

Ayn Rand

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Description

When it was first published in 1943, *The Fountainhead* - containing Ayn Rand's daringly original literary vision with the seeds of her groundbreaking philosophy, *Objectivism* - won immediate worldwide acclaim.

This instant classic is the story of an intransigent young architect, his violent battle against conventional standards, and his explosive love affair with a beautiful woman who struggles to defeat him.

Insightful reviews

Eric_W: I had not really paid much attention to Ayn Rand, darling of the conservatives (very surprisingly, actually) until I began reading her biography. When I asked around to see who had actually read any of her work, I found only a few, but lots of opinions about Rand herself. Often those comments ascribed beliefs to Rand that were at opposite poles of the spectrum, from conservative to radical, individualist to Nazi fascist. Obviously another case of what I call the "De Toqueville syndrome," where everyone pretends to have read a famous book and to know what the author stood for, but has no firsthand reading knowledge. Her biography revealed a complex and very interesting individual, so it was time to dig into her works personally.

The *Fountainhead* tells the story of Howard Roark, an architect. Thrown out of Stanton School of Architecture for his refusal to adhere to the standards of the past (the dean views Roark as a rebel who opposes all the rules of architecture and his society's view of art that is representation of what has been revered in the past) and for turning in assignments that represented a complete break from the past. The conversation with the dean, who tried to persuade Roark to come back into the fold, represents the central theme of the book, the conflict between those who are realitycentered against those who define their lives through the eyes of other people. Roark seeks employment with Cameron, an architect whose designs tried to incorporate using the advantages of new materials, e.g., a skyscraper should look tall, not just like a twenty-story brick building trying to look like a renaissance house. Cameron began to design buildings the way he wanted rather than how his clients demanded. His business dwindled to nothing, but he was sought out by Roark.

Following Cameron's retirement, Roark seeks employment as a draftsman in a large architectural firm, where he gets a break by sketching a house that breaks with tradition completely but is just what the client wants. Roark is a brilliant but struggling iconoclast, while his rival and former classmate Peter Keating rises to the top of his profession by using obsequiousness, manipulation, and deception. His primary concern is how he is perceived by others. He designs by copying from the past, never thinking independently. Both men are in love with Dominique Falcon, a brilliant, passionate woman, who falls in love with Roark, admires his genius, but who is convinced his genius has no chance in a corrupt world. The villain of the book is Ellsworth Toohey, an architectural critic of note, who denounces Roark for his failure to adhere to the accepted standards of the day. Toohey believes that the individual must sacrifice his independence to the will of others, i.e. society or the group. Toohey is employed by Gail

Wynand, a publisher whose paper caters to the lowest common denominator to gain power. He comes to admire Roark and must then decide whether he will continue to pander to popular taste or live according to his higher standards. Rand and her novels have been vilified by the left-wing as reactionary and praised by conservatives as brilliant and influential.

Frankly, I cannot understand how conservatives can be so enamored of this work that celebrates independence and the rejection of tradition and “normal” morality. She celebrated atheism, a kind of free love, very strong women, and a rejection of parental values and social norms. She abhorred the subordination of reason to faith, of surrendering one’s own thinking to the beliefs of others. She despised the religious believer who without questioning adopts the religious beliefs of his parents, conforming without thinking. Morality becomes something practical and relative. For example, Roark dynamites a government building project that has been altered, so he can gain access to the courts since the government cannot be sued. Roark really doesn’t care what other people think. He has such strong personal will that he will just do what he thinks is right. He also pals around with one of the construction workers who admires him because he is the only architect that understands construction, and, indeed, Roark makes the point that he loves engineering and building.

