

Who in the World is Ayn Rand?

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to underscore the importance of reading the works of author Ayn Rand. Special focus will be placed on her novella, *The Anthem* (1938). A main idea questioning strategy will be used to reveal Rand's philosophy and determine the most salient points for ethical administrators. Focus will be placed on the following questions: 1. Who is Ayn Rand? 2. How is Rand's philosophy reflected in *The Anthem*? 3. Why should ethical leaders take the time to read her books? 4. When should leaders be selfish? 5. Where should ethical leaders look for guidance? It is our belief that the study of Rand and her works will lead ethical leaders to reflect on their own personal philosophy of life. It is also our belief that one must first know what he/she believes before he/she can ethically lead other individuals. A person must know where he/she is starting from before he/she can go where he/she needs to go (Kritsonis, 2007).

Purpose of the Article

The purpose of this article is to reveal the importance of reading and reflecting on the works of author Ayn Rand. A main idea questioning strategy will be used to reveal Rand's philosophy and determine the most salient points for ethical administrators. Focus will be placed on the following questions:

1. Who is Ayn Rand?
2. How is her philosophy reflected in *The Anthem* (1938)?
3. Why should ethical leaders take the time to read her books?
4. When should leaders be selfish?
5. Where should ethical leaders look for guidance?

It is our belief that the study of Rand and her works will lead ethical leaders to reflect on their own personal philosophy of life. We also believe that one must first know what he/she believes before he/she can ethically lead other individuals. A person must know where he/she is starting from before he/she can go where he/she needs to go (Kritsonis, 2007).

Who is Ayn Rand?

Understanding Rand's history is essential to understanding and appreciating her storylines. Ayn Rand (Alissa Rosnbaum) was born in Russia, in 1905. She taught herself to read at the age of six and had decided that she wanted to become a writer by the age of nine.

As a youth, Rand witnessed two Russian wars: The Kerensky Revolution (The February Revolution) and the Bolsheviks Revolution (The October Revolution). The February Revolution brought a victory against communism and The October Revolution restored communism.

During the Bolsheviks Revolution, Rand's family fled to the Crimea (a republic in the Ukraine). Her family, once upper middle class business owners, faced near-starvation. The government seized the family pharmacy. Rand witnessed the shortcomings of communism firsthand. She came to hate collectivism.

Rand loved the romantic fantasy of western style writing. She was introduced to it through American history during her last year of high school. Rand took America as her model of what a nation of free men could be. She felt that this was her destiny.

After the Bolsheviks Revolution, Ayn Rand returned to live in Russia. She attended the University of Petrograd. The communist government was running the university. Opportunity for free inquiry was gone. Rand was not satisfied as she studied philosophy and history. Her one escape was the cinema. She loved western films and plays. She wanted to be free of government censure and pursue her desire to write. When she left Russia in 1925 to visit relatives in the United States she secretly vowed never to return to her homeland. Rand's goal was to live in Hollywood and pursue a career as a screenwriter.

Rand struggled for several years at various non-writing jobs. She sold her first screenplay, *Red Pawn*, to Universal Pictures in 1932. This book is said to be the most autobiographical of her novels. It described the tyranny of Soviet Communism. *Red Pawn* is a dramatic story about a beautiful woman who becomes the adored mistress of a commandant of a Soviet prison for men convicted of political crimes. The heroine

becomes the commandant's mistress in order to free her husband who, unknown to the commandant, is one of his prisoners. This work contains philosophical insights that reach their climax in the book *Atlas Shrugged* (Page by Page, 2006). The topic for the screenplay was obviously influenced by Rand's childhood in Communist Russia.

Ms. Rand was able to get many of her books and plays published. *The Fountainhead*, written in 1943, eventually became a movie. It was rejected twelve times before it was published in 1943. It made history by becoming a best seller through word-of-mouth. This is the book that gained author Ayn Rand recognition as a champion of individualism.

Rand's most famous book, *Atlas Shrugged* was published in 1957. In this novel, she dramatized her unique philosophy as an intellectual mystery writer with a story that integrated ethics, metaphysics, epistemology, politics, economics and romance. Although she considered herself primarily a fiction writer, she realized that in order to create heroic fictional characters, she had to identify the philosophy, which makes such individuals possible.

