

Playboy Interview: Ayn Rand

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playboy interview

Photography by Jerry Yulsman



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Ayn Rand, an intense, angry young woman of 58, is among the most outspoken – and important – intellectual voices in America today. She is the author of what is perhaps the most fiercely damned and admired best seller of the decade: Atlas Shrugged, which has sold 1,200,000 copies since its publication six years ago, and has become one of the most talked-about novels in the country. Ayn Rand discussion clubs dot college campuses. Professors debate her ideas in their classrooms. More than 2,500 people in 30 cities from New York to Los Angeles attend courses given by the Nathaniel Branden Institute, in which they listen to live speakers and taped lectures expounding the principles set forth in the book. Thousands more subscribe to The Objectivist Newsletter, a monthly publication in which Miss Rand and her associates comment on everything from economics to aesthetics. And sales of her previous best seller, The Fountainhead, have climbed to almost the 2,000,000 mark.



THE PLAYBOY INTERVIEW

That any novel should set off such a chain reaction is unusual; that Atlas Shrugged has done so is astonishing. For the book, a panoramic novel about what happens when the “men of the mind” go on strike, is 1168 pages long. It is filled with lengthy, sometimes complex philosophical passages; and it is brimming with as many explosively unpopular ideas as Ayn Rand herself. Despite this success, the literary establishment considers her an outsider. Almost to a man, critics have either ignored or denounced the book. She is an exile among philosophers, too, although Atlas is as much a work of philosophy as it is a novel. Liberals glower at the very mention of her name; but conservatives, too, swallow hard when she begins to speak. For Ayn Rand, whether anyone likes it or not, is sui generis: indubitably, irrevocably, intransigently individual. She detests the drift of modern American society: She doesn’t like its politics, its economics, its attitudes toward sex, women, business, art or religion. In short, she declares, with unblinking immodesty, “I am challenging the cultural tradition of two-and-a-half-thousand years.” She means it.

A dark-haired, woman with penetrating brown eyes and a computer-quick mind, Ayn (rhymes with mine) Rand was born to the family of a small businessman in St. Petersburg, Russia, where she lived through the Soviet Revolution. She attended the University of Leningrad, loathing communism and its philosophy. In 1926 she managed to leave the U. S. S. R., stayed for a few months with distant relatives in Chicago, then moved on to Hollywood. She had always wanted to be a writer. Since her command of English was somewhat less than adequate for writing fiction, she found a job preparing outlines for silent movies, as she went about mastering her new language. Between bouts of unemployment, she worked as a movie extra, waitress, newspaper subscription salesgirl and studio wardrobe-department clerk.

Then, in 1936, she completed her first novel, We the Living —an attack on totalitarianism, set in Soviet Russia—which drew little notice. Two years later she finished Anthem, a short novel about a society in which the word “I” has been extirpated in favor of the collectivist “we.” It was not until five years and twelve publishers’ rejections later that her first commercially successful book, The Fountainhead, appeared; the story of an architect’s battle for his own individuality, it became a national best seller, and was later made

into a movie.

For nearly a decade after that, Miss Rand struggled to write Atlas Shrugged, which she views not merely as a novel, but as the crystallization of a philosophy aimed at nothing less than reversing the entire direction of change in America—turning society toward a state of pure laissez-faire capitalism, even purer than that which existed during the 19th Century. But her philosophy—which she calls “Objectivism”—encompasses more than economics or politics: Primarily, it sets forth a new kind of ethics, which she defines as a morality of rational self-interest.

Today, Ayn Rand lives in a modest apartment in the East Thirties of Manhattan with her artist husband, Frank O'Connor. She is planning another novel and working on a long-range nonfiction project—a book on epistemology, the theory of knowledge. Though her progress on both projects is interrupted by a demanding schedule of speaking engagements around the country, most of her working hours, and her considerable energies, are spent in the small blue-green study where she does most of her writing—entirely in longhand.