That sounds more like sixties liberalism than what I hear conservatives espouse. Rand is clearly a romantic who believed that man can live up to an ideal, and reason can help them achieve the independence and the happiness that depends on that independence. What infuriates liberals, as far as I can gather, was her unfailing adherence to capitalism. I suppose conservatives latched on to her vigorous rejection of collectivism, no doubt related to her childhood experiences under Communism. This is not to say Rand celebrates nonconformity for its own sake. That is simply another form of conformity because it’s living one’s life in reaction to the standards of others. The conformist must learn the beliefs of others to adhere to them; the nonconformist must learn the standards so as to avoid adhering to them. Both groups are psychological dependents. Rand celebrates the independent thinker, the individualist who lives on his own terms. The individualist creates his own standards and adheres to them regardless of what others do or think. He has a commitment to reason and facts. Roark represents the great innovator struggling against a profoundly conservative society against the traditionalist who says, “It was never done this way, so it can’t be good.” The climax of the book is Roark’s speech to the court when he is on trial. “I wish to come here and say that I am a man who does not exist for others. . . The world is perishing from an orgy of self-sacrificing.” He represents a complete rejection of altruism, “the doctrine which demands that man live for others and place others above self.”

It’s truly a shame when books and authors get labeled as “conservative” or “liberal,” “communist” or “democrat” and then judged on the basis of the label. Read the book; make up your own mind!

Max Ostrovsky: I did not like *The Fountainhead* as much as *Atlas Shrugged*. *Atlas Shrugged* was more of a page turner. There were very specific character goals that drove that story. *The Fountainhead* had a gradual buildup to a very climactic courtroom scene. *The Fountainhead*

took the reader on a very linear journey, but never going beyond the basic story of a man who wants to succeed. Of course there are more nuances than that, but that is the basic essence. Atlas Shrugged takes a more epic approach and raises more issues and more awareness of the world around you. As Ayn Rand has said, The Fountainhead was the story of man, while Atlas Shrugged was a story of society. And, of course, society is going to have more things going on in it.

Both stories revolve around a central character, the perfect man. In The Fountainhead, this man is Howard Roark, Architect. While being "perfect" in the Ayn Rand sense, he seems more human than the counterpart in Atlas Shrugged, John Galt, Destroyer, who is more of a god in that story. Even the speeches made at the end by both men are as different. Roark's speech is approachable, readable, understandable and relates directly to the reader. The reader is instantly drawn in. John Galt's Speech, however, is a massive didactic and at times condescending speech that as a reader is a major undertaking in a book as involved as Atlas Shrugged. But the audiences were different for the men. Roark spoke to men who he chose to listen to him. Men who were logical thinkers; cold and objective. Galt spoke to the radio masses; basically sheep. He had to find 42 different ways of saying the same thing, just so the people could understand him. Beyond the speeches these men are different in their presentation in the book. Roark begins and ends the story. Galt is a mystery for the majority of Atlas Shrugged. He is mythic and godlike. Referenced, but never known and understood with the constant elusive and almost meaningless quote "Who is John Galt?" That book really focuses on Dagny Taggart, a rare very strong female character. Atlas Shrugged is really her story, her failing quest to save a world that doesn't understand its own danger from a destroyer. Both she and Galt are a matched pair, similar in philosophies, drive and dedication, but different in their approach. Dagny was relentless in trying to hold the world together, even though the world tried to stop and undermine her at every turn. Galt did not actively seek out destruction. He merely illustrated that without the exploitation of people like Dagny, it will not and can not survive. He simply withdrew himself from being exploited.

One thing that Ayn Rand really impresses me with is that while she gets a kick out of creating and describing and telling the story of the perfect man, she incorporates some of the strongest women I have ever read in literature. As Dagny is in Atlas Shrugged, Dominique was in The Fountainhead. While not as strong or dominate as Dagny, Dominique finds her own niche in the story as the perfect female and satirizes what society usually paints as the "perfect female." Besides being physically attractive she is smart beyond normal comprehension. When trapping herself in a meaningless marriage and playing the part of the "perfect wife," she performed her womanly duties; everything when the husband wanted. Did he love this "perfect wife?" He was miserable because who would want to date a robot who did everything he wanted. She exhibited no personality or thought of her own and was perfectly compliant with everything everyone wanted from her....specifically to show how miserable they can be by simply using her.

