

An Unificationist View of Ayn Rand

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September 16, 2013



Rand is a writer and philosopher who understood that “something” is terribly wrong with humankind and had the courage to seek the answers to it. Like others before her who tackled this subject, her writings are controversial. For years, I enjoyed her beautiful use of language in expressing her beliefs and telling her stories. She was a powerful and appealing writer. Yet, I now find some of her beliefs very troubling and need to be seriously reevaluated. As a Unificationist, I’ve had to fairly examine her writings, then ask: was her understanding of humankind’s nature correct and is her solution going to solve our dilemma of constant conflict and create a world of goodness and peace?



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Ayn Rand, born Alisa Rosenbaum in Russia, was a writer of great passion, whose ideas were born out of the chaos of the Bolshevik Revolution. As a 12-year-old, she saw her nation crumble before her eyes and be recreated under Lenin’s view of how life should be lived. That was Communism. Her father’s business was seized because private property was declared illegal. The state acquired power over the rights of the individual in determining what talents would best serve society. Expressing individualism and self-determination became dangerous, if not illegal, ways to live. Cooperation and collectivism became Russia’s national goals and it was expected everyone would work for the public good, putting the state before self.

To understand Rand’s views of life, one must comprehend the extreme times she lived in. Her philosophy came to be best expressed in *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*, her two major works. They are controversial, well read, and now making a comeback, particularly in conservative political ideology.

Her philosophy was expressed by the two main character’s speeches at the climatic moments in each novel. In *The Fountainhead*, Howard Roark is an architect who, at his trial, defends blowing up the building he designed after his design was altered by a less talented colleague. In *Atlas Shrugged*, John Galt speaks to a crumbling America from his rundown apartment along the New York waterfront, explaining why the country is in the condition it is, as well as why he persuaded the greatest minds and talents in the nation to abandon a corrupt and dying country in order to save it.

Rand’s stated beliefs are: There is no God. There is only the mind of man and that is supreme. The mind is not a collective or function of the state but an individual attribute. It is our highest value and greatest asset. The most important viewpoint is the individual viewpoint. Only our mind and its proper use can insure our survival. This is the unique creative power of man that no other life form on earth has. A man must think and work alone; the creative process is guided by an individual thought, not a collective brain.

Rand taught selfishness is a virtue; one must live for oneself and for one's own happiness. One's own survival is the first moral directive. Selflessness and altruism are the roots of all evil. Living for the sake of others is the expression of this evil. Putting others before self and not satisfying one's own desires first is evil. Man's first duty is to himself; his moral obligation is to do what he wishes and pursue his own happiness. This moral choice must always be placed first. Self-sacrifice is evil. Self-fulfillment is good. These are the heart and soul of her beliefs.

As a 19-year-old college student desperately struggling to find his place in the world, Rand's ideas became so attractive to me that I read all her major works. I believed her values would be life-changing. They certainly were! After a year of trying to master the art of selfishness, I found myself more distant, more judgmental, less happy, and more arrogant than when I started. Telling myself that intellect and mind were supreme and feelings and heart were a weakness made me into a person very unappealing to others. I told myself, "I am not my brother's keeper; I will not live for the sake of others. I will live for my own happiness and ambition, and if people get upset, tough." A time came when I realized living like this got me nowhere and I put her books down and cast aside her ideas about selfishness and sought a new path. One night in the library, I picked up a book about Sufism that read, "The way to God is by service-sacrifice and suffering — totally opposite of Ayn Rand's ethics. This attracted me and was actually an important moment in my spiritual journey.

Comparing Rand's ideas to those taught by Rev. Moon, here is what I see. The Third Blessing, "to take dominion," is mixed within her ethics. To read of people who have excelled in their chosen professions touches a good and inherent chord within us. We all have that desire to master our chosen field and use that mastery in good and creative ways to benefit others. To a much lesser degree, the First Blessing, "to be fruitful," is evident in the unique qualities of her strong characters. They seem to have themselves together, knowing who they are and what they believe in, consistently acting out whom they are.

Comparing Unificationist views to Rand's, we see two opposite views of life; both cannot be true. One believes in God, the other adamantly does not. One sees God as its strength and source of life, love and truth. The other sees man as the supreme being, answerable to no one but himself. One emphasizes heart and the perfecting of love. The other holds the mind as supreme and has its own individual standard to be responsible for. One believes that education is given to develop an individual not only to take care of himself but to be a benefit to others. The other's primary motive is for individual happiness. One believes selfishness is a sin, the other that selfishness is a virtue. One believes the ideal is fulfilled in the family, the other sees only the individual. One says life's highest path is to possess the love of God and give it to others, the other finding one's own happiness and fulfilling one's own desires. One seeks to serve others first, the other to serve self first.



The word individualism is like love. There are many kinds and qualities of love and to describe them all by the one word – love — does them all a disservice. Within every individual, there lies a heart, mind, and a spirit, uniquely created by God. What we choose to fill ourselves with and to become is up to each of us. The individualism of our strongly independent Father, who decided to give up his own desires to carry out the Will of Heaven, is quite different from the self-centered individualism considered a virtue and life's first purpose. Selfishness has a strange and subtle power to blind and poison even those who are good. It has the patience to wait years to misdirect, twist, and destroy even strong people. It is the

perverse, silent killer of the spirit. Unfortunately, this is the ill-chosen virtue of Ayn Rand's ideal man, mixed with some good traits.

But a man who seeks to live as a Godly individual has quite a different internal make up as Rev. Moon has shown in how he lived his life. To be a strongly individualistic person whose sole motivation is to live for the benefit of others and the Will of Heaven without self-centered selfishness is a difference we would be wise to think deeply about.

Our nation is deeply divided between two views of how to govern. One favors greater expansion of federal controls over the excesses of individuals. The other view is exemplified by some conservatives and Libertarians, notably former vice presidential nominee Congressman Paul Ryan, former presidential candidate and congressman Ron Paul, and his son, Senator Rand Paul. They hold individual liberty, independence and freedom as their highest political values, and not surprisingly have embraced Ayn Rand's philosophy, which champions individual selfishness and limited government. Her prophetic story of America's demise has similarities to our present national situation, which make her all the more relevant.

The contrast is stark and clear. When deciding which way of life to live, there are three questions that must be asked. Which ideology is going to make this a better world? What way of life will create individuals who can make this a better world? And, is living selfishly the ideal to follow and when this way of life is accepted and implemented in national economic or political policy what results will appear? As in all things, the choices are each person's to make. Not only is an individual's destiny at stake but by the choices its leaders make, a nation's destiny will hang in the balance.

Wayne Hankins lives in northern California and aspires through writing to bring new meaning to the Principles that Rev. Moon taught.