*In a series of intellectually electric conversations with Playboy's interviewer, **Alvin Toffler**, Miss Rand spoke clearly and urgently about her work and her views. Answering question after question with a clipped, even delivery, her deep voice edged with a Russian accent, she paused only long enough between words to puff on cigarettes held in a blue-and-silver holder (a gift from admirers) engraved with her initials, the names of the three heroes of Atlas Shrugged, and a number of diminutive dollar signs. The dollar sign, in Atlas Shrugged, is the symbol of "free trade and, therefore, of a free mind."*

Miss Rand, your novels and essays, especially your controversial best seller, *Atlas Shrugged*, present a carefully engineered, internally consistent worldview. They are, in effect, the expression of an all-encompassing philosophical system. What do you seek to accomplish with this new philosophy?

I seek to provide men – or those who care to think – with an integrated, consistent and rational view of life.

What are the basic premises of Objectivism? Where does it begin?

It begins with the axiom that existence exists, which means that an objective reality exists independent of any perceiver or of the perceiver's emotions, feelings, wishes, hopes or fears. Objectivism holds that reason is man's only means of perceiving reality and his only guide to action. By reason, I mean the faculty, which identifies and integrates the material provided by man's senses.

In *Atlas Shrugged* your hero, John Galt, declares, “I swear – by my life and my love of it – that I will never live for the sake of another man, nor ask another man to live for mine.” How is this related to your basic principles?

Galt's statement is a dramatized summation of the Objectivist ethics. Any system of ethics is based on and derived, implicitly or explicitly, from a metaphysics. The ethic derived from the metaphysical base of Objectivism holds that, since reason is man's basic tool of survival, rationality is his highest virtue. To use his mind, to perceive reality and to act accordingly, is man's moral imperative. The standard of value of the Objectivist ethics is: man's life—man's survival qua man—or that which the nature of a rational being requires for his proper survival. The Objectivist ethics, in essence, hold that man exists for his own sake, that the pursuit of his own happiness is his highest moral purpose, that he must not sacrifice himself to others, nor sacrifice others to himself. It is this last that Galt's statement summarizes.

What kind of morality derives from this, in terms of the individual's behavior?

This is presented in detail in *Atlas Shrugged*.

The heroine of *Atlas Shrugged* was, in your words, “completely incapable of experiencing a feeling

of fundamental guilt.” Is any system of morality possible without guilt?

The important word in the statement you quoted is “fundamental.” Fundamental guilt does not mean the ability to judge one’s own actions and regret a wrong action, if one commits it. Fundamental guilt means that man is evil and guilty by nature.

You mean original sin?

Exactly. It is the concept of original sin that my heroine, or I, or any Objectivist, is incapable of accepting or of ever experiencing emotionally. It is the concept of original sin that negates morality. If man is guilty by nature, he has no choice about it. If he has no choice, the issue does not belong in the field of morality. Morality pertains only to the sphere of man’s free will – only to those actions, which are open to his choice. To consider man guilty by nature is a contradiction in terms. My heroine would be capable of experiencing guilt about a specific action. Only, being a woman of high moral stature and self-esteem, she would see to it that she never earned any guilt by her actions. She would act in a totally moral manner and, therefore, would not accept an unearned guilt.

In *Atlas Shrugged*, one of your leading characters is asked, “What’s the most depraved type of human being?” His reply is surprising: He doesn’t say a sadist or a murderer or a sex maniac or a dictator; he says, “The man without a purpose.” Yet most people seem to go through their lives without a clearly defined purpose. Do you regard them as depraved?

Yes, to a certain extent.

Why?

Because that aspect of their character lies at the root of and causes all the evils, which you mentioned in your question. Sadism, dictatorship, any form of evil, is the consequence of a man’s evasion of reality. A consequence of his failure to think. The man without a purpose is a man who drifts at the mercy of random feelings or unidentified urges and is capable of any evil, because he is totally out of control of his own life. In order to be in control of your life, you have to have a purpose—a productive purpose.

Weren’t Hitler and Stalin, to name two tyrants, in control of their own lives, and didn’t they have a clear purpose?

