Transhumanist Wager*. A character named Reverend Belinas takes the form of Toohey. Belinas is the head of the Redeem Church, the largest evangelical movement in the United States. A powerful cleric who counsels politicians from the president on down, Belinas is also a vigorous opponent of

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<sup>95</sup> Istvan, *The Transhumanist Wager*, 13, 57.

<sup>96</sup> Istvan, *The Transhumanist Wager*, 80.

<sup>97</sup> Rand, *The Fountainhead*, 665.



transhumanism; it goes against his religious beliefs regarding the inviolability of God's creation, and the rise of the atheistic philosophy that goes along with it proves a threat to his material influence. Like Toohey, Belinas is "hungry for power," power "that best accomplished his bidding for his church and the Lord. He would stop at nothing to achieve it."<sup>98</sup> Belinas recruits Michaelson as his chosen son, much as Toohey recruits Keating—in both cases the "villain" chooses this character because of Keating/Michaelson's malleability: Keating and Michaelson represents ready-made vessels for others' agendas. Toohey grooms Keating as a cultural celebrity; Belinas grooms Michaelson for political celebrity. Michaelson becomes a US senator and comes to head up a prominent government bureaucracy regulating transhumanism, the National Future Security Agency. Belinas's goal is to halt Jethro Knights's agenda, as Toohey's is to drive Roark out of the architectural profession: both heroes represent radical threats to the existing culture as it is set up in each novel.

The villain of *The Fountainhead*, Toohey, is a socialist, while the Toohey figure Istvan chooses for *Wager* is a cleric. This has significance in itself, since Rand saw a clear continuity between socialism and religion; for her, both were about collectivised concepts of identity, surrendering one's rational individuality to an external force (whether God or "the people"). Rand wrote in the 1960s: "Today, Catholicism and communism may well cooperate, on the premise that they will fight each other for power later, but must first destroy their common enemy, the individual, by forcing mankind to unite to form one neck ready for one leash."<sup>99</sup>

### **Engineering the Earth as Utopia**

There is something of an irony in Zoltan Istvan running to be democratically elected as US president, attempting to gather popular support for his transhumanist ideas, when the vision that he presents in *The Transhumanist Wager* is utterly undemocratic and anti-populist. *Wager* takes the Nietzschean will-to-power, anti-democratic, and absolutist elements in Rand to a new extreme. Jethro Knights engages in an even greater project of utopian social engineering than Andrew Ryan: he assumes the status of a global dictator, rebuilding the world according to an image in his imagination, so that it better conforms to his will.

The character dynamics in *Wager* draw heavily on *The Fountainhead*. The final philosophical/thematic dynamic of Istvan's novel, however, is a version of *Atlas Shrugged's* Knights's ever-presence in the narrative is more reminiscent of Howard Roark than John Galt, but his project in the novel is that of a Galt. Roark has no need to redesign society so that he can be free to be his best self; in the end he is able to accomplish his goals without having to

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<sup>98</sup> Istvan, *The Transhumanist Wager*, 52.

<sup>99</sup> Ayn Rand, "Requiem for Man," in *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal* (New York: Signet, 2005), 363.

consciously re-engineer social structures. We could say that certain aspects of the world of *The Fountainhead* come round to him, but he does not want to remake the world, as such: Roark's focus is always on himself only. John Galt wants to remake the world. He needs to, according to the parameters of the text, if he is to realise who he is: the embodiment of Rand's virtue of selfishness. The social environment of *Atlas Shrugged* is one that oppresses the creators; it does not let the inventor profit from his inventions: it sees all wealth created as something to be distributed to the public at large, not the private property of the creator for his use as he sees fit. And so, Galt sets about re-engineering the world—by first re-engineering America—in the image of his values, the image of Objectivism and pure capitalism. He encourages the creative elite, the best artists, inventors, and entrepreneurs, to drop out of the economy: to take manual-labour jobs and not use their singular minds, their unique talents, for the benefit of a flawed social structure. This elite withdraws to Galt's Gulch, where they establish a social structure in accordance with their worldview, where all property is private, there is no welfare, and those of "lesser ability" are not carried on the backs of the strong, as they are in a redistributive society, according to Randian opinion. Galt's Gulch is a small-scale utopia, in accordance with Objectivist parameters; it is also the model for, and the breeding ground of, the utopia-at-large that the world will become. The absence of the "world movers" from productive life in short order brings about the collapse of the old American economy, and in turn all the institutions of the old polity: there is no one competent enough to create and manage technological infrastructure, or to run major businesses; there is no one to create enough wealth and thereby pay the taxes that keep the whole system going: the whole system collapses. With this accomplished, Galt and his cohort of strikers can return to the world and rebuild civilisation from scratch. This is how they go about building their ideal society; it is, as I discussed in chapter one, an at-length portrayal of Popper's concept of utopian social engineering.

This dynamic is repeated in *The Transhumanist Wager*; the essentials are the same, though the details differ. *Atlas Shrugged* dramatises a particularly twentieth-century, particularly Cold War, philosophical binary: the battle of individualism versus collectivism as the engine of society. Rand's novel privileges individualism in order to promote capitalism. Istvan's book uses Rand as a model in order to move the debate to a twenty-first-century vista: the battle of the individual versus technology. Istvan sees Randian individualism as compatible with technology as an enhancer of the chosen self—in other words, compatible with transhumanism. Rand's imperative was that the individual mind be seen as the engine of all (human) creation. Istvan's imperative is an extension of this: given the creative capacity of the individual mind, it should not be left encased within a flawed, perishable body; we should use our "rational faculty," as Rand called it, in order to choose to upgrade our minds and bodies so that our uniqueness as individuals continues in perpetuity, and so that our selves



continue to be improved upon. Galt desires a life of freedom (on his terms), Knights desires an endless life of freedom (on his terms).