Fountainhead is a brilliant novel. Ayn Rand has found a way to share her philosophies in a way that is entertaining and enlightening and only a rare trace of didacticism. The Fountainhead shows a very true if not menacing picture of how evil altruism can be.

Richard: *(Update at end; latest is 2013-11-12)*

OK, I've got to explain this four-star rating, because I don't want anyone to think I'd

actually *recommend* this book...

It has been many years since I've read either of Ayn Rand's two doorstep books, and I can't really recall the details of either. I'm pretty sure the one with John Galt had the absurdly long speech near the end, and all the cool kids smoked special cigarettes, and was mostly about railroads. This was the one with the architect, right?

Anyway, I think folks should need permission to read this. Frankly, I think teenage experimentation with pot is trivial in terms of risk to a kid's soul compared to experimentation with Ayn Rand. Her books can much more easily destroy a life.

Let me explain. Rand's philosophy, as near as I can tell, is that great people shouldn't be encumbered by the not-so-great. Taxes, regulations, all that stuff: just the shackles the large number of mediocre folks force onto their betters — pure parasitism. Her morality comes down to letting the best do whatever they want, and letting the rest starve. These books are her ideas about how that *should* work out, and as such are suffused with incredibly juvenile wish-fulfillment. The powerful are tormented by the weak, but through force of will rise above it all.

I might not be remembering all this quite right — after all, it has been a long time. The above description is what my initial impression has distilled down to; your mileage may vary.

So where's the danger, and why the relatively high rating? Well, many teenagers look out at their world and feel victimized by the completely lame and restrictive world that adults impose upon them. It is clear to them that they are as smart and able as these authorities, yet those adults are so... clueless. Obviously, adult life somehow has turned them into a lesser breed of humanity, with all the vitality sucked out. Add Ayn Rand to this and you suddenly have the ingredients for a self-perpetuating sense of victimhood and entitlement.

Most people have overcome their teenage angst and fantasies by, say, twenty-eight or so. At that point, Rand will have lost her magic and her books should be freely available. But between twelve and twenty-seven, a committee of wise elders should decide whether that kid is mature enough not to get sucked into it.

Sounds unlikely? Yeah, well so does Rand's puerile philosophy, but somehow we have self-righteous imbeciles getting elected left and right. Well, sorry, not so much "left" — mostly "right". (The left has its own cast of bad influences, of course.)

But then, why the good rating? Because Rand provided a window into the strange logic of the pathologically extreme libertarian. We might have seen Hitler's deeds, and learned of Nietzsche's diktats, but we never saw the fantasies that drove them. Most folks that would enthusiastically agree with Rand are either too dumb to put pen to paper, or too smart to let the world see what sociopaths they really are.

So: four stars for the opportunity to watch the slow-motion horror show of Rand's political philosophy in action, warning us of where we're heading.

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Update, late summer 2012— Romney's selection of Ryan as his running mate has got folks chatting about Ryan's on-and-off obsession with Ayn Rand. Not having made a study of Rand's life, I was pleased to learn that while her extremely anti-collectivist views are still antithetical to civilization (which is definitionally a collectivist enterprise) she was actually quite the social liberal. Not sure that makes her any more pleasant — ideologues of any stripe are quite annoying, even those that suddenly appear more complex and harder to pigeon-hole — but nice to know. A few more details? Check out the NY Times op-ed piece, [Atlas Spurned](#).

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Update, summer 2013— I was catching up on my favorite intelligent magazine, the excellent [Wilson Quarterly](#), and ran across a brief note in the Spring 2013 issue entitled “Fountainhead of Need”. As a young woman and recent immigrant to the United States, Rand was very poor while toying with a life in Hollywood — she worked as an extra in Cecil B. De Mille’s *King of Kings* — and at one point was destitute enough that she relied on charity to keep a roof over her head. Years later, she wrote a letter of thanks to the women’s boarding house that helped her at a time of dire need.