Certainly not. Observe that both of them ended as literal psychotics. They were men who lacked self-esteem and, therefore, hated all of existence. Their psychology, in effect, is summarized in *Atlas Shrugged* by the character of James Taggart. The man who has no purpose, but has to act, acts to destroy others. That is not the same thing as a productive or creative purpose.

If a person organizes his life around a single, neatly defined purpose, isn’t he in danger of becoming extremely narrow in his horizons?

Quite the contrary. A central purpose serves to integrate all the other concerns of a man’s life. It establishes the hierarchy, the relative importance, of his values, it saves him from pointless inner conflicts, it permits him to enjoy life on a wide scale and to carry that enjoyment into any area open to his mind; whereas a man without a purpose is lost in chaos. He does not know what his values are. He does not know how to judge. He cannot tell what is or is not important to him, and, therefore, he drifts helplessly at the mercy of any chance stimulus or any whim of the moment. He can enjoy nothing. He spends his life searching for some value, which he will never find.

Couldn’t the attempt to rule whim out of life, to act in a totally rational fashion, be viewed as conducive to a juiceless, joyless kind of existence?

I truly must say that I don’t know what you are talking about. Let’s define our terms. Reason is man’s tool of knowledge, the faculty that enables him to perceive the facts of reality. To act rationally means to act in accordance with the facts of reality. Emotions are not tools of cognition. What you feel tells you nothing about the facts; it merely tells you something about your estimate of the facts. Emotions are the result of your value judgments; they are caused by your basic premises, which you may hold consciously or

subconsciously, which may be right or wrong. A whim is an emotion whose cause you neither know nor care to discover. Now what does it mean, to act on whim? It means that a man acts like a zombie, without any knowledge of what he deals with, what he wants to accomplish, or what motivates him. It means that a man acts in a state of temporary insanity. Is this what you call juicy or colorful? I think the only juice that can come out of such a situation is blood. To act against the facts of reality can result only in destruction.

Should one ignore emotions altogether, rule them out of one's life entirely?

Of course not. One should merely keep them in their place. An emotion is an automatic response, an automatic effect of man's value premises. An effect, not a cause. There is no necessary clash, no dichotomy between man's reason and his emotions – provided he observes their proper relationship. A rational man knows – or makes it a point to discover – the source of his emotions, the basic premises from which they come; if his premises are wrong, he corrects them. He never acts on emotions, for which he cannot account, the meaning of which he does not understand. In appraising a situation, he knows why he reacts as he does and whether he is right. He has no inner conflicts, his mind and his emotions are integrated, his consciousness is in perfect harmony. His emotions are not his enemies; they are his means of enjoying life. But they are not his guide; the guide is his mind. This relationship cannot be reversed, however. If a man takes his emotions as the cause and his mind as their passive effect, if he is guided by his emotions and uses his mind only to rationalize or justify them somehow—*then* he is acting immorally, he is condemning himself to misery, failure, defeat, and he will achieve nothing but destruction—his own and that of others.

According to your philosophy, work and achievement are the highest goals of life. Do you regard as immoral those who find greater fulfillment in the warmth of friendship and family ties?

If they place such things as friendship and family ties above their own productive work, yes, then they are immoral. Friendship, family life and human relationships are not primary in a man's life. A man who places others first, above his own creative work, is an emotional parasite; whereas, if he places his work first, there is no conflict between his work and his enjoyment of human relationships.

Do you believe that women as well as men should organize their lives around work – and if so, what kind of work?

Of course. I believe that women are human beings. What is proper for a man is proper for a woman. The basic principles are the same. I would not attempt to prescribe what kind of work a man should do, and I would not attempt it in regard to women. There is no particular work, which is specifically feminine. Women can choose their work according to their own purpose and premises in the same manner as men do.

In your opinion, is a woman immoral who chooses to devote herself to home and family instead of a career?

Not immoral—I would say she is impractical, because a home cannot be a full-time occupation, except when her children are young. However, if she wants a family and wants to make that her career, at least for a while, it would be proper—if she approaches it as a career, that is, if she studies the subject, if she defines the rules and principles by which she wants to bring up her children, if she approaches her task in an intellectual manner. It is a very responsible task and a very important one, but only when treated as a science, not as a mere emotional indulgence.