Jethro Knights takes actions that are every similar to John Galt's. Like Galt, he wants to achieve his highest vision of his own self on this earth. Like Galt, he comes to realise that in order to do this he will have to remake the world in the image of his personal values. In *Atlas Shrugged*, the government strangles the productivity of wealth creators with taxes and regulations. In *Wager*, the government declares a "War on Transhumanism" and legislates and pressures transhuman sciences out of existence in America. "Big Government" is an enemy in both texts. Knights had initially set up his institute for the furtherance of immortality, Transhuman Citizen, in Silicon Valley—Istvan here implicitly making the connection between Randian philosophy and the Californian technological hub, a connection which, as we have seen, exists in real life. As the government tightens its noose around transhumanism, however, Knights realises that in order to fulfil his vision he will have to depart the world as-it-is; he hires a designer of floating cities to build him one—a "seastead," which he names Transhumania.

Seasteading is in fact a real-life phenomenon, a movement that has emerged from the same technolibertarian community that reveres Rand and gave birth to transhumanism. The Seasteading Institute was founded in 2008 by Patri Friedman, Milton Friedman's grandson and a vocal member of the transhumanist organisation Humanity+, and Peter Thiel, PayPal entrepreneur. Both men have Rand in their pasts. Their institute aims to establish "floating cities—which will allow the next generation of pioneers to peacefully test new ideas for government."<sup>100</sup> In a 2009 essay for the Cato Institute in support of seasteading, Thiel presented a very Randian vista: "The fate of the world may depend on the effort of a single person who builds or propagates the machinery of freedom that makes the world safe for capitalism"; the broken nature of current politics requires "focusing energy elsewhere, onto peaceful projects that some consider utopian."<sup>101</sup> The similarities between seasteads and Galt's Gulch have not gone unnoticed; a *Daily Mail* article, for one, makes the connection.<sup>102</sup> The institute's logo depicts a titanic man, standing on the ocean, holding aloft a city.<sup>103</sup> It is not a stretch to call him Atlas. Istvan's decision to include seasteading in his work spotlights the connectivity between Rand, transhumanity, and other aspects of contemporary techno-culture.

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<sup>100</sup> "Introduction," Seasteading Institute, accessed June 25, 2011, <http://seasteading.org/about-seasteading/introduction>.

<sup>101</sup> Peter Thiel, "The Education of a Libertarian," *Cato Unbound*, April 13, 2009, <http://www.cato-unbound.org/2009/04/13/peter-thiel/education-libertarian>.

<sup>102</sup> "Floating Cities: PayPal Billionaire Plans to Build a Whole New Libertarian Colony Off the Coast of San Francisco," *Daily Mail*, August 25, 2011, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2024761/Atlas-Shrugged-Silicon-Valley-billionaire-reveals-plan-launch-floating-start-country-coast-San-Francisco.html>.

<sup>103</sup> See the organisation's website, <http://www.seasteading.org/> (accessed December 1, 2014).

The seasteading ideals are those of libertarian individualism and capitalist competition, brought to the realm of government itself; the organisation envisages “a vibrant startup sector for governments, with many small groups testing out innovative ideas as they compete to better serve their citizens’ needs.”<sup>104</sup> In one sense, this ideal is inconsistent with Rand, who thought government should be small but a monopoly: the single objective arbiter in disputes, removed from the usual realms of competition. In another respect, however, seasteaders are taking their cue from Rand—following her logic on the benefits of capitalist competition to its ultimate conclusion. The seasteading impulse explicitly appeals to individual empowerment and liberty, and individuals’ stifled potential under current systems: “Currently [...] it is hard for an individual to make much difference,” because of the enormity of existing states and institutions: “Imagine unprecedented personal freedom, new economic opportunities, [...] and the chance to demonstrate a better way of living to the world.”<sup>105</sup> This is an American, “new world” impulse for the twenty-first century: “All land on Earth is already claimed, making the oceans humanity’s next frontier.”<sup>106</sup> The connection between seasteading and transhumanism is implicit if not explicit. In theory, a seastead would be the ideal environment for transhumanist endeavours—free of existing governments’ regulations, one could conduct unhindered experimentation, surrounded by like-minded individuals in a self-contained community. The philosophy behind seasteading is also commensurate with transhumanist goals: “We see experimentation as the source of all progress. Many innovations—on numerous seasteads—will allow humanity to rapidly improve how we live together.”<sup>107</sup> This is humanity being improved through the application of science and innovation.

The seasteading impulse is a John Galt-ian impulse. The logic is as follows: The world is broken—existing governments are the problem. In order to save the world, we must remake it. Those of an entrepreneurial inclination will advance to a new frontier: Galt’s Gulch / floating cities—“Atlantis,” as Rand calls her own hub. Here, new ways of living are explored, free of the restraints that exist elsewhere. The new ways are explored in the expectation that they will be spread to the world at large, and the earth will be reformed. This is exactly the plot pattern that is followed in *The Transhumanist Wager*. Patri Friedman says he did not read *Atlas Shrugged* until 2009, after the Seasteading Institute was already up and running. However, Rand’s work and her ideals have such prevalence within libertarian culture, that showing a direct causal link between Rand and seasteading is unnecessary: *philosophically*,

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<sup>104</sup> “Why the World Needs Seasteading,” Seasteading Institute, accessed December 29, 2014, <http://www.seasteading.org/about/>.

