

Ayn Rand once said, “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.” Ayn Rand integrates her philosophy of Objectivism through her complex and powerful novel Atlas Shrugged. Within the novel, Rand stresses these very ideas, portraying characters that embody all these attributes and more. Atlas Shrugged is about unlimited human potential. I have internalized much of this idealistic and inspiring novel, adding to my personal views, and changing the way I view the world and myself.

The novel portrays characters who contain man’s highest attributes of creative ability, ambitiousness, self-assertiveness, refusal to bear uncontested disasters, and virtues of independence, integrity, rational self-interest, honesty and justice. The characters also possess what Rand describes as the three key values to the Objectivist ethics. These values enable man to fully realize one’s life. The three values include Reason, Purpose, and Self-Esteem. Corresponding virtues to these values are Rationality, Productiveness, and Pride. These three key values and virtues combined make up a man’s source of knowledge, central goal in life, and sense of self-worth. The characters in the novel come to understand and realize their individual purpose by possessing these three values and virtues. The Objectivist ethics come to life through Rand’s characters, giving the reader a clear portrayal of these qualities. Human beings start with the idea of a blank slate or tabula rasa. From this starting point, we try to define life goals and ourselves. As I read Atlas Shrugged, I began to conceptualize and solidify these ideas that helped change me into a more positive, self-assured, young adult. It is these three key values and virtues that I still strive for in order to define myself.

Atlas Shrugged focuses on Objectivism’s basic social principle, which states, “Man must live for his own sake, neither sacrificing himself to others nor sacrificing others to himself.” The characters in the novel live by this heroic way of life, following their goals by the driving force of their vision. Ayn Rand expands on this idea, describing two distinct kinds of people. Rand calls people the Creators and the Second-handers. Creators are categorized as thinkers, scientists, artists, industrialists, and inventors; those whose ideas are opposed and denounced. Creators are men who fight for their vision, suffer and win. These are men who propel history. The Second-hander advocates a

warped altruistic view, in which man places others before themselves. Their goal is not to achieve, but give. The Second-hander uses this as a weapon to exploit others by teaching dependency.

The better way of life is that of the Creator, who lives by the independent work of the mind. The other way of life is as a parasite, which lives off the work and minds of others. The parasite is the Second-hander who must make secure connections with other men in order to feed off of others. The choice between the two is not self-sacrifice or dominance; it is between independence and dependence. The Creator is one who does not exist for any other person except himself. The Second-hander is a state in which a mind is unable to survive on its own. This timeless contest can also be known as the individual against the collective.

When the Creator and the Second-hander put their beliefs into practice, they naturally came up against each other. The Second-hander tries to smother the Creator because of the Creator's true and individual talent the Second-hander so desperately craves. He does this by promoting sameness and equality in which they are able to "level the playing field", turning the Creator into the symbolic Atlas, holding the world upon his shoulders, just as the Creator carries the Second-hander. This is a state in which the Creator cannot live. The creator is an individual who creates change and growth that makes a difference in the stand-still world the Second-hander encourages.

When looking at these two radically different lifestyles Rand puts forth in the novel, one can see the obvious path that you are inspired to choose. This simple and yet complex social principle of the Creator makes me aspire for such grand goals, to not be afraid of such rugged individualism, regardless of others' views and denunciations. These motivational concepts of endless human potential give me a sense that anything is possible, inspiring me to accomplish anything I set my mind to.

Directly linked to the basic social principle in Atlas Shrugged is the idea of an uncompromised state of happiness. This idea dictates, "Man is to live for his own sake and the achievement of this own happiness, and is man's highest moral purpose". However, this must be a happiness not tainted by any imperfections, making it an uncompromised happiness. The main character, John Galt, clarifies this by proclaiming, "Happiness is a state of non-contradictory joy- a joy without penalty or

guilt, a joy that does not clash with any of your values and does not work for your own destruction.” This kind of happiness is what the characters in the book pursue and have. The Creators find this in a job, artistic delights, or even a mother in raising her children. This may sound unrealistic and maybe a bit idealistic, but isn't that what we should be at this age, optimistic? The quest for happiness has been a timeless goal for all human beings, including myself. The important thing is to find what you want out of life and how to achieve it to make yourself *truly* happy.

Ayn Rand boldly sets forth her philosophy and uses this intricately crafted novel as a way of conveying her firmly held belief of Objectivism. Rand's ideas have been integrated into my eclectic philosophy. Atlas Shrugged is a novel that has affected me more than any other, and whose exciting perspective resonates with this particular young reader.