Where, would you say, should romantic love fit into the life of a rational person whose single driving passion is work?

It is his greatest reward. The only man capable of experiencing a profound romantic love is the man driven by passion for his work—because love is an expression of self-esteem, of the deepest values in a man's or a woman's character. One falls in love with the person who shares these values. If a man has no clearly defined values, and no moral character, he is not able to appreciate another person. In this respect, I would like to quote from *The Fountainhead*, in which the hero utters a line that has often been quoted by

readers: "To say 'I love you' one must know first how to say the 'I.'"

You hold that one's own happiness is the highest end, and that self-sacrifice is immoral. Does this apply to love as well as work?

To love more than to anything else. When you are in love, it means that the person you love is of great personal, selfish importance to you and to your life. If you were selfless, it would have to mean that you derive no personal pleasure or happiness from the company and the existence of the person you love, and that you are motivated only by self-sacrificial pity for that person's need of you. I don't have to point out to you that no one would be flattered by, nor would accept, a concept of that kind. Love is not self-sacrifice, but the most profound assertion of your own needs and values. It is for your *own* happiness that you need the person you love, and that is the greatest compliment, the greatest tribute you can pay to that person.

You have denounced the puritan notion that physical love is ugly or evil; yet you have written that "Indiscriminate desire and unselective indulgence are possible only to those who regard sex and themselves as evil." Would you say that discriminate and selective indulgence in sex *is* moral?

I would say that a selective and discriminate sex life is not an indulgence. The term indulgence implies that it is an action taken lightly and casually. I say that sex is one of the most important aspects of man's life and, therefore, must never be approached lightly or casually. A sexual relationship is proper only on the ground of the highest values one can find in a human being. Sex must not be anything other than a response to values. And that is why I consider promiscuity immoral. Not because sex is evil, but because sex is too good and too important.

Does this mean, in your view, that sex should involve only married partners?

Not necessarily. What sex should involve is a very serious relationship. Whether that relationship should or should not become a marriage is a question, which depends on the circumstances and the context of the two persons' lives. I consider marriage a very important institution, but it is important *when* and *if* two people have found the person with whom they wish to spend the rest of their lives—a question of which no man or woman can be automatically certain. When one is certain that one's choice is final, then marriage is, of course, a desirable state. But this does *not* mean that any relationship based on less than total certainty is improper. I think the question of an affair or a marriage depends on the knowledge and the position of the two persons involved and should be left up to them. Either is moral, provided only that both parties take the relationship seriously and that it is based on values.

As one who champions the cause of enlightened self-interest, how do you feel about dedicating one's life to hedonistic self-gratification?

I am profoundly opposed to the philosophy of hedonism. Hedonism is the doctrine, which holds that the good is whatever gives you pleasure and, therefore, pleasure is the standard of morality. Objectivism holds that the good must be defined by a rational standard of value, that pleasure is not a first cause, but only a consequence, that only the pleasure which proceeds from a rational value judgment can be regarded as moral, that pleasure, as such, is not a guide to action nor a standard of morality. To say that pleasure should be the standard of morality simply means that whichever values you happen to have chosen, consciously or subconsciously, rationally or irrationally, are right and moral. This means that you are to be guided by chance feelings, emotions and whims, not by your mind. My philosophy is the opposite of hedonism. I hold that one cannot achieve happiness by random, arbitrary or subjective means. One can achieve happiness only on the basis of rational values. By rational values, I do not mean anything that a man may arbitrarily or blindly declare to be rational. It is the province of morality, of the science of ethics, to define for men what is a rational standard and what are the rational values to pursue.

You have said that the kind of man who spends his time running after women is a man who "despises himself." Would you elaborate?

This type of man is reversing cause and effect in regard to sex. Sex is an expression of a man's self-

esteem, of his own self-value. But the man who does not value himself tries to reverse this process. He tries to derive his self-esteem from his sexual conquests, which cannot be done. He cannot acquire his own value from the number of women who regard him as valuable. Yet that is the hopeless thing, which he attempts.