<sup>105</sup> Floating City Project (an offshoot of the Seasteading Institute), accessed December 29, 2014, <http://floating-city.org/>.

<sup>106</sup> “Why the World Needs Seasteading.”

<sup>107</sup> Floating City Project, <http://floating-city.org/>.



her fiction can be used to explain this drive; she put her finger on the nature of the desire. Friedman himself has boasted: “[I]n cold objective fact, I am quite arguably the closest person to being John Galt in the world, since I am going around recruiting libertarians & entrepreneurs to leave our current outmoded systems and create innovative new societies elsewhere. Plus, superficially, I am taking them to the ocean, ie ‘Atlantis’.”<sup>108</sup>

In Istvan’s novel, Knights’s seastead, like *BioShock*’s Rapture, is most definitely a version of Galt’s Gulch: “Atlantis,” utopia upon the ocean—a place where wholly new, wholly Randian methods of social relations can be put into practice, away from the strictures and constrictions of existing countries, with their overbearing governments and altruistic cultures. Istvan explicitly labels Transhumania a “utopia for transhumanists”; it feels like “a remarkable new planet.” It is a project bound up with the perfectibility of man—which in this case means the overcoming of flawed human biology, as well as an escape from altruistic morality, an Ayn Rand utopia married to transhumanism: “Whatever you wanted or needed, no matter how far-fetched; it would all be there. [...] [A]n ideal, advanced society [...]. There were no labor unions allowed. No workers’ compensation. No welfare. No freebies. [...] There was just usefulness—or not.”<sup>109</sup> Knights courts the world’s greatest innovators, inventors, and scientists, and gives them a chance at a new life in Transhumania. His promise is thus the same as Galt’s: drop out of the world, and we will build it anew. Transhumania, like Galt’s Gulch, “works” because it is populated by people who all share the same values. In chapter one, I detailed Den Uyl’s explanation of Rand’s defence of liberty, as one based on essentialist values—it is therefore opposed to the pluralism that comes with liberal democracy. Istvan too offers a portrait of liberty, a portrait of libertarianism, based on its being the purview of “the right kind of people”—it is thus the enemy of pluralism. *BioShock* injects plurality into the Randian experiment and finds it wanting. *Wager* keeps those with divergent values out of its utopia in order that the ideal society may be preserved: “Problems occurred, but they were quickly worked out for the most part. These were not people who complained about a broken hot shower or a bad internet connection. These were professionals of the highest order [...]. These were people of action, of doing—and doing it right.” Like Galt’s Gulch, Transhumania is not the final resting place of utopia, but an experiment in miniature for utopia on a large scale. By the end of *Wager*, Knights has engineered the whole of earth as “a greater Transhumania.”<sup>110</sup>

Transhumania exercises a consistent libertarian fantasy, a fantasy which lies at the heart of Rand’s philosophy, and which lay at the heart of early Extropianism: the idea that, if

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<sup>108</sup> Patri Friedman, “Atlas Shrugged Movie Thoughts / I am John Galt,” *Patrissimo* (blog), April 23, 2011, <http://patrissimo.livejournal.com/1452257.html>.

<sup>109</sup> Istvan, *The Transhumanist Wager*, 192, 205, 197.

<sup>110</sup> Istvan, *The Transhumanist Wager*, 205, 265.

only “government” could be got out of the way—along with its disincentivising regulatory structure and redistributive tax system—free-thinking men of science would possess both the incentive and the resources to create exponential technological progress, far beyond what we have seen in human societies thus far. Galt’s Gulch epitomises this: the entire community gets its electricity from a new power source, Galt’s motor, which harnesses static energy from the atmosphere. The community is also hidden from view by a protective “ray screen.” These two technologies do not exist in outside economies, because their inventor (Galt) will not share them with the “parasites” who will leech his potential profits. The Gulch’s medical care is also more advanced than the “socialised medicine” outside, since here a doctor can keep all the profit from the application of his skills, and so is incentivised to improve his care.<sup>111</sup> The strongest sectors of the economy are thus supposed to experience rapid growth under Objectivist economics, once individual human potential is set free from the shackles of having to be its neighbour’s keeper. As we have seen, *BioShock* plays with this libertarian fantasy—suggesting that a society free of regulation might result in more rapid progress in science and technology, but questioning whether this is a good thing. In Rapture, the posthuman vista that emerges from this results in a loss of individuality and a loss of humanity (the Splicers). Objectivism posits that the darker side of human nature can be transcended, or at least become irrelevant, through the application of strict philosophical principles by enough members of a given population. Under an Objectivist political system, everyone gets what they are independently capable of getting: if another person achieves more than you in a particular field—according to “Objective reality”—he or she simply possesses greater faculties than you. Every follower of Objectivism, under an Objectivist political system, would thus be content with their final lot in life. As Rand summarises: “[T]here are no conflicts of interest among rational men.”<sup>112</sup> *BioShock* shows this up for what it is: a utopian pursuit of unrealisable harmony. The application of Randian philosophy in Rapture is not enough to overcome the “natural” jostling for power and resources that emerges in human societies, resulting in conflict. *BioShock*’s point is also that expecting masses of people to all adhere to the same set of philosophical principles, regardless of where they have come from or where they end up in life, is in itself unrealistic utopian thinking. Andrew Ryan could not transform the pluralist nature of humanity into a utopian singularity.

