



# BULLETIN of THE NORTH TEXAS CHURCH OF FREETHOUGHT

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## AYN RAND AND OBJECTIVISM

Ayn Rand (1905-1982) was a 20<sup>th</sup> Century novelist-writer who was famous for her fiction and nonfiction that extolled reason, capitalism, “the virtue of selfishness” – the title of one of her books – and her philosophy of “Objectivism.” Her ideas and attitudes were born of her first-hand experience of the 1917 Russian Revolution. She is notable for Freethinkers in that she rejected supernaturalism, called the Christian concept of love “evil,” and singled out John 3:16 as “monstrous.” Unafraid of saying “I am an atheist,” she added: “I have only one religion: the sublime in human nature.”

Rand was born Alissa Zinovievna Rosenbaum on February 2, 1905 in Saint Petersburg, then the capital of the Russian Empire. After completing her education, including philosophy, law and, of course, Marxism-Leninism, she emigrated at age 20 to the United States. She made her way to Hollywood, became a script reader, married a movie actor, and began writing screenplays and fiction, including *The Night of January 16<sup>th</sup>* (1934), *We The Living* (1936), a semi-autobiography of her youth under Soviet dictatorship, and then *Anthem* (1938), a dystopian novella predating Orwell's *1984*. The novels that made her famous, *The Fountainhead* (1943) and *Atlas Shrugged* (1957) followed, both bestsellers. A film adaptation of *The Fountainhead* came out in 1949.

There was great popular interest in the ideas she expressed in these works. She responded with interviews, lectures and articles explaining and defending her views. Turning to non-fiction, she wrote *For the New Intellectual* (1961), *The Virtue of Selfishness* (1964), *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal* (1966), *The Romantic Manifesto* (1969), *The New Left: The Anti-Industrial Revolution* (1971), *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology* (1979), and, posthumously, *Philosophy: Who Needs It* (1982) as well as other collections of essays.

Rand held that fundamental philosophical principles are of vital importance because they shape social and political institutions that profoundly affect

human life and morality. She opposed what she saw as the prevailing ethic of the modern world, altruism, the doctrine that the happiness and well-being of others is of greater importance than one's own. She advocated for “selfishness,” rational egoism. She held that the only acceptable political system consistent with this is laissez-faire capitalism. Asked on one occasion to describe her philosophy while standing on one foot, she answered: “Metaphysics: Objective Reality, Epistemology: Reason, Ethics: Self-interest, Politics: Capitalism.”

At the time, the idea that “selfishness” and unfettered capitalism should be seen as ideals went against the prevailing wisdom. Most of the intelligentsia at the time believed that communism/socialism and controlled economies such as the USSR's were the future. This was the world in which Whitaker Chambers, the former communist who exposed Alger Hiss, said of his break with his Soviet masters: “I know that I am leaving the winning side for the losing side.”

Rand influenced the libertarian and conservative movements. But she herself disdained them as “hippies of the right,” “publicity seekers,” and a “monstrous, disgusting bunch of people” who supported anarchism as “anarchists are collectivists.”

At least two organizations remain active in support of Rand's ideas. One is The Ayn Rand Institute which states on its website that Rand's “is an approach to life that's unlike anything you've ever heard before” and consists of: “Follow reason, not whims or faith, Work hard to achieve a life of purpose and productivity, Earn genuine self-esteem, Pursue your own happiness as your highest moral aim, [and] Prosper by treating others as individuals, trading value for value.” These are admirable ideals, though hardly “unlike anything” that has ever been heard of before.

The Atlas Society was initially led by philosopher David Kelley (1949-) after he broke with the Institute. He has advocated for an “open” version of Ayn Rand's Objectivism that could be built upon and, in that way, refined and improved.† The Ayn Rand

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Institute, in contrast, insists that Objectivism is “closed,” that “every truth is an absolute,” and even that “every philosophy ... is immutable.”††

Ayn Rand deserves credit for stimulating interest in philosophy. She offered original and insightful observations of modern culture, society and politics. And she drew attention to human dignity and its realization in free-market capitalist economics.