[As the article puts it:](#)

“The Studio Club,” Rand wrote, “is the only organization I know of personally that carries on, quietly and modestly, this great work which is needed so badly — help for young talent. It not only provides human, decent living accommodations which a poor beginner could not afford elsewhere, but it provides that other great necessity of life: Understanding.”

A paean to altruism? Not exactly. In the letter, Rand also declared that it was time to stop favoring “crippled children, old people, blind people and all kinds of disabled unfortunates” over “the able, the fit, the talented.” She continued, “Who is more worthy of help — the sub-normal or the above normal? Who is more valuable to humanity?” Aiding “the disabled” was fine, she said, but nurturing “potential talent” represented “a much higher type of charity.”

Yup, that's the kind of woman she was.

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Update, autumn 2013— Wow, there are still folks out there that are explicitly adherents of Objectivism. If you would like to cringe, take a gander at ["Give Back? Yes, It's Time For The 99% To Give Back To The 1%"](#) at Forbes. Yeah, Forbes is the "church periodical for those that worship at the temple of wealth" (as a FB acquaintance put it), but it still seems somewhat staggering that there are people that believe that

It turns out that the 99% get far more benefit from the 1% than vice-versa.

See if you can spot the basic logic error in the first paragraph!

The proposal that the wealthy be *exempt* from income taxes is only capped by the appalling suggestion that “the year’s top earner should be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.” Honestly, if this were in the Onion it would still be over the top.

brian : the day gone by i spent the day mainlining bookface and stumbled on that probably the most reviled books at the web site used to be the fountainhead. i will consider a number of reasons:1) it feels strong (perhaps a marker of non-public progress?) to reject or condescend to that which we as soon as loved. (see also: catcher within the rye and at the road)2) those (the vast majority of bookfacers) who fall at the liberal finish of the spectrum locate the residual conservative drool all around the ebook a piece yukky?3) the philosophy is unrealistic; the characters are stand-ins, mouthpieces, wood fable archetypes; the plot is stuffed with contrivances; at its top the prose is serviceable, at worst, it really is cringeworthy.4) its topics of non-public responsibility scare the shit out of people. i discovered this ebook terrifically worthy in excessive school. with now not sufficient existence adventure to appreciate why i used to be ceaselessly at the outside, i learn the fountainhead and reconfigured all of it to think that i wasn't a part of the gang b/c the gang was once a dead-end of groupthink and that i used to be unique. whatever. a load of shit, however it helped me get by, y'know? and as i grew up i spotted that besides the private responsibility half and the urging directly to stay someone regardless of societal strain to comply (both of which i nonetheless appreciate), used to be an excellent measure of selfishness and unreality. yet whatever... i technique this too-long e-book as containing a hugely fallacious process of belief, yet one who works for a particular time in lots of people's lives. shit, they need to begin pushing this as a tender adult's book. that's relatively what it is. and although ayn rand would possibly not like it, there's rather not anything mistaken with that.

Sparrow: THIS HORROR tale IS TO frightening FOR ME IT HAS A CREEPY GINGER child AND HE RAPES ANN COULTER simply because SHE wishes HIM TO!!! THEN they've got loads of TICKLE FIGHTS AND construct SUM homes THATS ALL i REMEMBER.

mark monday: I as soon as broke up with somebody simply because she used to be an ardent follower of Ayn Rand. it simply begun bothering me extra and more, and that i began seeing the taint of Objectivism in such a lot of of her comments. brain you, this used to be in collage whilst i used to be even more obnoxiously political. once we broke up, she rotated and began relationship my roommate... candy revenge, and a becoming reaction from an Objectivist.

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