The case of Transhumania in *The Transhumanist Wager* works from the same first principle as Galt’s Gulch and Rapture—and, indeed, real-life seasteading: that a “new” environment, free from the legacy of existing regulations, will result in exponential progress in science and technology. Existing governments are removed from the equation and then

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<sup>111</sup> This is the suggestion given by Dr. Hendricks’s inspection of Dagny after her crash. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 711.

<sup>112</sup> Ayn Rand, “The ‘Conflicts’ of Men’s Interests,” in *Virtue of Selfishness*, 57.



human potential is unleashed. In real life, innovation does not work as cleanly as this. In *The Entrepreneurial State* (2011), Mariana Mazzucato makes a compelling case that the “common sense,” libertarian view of innovation is a fallacy; this is the idea that was also Rand’s: that the best thing government can do for innovation is to get out of the way. Mazzucato argues, contrarily, that “in the most successful economies,” government “is a leading agent in achieving the type of innovative breakthroughs that allow companies, and economies, to grow, not just by creating the ‘conditions’ that enable innovation.”<sup>113</sup> Many of the most important economic developments of recent decades have state funding at their root; they emerged out of an interplay between the public and private sectors, but began as projects only government saw a use for. Computers, the Internet, biotechnology, and nanotechnology are all sectors that Mazzucato cites.<sup>114</sup> These fields are all integral to transhumanism. *Wager*, however, takes the “government needs to get out of the way” Randian fallacy and runs with it. The governments of the world suppress innovation, for Istvan. This is a large part of the rationale for Transhumania, a utopia where inventors and scientists can go about their work without regulatory interference—and what government there is, is assistive rather than a hindrance. On Transhumania, a community of 10,000 scientists and innovators, working in three Roarkian skyscrapers, advances technologically far beyond the rest of the world, within a few short years. They develop better-than-biological prosthetic limbs, new methods of human-machine interfacing, and their own more-advanced-than-America’s drone weaponry. Medicinal methods of rejuvenating the body advance so far that effective immortality becomes possible.

*BioShock* portrays Randian absolutism in order to argue against it; *The Transhumanist Wager* embraces Randian absolutism as a path to a brighter future—and goes further than Rand ever did in suggesting what actions might be “necessary” in order to remake the world as a “libertarian” utopia. Istvan puts forward in his novel a vision of what can only be called libertarian totalitarianism. As the story reaches its climax, Transhumania’s existence dwells on the minds of global leaders; they come to see this rapidly advancing new country as a major threat. Warships from the United States and other nations surround the floating community. The other nations attack first—ensuring Knights does not violate Rand’s principle against initiating force. From here, however, Knights lays waste to the world. Four highly advanced drones (the four horsemen of the apocalypse?) are launched from Transhumania and destroy all the buildings housing the earth’s political institutions; every major religious or historical

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<sup>113</sup> “Rather the state can proactively create strategy around a new high growth area before the potential is understood by the business community (from the internet to nanotechnology), funding the most uncertain phase of the research that the private sector is too risk-averse to engage with, seeking and commissioning further developments, and even overseeing the commercialisation process.” Mariana Mazzucato, *The Entrepreneurial State* (London: Demos, 2011), 15–17.

<sup>114</sup> Mazzucato, *The Entrepreneurial State*, 18.

monument is also blown up; countless men, women, and children are killed. The drones are named *Trano*, *Cidro*, *Kijno*, and *Tabno*—words for the elements that birthed life, in a new language Knights has invented: nitrogen, hydrogen, oxygen, and carbon. The description of the destruction is matter-of-fact:

*Trano* reached America's East Coast early in its evening and sent missiles to destroy the White House, the Capitol Building, and the Supreme Court. Centuries of legacy and past triumph were annihilated by three fiery explosions [...]. *Kijno* reached Europe early in the continent's morning. Its first missile was due to eradicate the Vatican at 8:20 A.M., local time. Catholic believers by the hundreds remained in the famous Saint Peter's Square, praying on their knees for a miracle. They were repeatedly warned by police and the media to depart the area. Along with the Pope, who was hiding below ground in the catacombs, all were incinerated by the single missile. [...] *Cidro* soon crossed to Mecca, where the Kabba was obliterated. It continued to Jerusalem, where the Wailing Wall and Temple Mount were demolished [...]. In North America, *Trano* brought down [...] the United Nations building in New York City.

Landscapes of destruction such as this—scorching the earth so a new beginning is needed—have a long history within radical and utopian political thought, as well as within science fiction; *Wager* is participating in this lineage. Istvan's deadpan accounts, dwelling little on the human cost, ironically make the destruction seem even more horrifying. Knights feels no remorse for his actions: “[H]e was not an archaeologist, but a futurist. And the relics of the past bore little value to him.”<sup>115</sup> He wants, of course, to surpass the human world. Rand stressed that she was not a conservative, but a radical for capitalism.<sup>116</sup> *Wager*'s protagonist takes Rand's privileging of innovation and futurity to a new extreme—he is a radical, and a violent one, for transhumanism.