Kritsonis (2007) says that some theorists hold to a natural view of moral constructs. This means that they believe that right conduct can be made on rational grounds. All men are created equally. Their creator gives them the unalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. All of Ayn Rand's heroes all hold this view.

Every book by Ayn Rand published in her lifetime is still in print. Hundreds of thousands of copies are sold each year, so far totaling more than twenty million. Several new volumes have been published posthumously. Her vision of man and her philosophy for living on earth have changed the lives of thousands of readers and launched a philosophic movement with a growing impact on American culture.

The Anthem was written in 1937, but was not published in the United States until 1946. The book was rediscovered when a dinner guest in Rand's home related that he wished for a book about a collective society. Rand told him that she had already written such a book and the rest is history.

Rand was married American actor Frank O'Connor for fifty years. She preceded him in death and died on March 6, 1982, in New York City.

How is Rand's Philosophy Reflected in *The Anthem*?

To understand how Rand's philosophy is reflected in this novella, one must first know the story. The following is a brief synopsis:

The society described in *The Anthem* (1938) has arisen from the remains of what could have been a great nation that has been destroyed. All of the vestiges of modern conveniences have been buried away and are no longer spoken of by the citizens. The people are figuratively and literally kept in the dark. Great fires had raged over the land. In these fires, the Evil Ones (scientific men of a modern society) and all the things made

by them were burned. The fire was called the Dawn of the Great Rebirth. It was the script Fire where all the scripts (books) of the Evil Ones were burned, and with them all the words of the Evil Ones. Great mountains of flame stood in the squares of the Cities for three months. This began the Great Rebirth.

The central character in *The Anthem* (1938), Equality 7-2521, was taken from an anonymous mother at birth and raised in a common institutional building with other boys born in the same year. The same holds true for the female infants born in this society. Equality 7-2521 is ostracized because he fights with the other children. Fighting one's brothers is a sin.

At the age of five, Equality 7-2521 is sent to the Home of the Students to study. Again he stands out because he learns too quickly and asks too many questions. He tries to forget his lessons but he has a scientific mind and it shows. Equality 7-2521's teachers are not pleased with his inquisitiveness and they scorn him. He feels that his only hope is to be chosen to study as a scholar when he turns fifteen. At the age of fifteen, all people are assigned a profession.

Equality 7-2521 is crushed when he is not chosen by the great council to begin further studies. He is instead chosen to become a street sweeper. Street sweeping is one of the lowest jobs to be bestowed to a man. Equality 7-2521 finds that many of his co-laborers are mentally and or physically handicapped. One other normal man appointed to become a street sweeper is called International 4-8818. He is tall and strong and loves to laugh. It is not proper to smile at others; therefore, the teachers shun International 4-8818. International 4-8818 is artistic and draws with pieces of coal. This creates another problem because only those living in the Home of Art are allowed to draw. Equality 7-2521 and International 4-8818 become friends but they never say so in words nor do they allow others to know because it is a sin to show preference for one brother over another.

Equality 7-2521 relates that the newest discovery in this society was made only a hundred years ago. It was the making candles from wax and string. Before this discovery came the latest technology of making glass. Equality 7-2521 is curious about many things and lets his mind run to the old ones. They are the men who live to reach the age of forty. At forty, men are thought of as being worn out. Men are sent to the home of the useless, where the old ones live. The old ones no longer work; the government takes care of them. The old ones do not live much longer. When they do live to age forty-five, they are called the ancient ones. This is as much as one can expect.

Equality 7-2521 accepts his fate and keeps his allegiance to his fellowmen. As he goes about his job as a street sweeper he collects and experiments with the materials that he finds in the yard of the scholars. He hides his collection at the city cesspool until he makes his next discovery. As he was cleaning one evening he discovers an iron bar among the weeds. Underneath the iron bar is a black hole. The hole is a tunnel. This tunnel has existed since the unmentionable time. It soon becomes a place where Equality 7-2521 goes to study in secret.

Equality 7-2521 studies in secret for two years and he realizes that he has learned more during this time period than he had learned in all of his years in the Home of the Students. He learned things, which are not in the scripts. He has solved secrets of which

the Scholars had made no record. He came to see how great the unexplored was, and to realize that many lifetimes would not bring him to the end of his quest for understanding. He also realized that he did not wish to end his quest. He wished nothing but to be alone and to learn. It was the first peace that he had known in his twenty years.