Sadly, many of her views were amateurish and ill-informed. She freely engaged in straw-man tactics. The 18<sup>th</sup> Century German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), for example, famously distinguished “things as they are in themselves,” independent of our perception of them, from the way that things appear to us through our perceptual and mental faculties. Rand insisted that this showed that Kant believed that “man is blind, because he has eyes—deaf, because he has ears—deluded, because he has a mind—and the things he perceives do not exist, because he perceives them” and this is “a negation, not only of man’s consciousness, but of any consciousness, of consciousness as such.” Though Kant is notoriously difficult to read, this is a grievous misunderstanding and misrepresentation of Kant.

Despite Rand's praise of reason she did not always offer carefully reasoned arguments. And while denigrating emotion she clearly delighted in inflammatory rhetoric. She complained of term-switching but often did not sufficiently specify her own terms including, surprisingly, “objective.” She seems not to have understood that objective means inter-subjective, which is to say, open to perception by all but not dependent on any specific observer. This is why science and philosophy are collaborative enterprises. Human understanding advances by the participation of many individuals who each offer and consider their own and others' ideas as possible solutions to problems. Unlike art and literature, science and philosophy are not the result of heroic individualism insisting on its own creative vision.

These and other problems caused most serious and especially academic philosophers to ignore Rand's work. As she and most of her followers did not meaningfully engage with others having similar concerns, much less her critics, Rand's ideas contributed much less than they might have – and should have – to the long tradition of philosophical conversation.

That is a shame, for Rand and the rest of us.

† [https://atlassociety.org/sites/default/files/The\\_Contested\\_Legacy\\_of\\_Ayn\\_Rand.pdf](https://atlassociety.org/sites/default/files/The_Contested_Legacy_of_Ayn_Rand.pdf)

†† <https://ari.aynrand.org/issues/culture-and-society/religion-and-morality/Fact-and-Value>

**All NTCOF events can be found through our website calendar, or our meetup page, from which you can RSVP, at: - [www.meetup.com/church-of-freethought](http://www.meetup.com/church-of-freethought) - JOIN THE NTCOF MEETUP GROUP !!!**

**Social Luncheon:** Today, immediately after our Service, join us for lunch and discussion at the Jason's Deli on MacArthur Blvd just south of I-635, at 7707 N MacArthur Blvd, phone (972) 432-0555.

**Freethought Salon:** Discuss today's service topic or other conundrums on most non-first Sundays of the month, over breakfast/coffee (or not), in the atrium of the Embassy Suites DFW Airport North – on Bass Pro Drive in Grapevine beginning at 10:00 AM.

**Game Night:** Most Friday nights at the IHOP on 2310 Stemmons Trail (I-35), near Northwest Highway (Loop 12). Plan to arrive at about 7:30 PM, and stay late playing Imperial 2030, Dominion, Evolution, Le Havre, Ticket To Ride, and other fun games!

**Have Another Idea?** Email or call! Read bulletins & presentations and post on the FORUM at [www.churchoffreethought.org](http://www.churchoffreethought.org) LIKE US at [www.facebook.com/northtexaschurchoffreethought/](https://www.facebook.com/northtexaschurchoffreethought/) and sign up for our Twitter feed at [www.twitter.com/ntcof](https://www.twitter.com/ntcof) !

**PLANNED FOR NEXT MONTH:  
“THE STUFF OF  
THOUGHT”**

**> Sunday, May 7, 2019 <  
HERE at the Hawthorn Suites  
by Wyndham Hotel  
DFW Airport North 10:30 AM**

**THANK YOU !!  
FOR YOUR TIME and  
FINANCIAL SUPPORT**

**of the NTCOF !!  
It is needed, appreciated and  
Tax-Deductible !**

**The North Texas Church of Freethought  
The Fellowship of Unbelievers**

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