The world conquered, re-formed in the image of how he'd like it to be, Knights docks Transhumania in New York City—the place Rand always saw as the locus of civilisation—and assumes the role of dictator over the globe.<sup>117</sup> He abolishes every former government and national border, naming all of earth as Transhumania. The wages of law enforcement officers are doubled and they are ordered to shoot looters on sight, as the transition to the new regime begins. It is reasonable to ask: If Knights becomes a dictator, how is his regime libertarian? It enacts as policy Randian and libertarian fantasies: the abolition of social welfare payments, for example. All healthcare is to be private, and there will be “no retirement options nor public pensions.” Capitalism, private property, and free trade are to be the economics of everywhere, though government and compulsory taxation—“as little taxation as possible to reasonably

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<sup>115</sup> Istvan, *The Transhumanist Wager*, 266–67.

<sup>116</sup> Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 195.

<sup>117</sup> Rand called NYC “the greatest monument to the potency of man's mind.” Quoted in Heller, *Ayn Rand and the World She Made* (New York: Anchor Books, 2009), 79.



govern”—will still exist. After the defeat of the old regimes, Knights gives a lengthy televised address, *Wager*'s version of Galt's speech, where announces the imminent end of death: the era of immortality is arriving. He also decrees, however, that certain individuals will be judged unfit to procreate in this new age: "People who can reasonably and successfully raise children will be allowed to procreate and encouraged to do so; all others will not be allowed to procreate." One aspect of socialism is associated with the new order: a global policy of free education, to prepare the world's populations for the era of transhumanity. Ignorance is to become a crime "punishable by excessive fines and hard labor in prison."<sup>118</sup>

Jethro Knights remains as sole global ruler for seventeen years. After this time, he feels that "everyone gets it," and so he allows the reintroduction of democracy.<sup>119</sup> Jethro has engineered the world to suit himself, and so the masses do indeed now welcome their transhuman overlords: a long-time colleague of Knights is elected as president in his stead. *The Transhumanist Wager* involves a Randian fantasy write large: humanity's movement from diversity and pluralism, from contradictory impulses and complicated interrelations, to a singular set of ethics holding sway across the earth. The fact that Rand would not have endorsed certain of Knights's actions is irrelevant. Istvan received substantial impetus from Rand; he traces her work as he draws his own. Ayn Rand suffuses every page of Istvan's reverie.

*Atlas Shrugged*'s revolution of the capitalists is fundamentally pacifist. Galt and his strikers know the economy cannot survive without them; they step aside, and allow the human world to bring about its own implosion. This is not to say that violence is never called for. Rescuing Galt from those who have captured him in order to torture him, towards the end of the novel, Dagny Taggart kills a guard who refuses to stand aside and let her into the compound where they are holding Galt. The guard's death is framed as his own fault, since he was unable even to make the simple choice to save his own life when it was put to him that he would be killed if he didn't stand aside (like the Catholics who surround the Vatican in Istvan). The choice to kill—rather than simply wound or otherwise disable the antagonist—is made by a Randian hero, without remorse, because the antagonist has "brought it upon himself." That said, the fundamentals of the Galt revolution are non-violent: a strike rather than a coup. In *Wager*, Istvan does away with this Randian version of pacifism. Indeed, the "humanism" of Rand's final philosophy is stripped back entirely, so that its origin in simplistic Nietzschean will-to-power doctrine is laid bare—leading towards posthumanism. *Andromeda* implicitly critiques Rand on the basis of her philosophical association with Nietzschean Superman / social Darwinist doctrines; in *Wager*, the same creeds are presented as both inevitable and

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<sup>118</sup> Istvan, *The Transhumanist Wager*, 281–82.

<sup>119</sup> Istvan, *The Transhumanist Wager*, 290.

good: strength will out, and—evolutionarily—that is the way it is supposed to be. Transhumans will surpass humans and become posthumans. *Wager* includes many allusions to Nietzsche. The morality of the omnipotender is described as being “beyond a sense of good and evil.” As Roark is mocked by Toohey as a Superman, Belinas mocks Knights as “this new transhuman superman.” Most importantly, in terms of allusions to Nietzsche, the will to power is central in Knights’s position:

[H]e believed he was an individual, self-sustaining entity, bent on acquiring as much power as possible. [...] He wanted a universal dictatorship—or at least a draw—over everything and everyone. [...] Deep down inside, it was the fabric of humankind, built into us from the start, millions of years in the making: that we are each born unequal; that we are each born unfinished; that we are each born to conquer the other. Some may call it a *will to power*—though Jethro believed it was a *will to evolution*—an entity’s most imbued trait, the DNA of the universe.<sup>120</sup>

Knights only believes in “people’s rights and actions if there’s power behind it. [...] The smarter and more powerful entity will triumph over others.”<sup>121</sup> There is nothing new in using Rand to promote such a “brutal,” “might is right,” anti-egalitarian and anti-humanitarian view of existence. Indeed, in its overt rejection of a Christian God and its call to sacrifice the weak, Istvan’s text is reminiscent of another ideology with similar tendencies, which its creator described as “Ayn Rand with trappings”:<sup>122</sup> “Satanism has far more in common with Objectivism than with any other religion or philosophy.”<sup>123</sup> Satanism, like the philosophy of the omnipotender, sees the strong dominating the weak as natural and inevitable, and incorporates this into the basis of its morality: “The Satanic view sees as ethical the reality of domination of the weak by the strong. The assertion in Objectivism is that the use of force to cause others to submit to the will of the stronger or cleverer individual is ‘wrong’ for the individual. This [...] assertion [...] Satanism finds unproven by the Objectivists.”<sup>124</sup> Despite claiming that power, for her, did not involve control of other people, Rand’s work, with its veneration of strength and its anti-altruistic proclamations, lends itself to such philosophies.