Equality 7-2521's next great discovery was a female. The men in this society are forbidden to take notice of women and vice versa. This woman, Liberty 5-3000, had been assigned to work the soil. She was a farmer and she lived in the Homes of the Peasants. Street Sweepers had to keep the road to the Homes of the Peasants clean.

Liberty 5-3000 was young, thin, blonde and strong. She was a perfect match for Equality 7-2521. They both knew it, and thus began to communicate in subtle ways. He began to think of her as the Golden One. He called his interest in her another great sin. It was the sin of preference. It was a sin to give men names that distinguish them from other men. Later in the book she reveals that she has come to think of him as The Unconquered. This would become his name.

The laws after the Great Rebirth say that men may not think of women except for the Time of Mating. This is the time each spring when all the men older than twenty and all the women older than eighteen are sent for one night to the City Palace of Mating. The Council of Eugenics assigns mating partners to each man and woman. Children are born each winter, but women never see their children and children never know their parents. Twice Equality 7-2521 had been sent to the Palace of Mating and he felt that it was an ugly and shameful matter. Equality 7-2521 vows that the Golden One will never be sent to the place of mating. He did not yet know how to prevent it but he knew that he must.

Equality 7-2521 realizes that there is a word, one single word, which is not in the language of men, but which had been. It was an unspeakable word, which no men may speak nor hear. Street Sweepers often found it upon scraps of old manuscripts or cut into the fragments of ancient stones. But when they speak it, they are put to death. There is no crime punished by death in this world, save this one crime of speaking the unspeakable word. When he was ten, Equality 7-2521 sees a man burned alive in the square of the City. The man's tongue was torn out so that he could speak no longer. He died with a smile on his face. Equality 7-2521 always wondered, what was the Unspeakable Word?

Equality 7-2521 is eventually caught up in his discovery of the light bulb and does not return to his dormitory on time. Once caught, he refuses to tell the secret of his whereabouts. He is beaten and imprisoned. He hopes that the council of great minds will be grateful for his discovery of electricity and make him a fellow council member. This hope was short lived because his electric light bulb frightens the council. They tell him that his unwanted discovery would cause chaos in their world. His discovery could not easily be explained nor would it be accepted. They call for his death. I end here to say that the philosophy espoused by the society in *The Anthem* (1938) is total collectivism.

Collectivists believe that the sole purpose of man is to serve one another. Equality 7-2521 repeated the following words whenever he was tempted: "WE ARE ONE IN ALL AND ALL IN ONE. THERE ARE NO MEN BUT ONLY THE GREAT WE, ONE, INDIVISIBLE AND FOREVER" (Rand, 1938).

We believe this book has the power to cause a reader to pause and reflect. We encourage leaders to read this book in its entirety in order to enjoy its nuances and discover the ending.

Objectivism is the philosophy of Ayn Rand. Objectivism is the belief that there is no greater good for man than to seek to satisfy his own desires. In her novels, Rand dramatizes her ideal man as a physically strong, blue-eyed blond who lives by his own effort and does not give or receive the undeserved. Her heroes honor achievement and reject envy. Rand laid out the details of her world-view in nonfiction books such as *The Virtue of Selfishness* (Rand, 1964).

Objectivism holds that there is no greater moral goal than achieving one's own happiness. A person cannot achieve happiness by a wish or a whim. This requires rational respect for the facts of reality, including the facts about human nature and human needs. Happiness requires that one live by objective principles, including moral integrity and respect for the rights of others (Rand, 1964). Again, Kritsonis (2007) calls this belief natural law.