In terms of the specifically *posthuman* vision of *Wager*—the posthuman future to which its portrayal of transhumanity leads—it is a vision of minds conquering the universe. Knights yearns “for the universe that only his will forged”; Earth “is not a permanent home; it’s just a starting point.”<sup>125</sup> Bodily form matters less than immortality of the individual

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<sup>120</sup> Istvan, *The Transhumanist Wager*, 52, 136, 80. Emphases in original.

<sup>121</sup> Istvan, *The Transhumanist Wager*, 60.

<sup>122</sup> Anton LaVey, quoted in Jesper Aagaard Peterson, “Introduction: Embracing Satanism,” in Peterson, ed., *Contemporary Religious Satanism: A Critical Anthology* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), 2.

<sup>123</sup> “Nemo” (author), “Satanism and Objectivism,” Church of Satan, accessed October 3, 2013, <http://www.churchofsatan.com/satanism-and-objectivism.php>.

<sup>124</sup> Nemo, “Satanism and Objectivism.”

<sup>125</sup> Istvan, *The Transhumanist Wager*, 171, 281.



consciousness, and expansion of the individual consciousness. It is a vision of Extropy. Following Haraway, Knights suggests that we may become “androgynous” beings.<sup>126</sup> But this is the only overlap with Haraway’s posthuman concept. Randian individuality, “rationality,” and the will to technology are paramount. Echoing *Brave New World*—but stating its vision with sincerity—by the end of the novel, all human reproduction is accomplished via the test tube; it is more efficient and removes the chance of unwanted pregnancies: the mind takes total control of the bodily processes. The next step will be improved vessels for the mind. Genetic engineering of humans is already commonplace. The plan is that within a century, consciousness will no longer be biological; humans will transform into “cyborgs, conscious machines, and even artificial intelligences.” Beyond that, life will become “all energy, or living software, or created quantum fields of probabilities.” Knights’s appeal in his “Galt speech” is to an evolution towards computerised rational accomplishment, in competition with other powerful entities: “You must strive to emulate the pure computational process of a goal-driven computer.”<sup>127</sup>

*The Transhumanist Wager* exemplifies Rand’s view of art as a utopian space, discussed in chapter three: it presents the completed vision of the ideal, which Istvan hopes his readers will put into practice (not necessarily the mass murder, one suspects, but a future where the transhuman imperative is paramount). Whatever else it is, *Wager* is a novel of big ideas about human destiny and the shape of the future. The ideas themselves are not original—transhumanism has been a presence on the cultural scene for several decades—but Istvan puts forward a position on them which is nothing if not provocative. As has been explicated, he uses Rand—one of the most influential philosophical writers of the latter twentieth century—as a basis for his twenty-first-century philosophy. As described in the first chapter of this thesis, Rand identified the primary moral choice as whether to live or not to live. Istvan elaborates on a choice which, we could say, comes after this primary Randian choice, in an era of transhuman possibilities. If one chooses to live, then the next choice—in transhuman time—is whether or not to live forever. Istvan’s hero is prepared to do whatever it takes so that he can.

Rand’s work supports a posthuman vision, because her work has been used to support posthuman visions: it has influenced technology entrepreneurs and transhumanists (whose works are precursors to posthuman futures) to do what they have done. On the level of the texts themselves—as covered earlier in the thesis—Rand’s particular ideology of individual accomplishment, capitalism as an exciting environment, and technology as among the highest aims of man, must be considered crucial in terms of why she has had the impact she has. This

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<sup>126</sup> Istvan, *The Transhumanist Wager*, 145.

<sup>127</sup> Istvan, *The Transhumanist Wager*, 283, 178, 279.

is also why she continues to be brought into the science-fictional sphere. In the science fiction of *Andromeda*, *BioShock*, and *Wager*, Rand is being talked about, in the context of a technologically advanced future, in a context of posthumanism. *The Transhumanist Wager*—and, indeed, all examples discussed in this chapter—demonstrate that Ayn Rand continues to be relevant in the twenty-first century, and especially within the culture of technology-fetishism that is particular to the twenty-first century.



## The Mind-made Future

The “world” is no longer only this planet, but our solar system. The human sphere spans colonies from Luna to Mars to the Kuiper Belt. Earth has become a nature reserve and museum site, a tourist attraction billions visit every year to witness “where their remote ancestors came from, and how they lived.” This future began in the twenty-first century. Socialism and religion had been discredited. People were searching for a new hope, and they found it in a code that rejected both of those altruistic ideals, and in turn celebrated the science and technologies that were integral to modern ways of life. In their masses, individuals turned towards Ayn Rand’s Objectivism. The continuing march of capitalism and globalisation created “[j]ust one First World.” Humans settled the ocean—the surface and the seabed. Then came the off-world colonies.<sup>1</sup> The state became less important in people’s lives, since almost everyone was now following a rational ethics. Eventually government disappeared altogether, and individuals could deal with one another person-to-person, in complete confidence that Objective law would be followed. All the while, human life itself was being extended. We came to know that, one day, our descendants would live on other planets, and be immortal: “We have met God and he is us.” Heaven was normal, and not part of any supernatural realm. Heaven was ourselves.<sup>2</sup>

This is the vision of the future presented in Frederick Cookinham’s creative treatise *The Age of Rand: Imagining an Objectivist Future World* (2005). Cookinham’s vista encapsulates, in a different way, so many of the points elaborated in this thesis: Objectivism’s science-fictional imagination, and its hope for homes in space; Rand’s link, through libertarianism, to seasteading and transhumanism; the ultimate *posthuman* possibilities of a society that follows Randian philosophy: when the conquering of nature is paramount, and technological development enables us to choose different bodies for being, then it will be done. This thesis has been an attempt to place and to parse these visions in an academic context.

The century is young, and could take us many places. But one thing is certain: Ayn Rand is not going away. On the contrary, her presence in the world continues to grow. The Ayn Rand Institute in April 2015 launched a European arm in Copenhagen, taking the fight to the heart of the “Nordic model” of social democracy. A previously unpublished Rand novel

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick Cookinham, *The Age of Rand: Imagining an Objectivist Future World* (New York: iUniverse, 2005), 419–26, 1–4, 280–81.

<sup>2</sup> Cookinham, *Age of Rand*, 352–53, 217, 436.

from 1934 was released in the summer of 2015, while books which update her views for today's socio-political environment continue to be published by Objectivist commentators. More bizarrely, a former California real-estate agent is establishing a community for American expatriates called Galt's Gulch Chile, "in a secluded valley 17 kilometres from Curacavi."<sup>3</sup> The planned self-sustainable resort is being founded "with the same vision" as Rand's Atlantis.<sup>4</sup>

The major political-economic issue of the day, the biggest threat to the happiness and cohesion of societies, may be the level of income disparity between the wealthiest elite and the rest of the population. French economist Thomas Piketty set alight debate over the inequalities of capitalism with his 2014 bestseller *Capital in the Twenty-first Century*. Piketty, in Marxian style, argues that disparities in wealth are greater than at any time since the nineteenth century, and urges redistributive measures. The Randians have an answer on inequality too. In a 2016 book, *Equal Is Unfair: America's Misguided Fight Against Income Inequality*, the ARI's Don Watkins and Yaron Brook argue "that the key to protecting America's status as a land of opportunity, where individuals are free to rise as far as their ability and ambition will take them, is rejecting the immoral creed of the egalitarians."<sup>5</sup> Brook put the Objectivist view succinctly in a podcast: "Income inequality in a free society? Who cares?"<sup>6</sup> It would be a major mistake to think that, because they seem so out of tune with a certain consensus, Objectivist views can be ignored as irrelevant. Rand has seen off all detractors thus far; the foothold of her influence in the boardrooms and on the main streets of America is as strong as ever. As Gary Weiss puts it, the "tragedy" of Objectivism is that it requires re-debating the "first principles" of modern social democracy, from the existence of child labour laws to publically funded education.<sup>7</sup> But this struggle is going on—and the opponents of Rand's worldview cannot win unless they are in it. In order to be countered, Rand's influence must first be understood.

Posthumanism, depending on how you look at it, is either already here or a sure thing for the future. To some, it is our mode of being in the twenty-first century, connected as we always are to technology that enhances our capacity and changes how we interact with each other and the world; natural biology has already been downgraded. To others, we must seize

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<sup>3</sup> "Bitcoin Paradise," *Economist*, December 25, 2013,

<http://www.economist.com/blogs/schumpeter/2013/12/libertarian-enclaves>.

<sup>4</sup> "The Galt's Gulch Chile Vision," Galt's Gulch Chile, accessed April 15, 2014,

<http://galtsgulchchile.com/index.php/about-us/vision>.

<sup>5</sup> "Ayn Rand Enters the Inequality Debate," Ayn Rand Institute letter to subscribers (email received by author), July 18, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Yaron Brook, "Yaron Answers: Inequality Under Capitalism," YouTube video, 4:03, posted by the Ayn Rand Institute, December 1, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vYJQoZrhRug>.

<sup>7</sup> Gary Weiss, *Ayn Rand Nation: The Hidden Struggle for America's Soul* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2013), 208.



our technological moment in order to make the future a posthuman one, where our abilities are not just facilitated by technology but we are remade in its image. As we have seen, many who advocate the latter have sharpened their beliefs and arguments via Ayn Rand. From a certain point of view, transhumanism is a logical extension of Objectivism; according to this view, Ayn Rand points the way to the posthuman future.