Objectivists believe the following:

1. Reality exists as an absolute. Facts are independent of man's feelings, wishes, hopes or fears.
2. Reason is man's only means of perceiving reality. Reason is his only source of knowledge, his only guide to action, and his basic means of survival.
3. Every man is an end unto his own self. Man exists for his own sake. He must not sacrifice himself for others or accept the sacrifice of others for himself. The pursuit of his own rational self-interest and of his own happiness is the highest moral purpose of his life.
4. Laissez-faire capitalism is the best system of politics. Under this capitalism, a limited government protects each person's rights to life, liberty, and property. It forbids that anyone initiate force against anyone else. Champions of objectivism are achievers who build objectivism as optimistic. They hold that the universe is open to human achievement and happiness and that each person has within him the ability to live a rich, fulfilling, independent life. This is the idealistic message in Rand's novels. Her novels continue to sell by the hundreds of thousands every year to people attracted to their inspirational storylines and distinctive ideas. Individuals run businesses, invent, create art and ideas that depend on their own talents and on trade with other independent people to reach their goals.

When is it Permissible for Leaders to be Selfish?

In relation to the *Virtues of Selfishness* (Rand, 1964), one comes to understand the importance of shielding himself from those who would rob him of the time and talent that is necessary for ethical behavior. For example, adequate rest is one of the main requirements for the maintenance of a healthy body and a sound mind.

History tells us that great leaders in battles retreated so that they would live to fight another day. The study of Ayn Rand and her works, leads one to think about his or her own personal philosophy of life. You must first know what you believe and understand and why you believe it before you can lead others.

If a leader is so busy meeting everyone else's needs that he does not pause to rest then mistakes, burnout and or collapse will occur. The average principal must respond to an average of 500 questions per day. A leader must take time to reflect or disaster is certain to follow.

Where Should Ethical Leaders Look for Guidance?

The days of, "That's the way we've always done it," are gone. Understanding the ethical decision-making process has become a critical tool for those who lead America's schools. It is not clear that any amount of scientific inquiry can tell us whether a decision is fair, just, or equitable. When making ethical decisions, the decision-maker must also look beyond his own religious beliefs and personal values. This was a problem in *Atlas Shrugged*, (Rand, 1957). A grand transportation system eventually collapsed because business matters were not based on the best practices for the business. A decision maker has to consider his rights and beliefs but ethical decisions must take into consideration the rights and interests of other stakeholders. This is the point where it becomes essential for leaders to be strongly rooted. Ethical leaders must balance their beliefs with a plethora of rules and regulations. Everyone needs philosophy. Philosophy is essential in each person's life. Those who do not think philosophically are the helpless victims of the ideas they accept from others (ARI, 2006).

Educators in a democratic society must educate students and attempt to provide them the motivation to be the best that they can be. Educators must attempt to give everyone the same educational opportunities as we wrestle with "No Child Left Behind" legislation. With all of the pressures from the state level, we must also try to resist the temptation to use try and apply the cookie cutter method that Rand describes in *The Anthem* (1938).

When making ethical decisions, the decision-maker must also look beyond his religious beliefs and personal values. A decision maker has to consider his rights and beliefs, but ethical decisions must take into consideration the rights and interests of other stakeholders. For example, permitting student led prayer at football games was ruled unconstitutional because it did not take into consideration the rights and interests of persons outside the Christianity. Decisions must not be based on personal religious beliefs. Decisions should not violate the moral rights of persons with different beliefs.

Decision-makers must be aware of the difference between the right to hold an opinion on a matter of private concern, and the right to use that opinion as the basis for moral decision-making. We must strive to help each student realize his potential as a worthy and effective member of society. Educators; therefore, must work to stimulate the

spirit of inquiry, the acquisition of knowledge and understanding, and the thoughtful formulation of worthy goals (NEA, 2006).

There are many sources for guidance that an ethical leader must refer to and adhere to in order to remain employed. Those obvious sources are: the educator's code of conduct, the local board policy (this will include federal, state and local guidelines), district/campus handbooks and district/campus plans. The ultimate source of guidance comes from within the leader himself. This would be his creator's plan. This plan is built experiences and input from many sources, including authors such as Ayn Rand.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, Ayn Rand's childhood experiences resulted in her taking a strong stance against collectivism. This stance is obvious in her novels, especially *The Anthem* (1938). As leaders, our actions and reactions are revealing in many ways. By studying the works of Rand and other philosophers like her, administrators have cause to stop and revisit their own philosophy. It is our personal belief that the study of Rand and her works will lead ethical leaders to reflect of their own personal philosophy of life. We also believe that one must first know what he/she believes before he/she can ethically lead others. "If you don't stand for something, you will fall for anything."

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