Academia has been responding to Rand's rise in the culture. Burns writes that in particular, "[f]inally, Rand has begun to find her place within the literature about conservatism and the American right that has flourished of late in the historical profession."<sup>8</sup> That Rand is being taken seriously in the academy is a turnaround, and a welcome one. An author with such colossal reach should not go without scrutiny. Transhumanism, too, has made its way from a fringe discussion, into academia, joining its more radical cousin, the Harawayan posthuman, in the arena of scholarly respectability. A key moment was the publication by Wiley-Blackwell, in 2013, of *The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future*, edited by Max More and Natasha Vita-More. Also that year, the number of references to transhumanism in mainstream media increased threefold.<sup>9</sup>

Battle lines have been drawn over the trans-/posthuman future. Over a decade ago, *Foreign Policy* asked well-known intellectuals to name "the world's most dangerous idea." For Eric Hobsbawm, as the wars raged in Afghanistan and Iraq, it was the notion of "spreading democracy." For Francis Fukuyama, it was transhumanism.<sup>10</sup> Fukuyama's *Our Posthuman Future* (2002) argues that if some individuals became radically enhanced through artificial means, the human race would be robbed of its essential equality: the fact that we are all naturally born humans; this could only have deleterious consequences for social cohesion. The period of George W. Bush's presidency was a low point for advocates of the transhuman, with conservative philosopher Leon Kass heading up the President's Council on Bioethics (PCB), to which Fukuyama was also appointed: "Kass's appointment was a reward to the pro-life religious conservatives as he had consistently opposed in vitro fertilization, cloning and other medical technologies on the grounds that they rob us of 'human dignity.' Kass made opposition to all human enhancement technologies, from pharmaceuticals to genetics, the

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<sup>8</sup> Jennifer Burns, "Essay on Sources," in *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 297. Burns's essay, which closes her seminal study, is the definitive literature review on Rand scholarship thus far.

<sup>9</sup> "Articles and mentions of transhumanism and life extension science have tripled in 2013 in major media," says Kris Notaro, [...] Managing Director of the Institute for Ethics and Emerging Technologies." Zoltan Istvan, "I'm an Atheist, Therefore I'm a Transhumanist," *Huffington Post*, December 5, 2013, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/zoltan-istvan/im-an-atheist-therefore-i\\_b\\_4388778.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/zoltan-istvan/im-an-atheist-therefore-i_b_4388778.html).

<sup>10</sup> The article appeared in the September–October 2004 issue of *Foreign Policy*, and is reproduced online: Francis Fukuyama, "Transhumanism," *Foreign Policy*, October 23, 2009, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/10/23/transhumanism/>.

principle agenda of the PCB.” Transhumanists such as James Hughes argue, on the contrary, that if we can prevent suffering with genetic engineering and other enhancement mechanisms, and afford people more choices over their own lives, then we must do so. “[W]e can never understand all the consequences of any technology,” writes Hughes; therefore, we must proceed with caution—but proceed: “People will be happiest when they individually and collectively exercise rational control of the social and natural forces that affect their lives.”<sup>11</sup>

We may become posthuman, as the transhumanists see it, or we may not. The most epoch-altering developments have tended to get pushed farther and farther into the future. If we ever are able to remake completely our bodies and minds through choice, it remains to be seen if this will be greeted as a welcome opportunity by most people, or exist as a kind of fashion statement among a tech-savvy elite. In either case, the question of the posthuman looms large over our moment in history: “[T]he debate about human enhancement and posthumanity has moved from the fringes of cyberculture, science fiction and bioethics to the apex of the federal policy debate.”<sup>12</sup>

Personally, I have no desire currently to live forever. What makes life meaningful is the fact that it is limited. This is what lends a sublime urgency to our day-to-day. There is plenty of evidence to suggest—contra Rand and the transhumanists—that people are happiest and most driven only *after*, and as a consequence of, major suffering in their lives.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, the drive for human betterment—doing things smarter, faster, for longer—is deeply ingrained in individuals and societies; it cannot be snuffed out, and the push towards the posthuman must be seen in this tradition. The benefits of genetic engineering when it comes to curing diseases and prolonging life cannot be ignored, and seem likely to be looked on increasingly favourably by individuals and governments desperately seeking remedies for cancer and other ailments, notwithstanding arguments about slippery slopes. For these reasons alone, outright prohibition on transhumanist technologies is likely to fail.

An important exercise as we address the question of the posthuman is that we “put Rand in her place.” By this I mean, recognise her importance in the growth of the issue; equally, we must not be guided by absolutism such as Rand’s as we look to set policy. Liberal democracy enables relative order and general freedom by accepting that not all conflicts of interest are resolvable, either within or between human beings. Liberal democracies recognise that competing ideologies and individual and group interests exist within a single polity, but it is nevertheless possible to establish common ground through institutions in which everyone in theory has a stake. The overarching ideology is multi-fit. Rand’s ideal—that conflicts of

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<sup>11</sup> James Hughes, *Citizen Cyborg: Why Democratic Societies Must Respond to the Redesigned Human of the Future* (Cambridge, MA: Westview, 2004), xiii–xiv, xvii–xviii.

<sup>12</sup> Hughes, *Citizen Cyborg*, xiv.

<sup>13</sup> Jim Rendon’s book *Upside: The New Science of Post-Traumatic Growth* (Touchstone, 2015) is a compendium of evidence on point.



interest can all be resolved—unrealistically depends upon the widespread acceptance of a mono-form ideology.

We must not be guided by any extremism when it comes to how our societies are run. In relation to the posthuman as much as anything else, what is important is to manage the future with liberal democratic principles, Popperian principles—sensible of both the limitations of government and its importance in our shared betterment, ever-mindful to check the utopian impulse and the impulse to despair. I am not an advocate of the transhuman agenda like Hughes, but I do believe that government cannot hold back all its consequences, and indeed can guide its use towards humane or humanist ends, even if those standards are themselves shifting. If we accomplish this, maybe the human, in whatever form it survives, will be okay.

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