You attack the idea that sex is “impervious to reason.” But isn’t sex a nonrational biological instinct?

No. To begin with, man does not possess any instincts. Physically, sex is merely a capacity. But how a man will exercise this capacity and whom he will find attractive depends on his standard of value. It depends on his premises, which he may hold consciously or subconsciously, and which determine his choices. It is in this manner that his philosophy directs his sex life.

Isn’t the individual equipped with powerful, nonrational biological drives?

He is not. A man is equipped with a certain kind of physical mechanism and certain needs, but without any knowledge of how to fulfill them. For instance, man needs food. He experiences hunger. But, unless he learns first to identify this hunger, then to know that he needs food and how to obtain it, he will starve. The need, the hunger, will not tell him how to satisfy it. Man is born with certain physical and psychological needs, but he can neither discover them nor satisfy them without the use of his mind. Man has to discover what is right or wrong for him as a rational being. His so-called urges will not tell him what to do.

In *Atlas Shrugged* you wrote, “There are two sides to every issue. One side is right and the other is wrong, but the middle is always evil.” Isn’t this a rather black-and-white set of values?

It most certainly is. I most emphatically advocate a black-and-white view of the world. Let us define this. What is meant by the expression “black and white”? It means good and evil. Before you can identify anything as gray, as middle of the road, you have to know what is black and what is white, because gray is merely a mixture of the two. And when you have established that one alternative is good and the other is evil, there is no justification for the choice of a mixture. There is no justification ever for choosing any part of what you know to be evil.

Then you believe in absolutes?

I do.

Can’t Objectivism, then, be called a dogma?

No. A dogma is a set of beliefs accepted on faith; that is, without rational justification or against rational evidence. A dogma is a matter of blind faith. Objectivism is the exact opposite. Objectivism tells you that you must not accept any idea or conviction unless you can demonstrate its truth by means of reason.

If widely accepted, couldn’t Objectivism harden into a dogma?

No. I have found that Objectivism is its own protection against people who might attempt to use it as a dogma. Since Objectivism requires the use of one’s mind, those who attempt to take broad principles and apply them unthinkingly and indiscriminately to the concretes of their own existence find that it cannot be done. They are then compelled either to reject Objectivism or to apply it. When I say apply, I mean that they have to use their own mind, their own thinking, in order to know how to apply Objectivist principles to the specific problems of their own lives.

You have said you are opposed to faith. Do you believe in God?

Certainly not.

You’ve been quoted as saying “The cross is the symbol of torture, of the sacrifice of the ideal to the nonideal. I prefer the dollar sign.” Do you truly feel that two thousand years of Christianity can be summed up with the word “torture?”

To begin with, I never said that. It’s not my style. Neither literarily nor intellectually. I don’t say I prefer the

dollar sign—that is cheap nonsense, and please leave this in your copy. I don't know the origin of that particular quote, but the meaning of the dollar sign is made clear in *Atlas Shrugged*. It is the symbol, clearly explained in the story, of free trade and, therefore, of a free mind. A free mind and a free economy are corollaries. One can't exist without the other. The dollar sign, as the symbol of the currency of a free country, is the symbol of the free mind. More than that, as to the historical origin of the dollar sign, although it has never been proved, one very likely hypothesis is that it stands for the initials of the United States. So much for the dollar sign. Now you want me to speak about the cross. What is correct is that I do regard the cross as the symbol of the ideal to the nonideal. Isn't that what it does mean? Christ, in terms of the Christian philosophy, is the human ideal. He personifies that which men should strive to emulate. Yet, according to the Christian mythology, he died on the cross not for his own sins but for the sins of the nonideal people. In other words, a man of perfect virtue was sacrificed for men who are vicious and who are expected or supposed to accept that sacrifice. If I were a Christian, nothing could make me more indignant than that: the notion of sacrificing the ideal to the nonideal, or virtue to vice. And it is in the name of that symbol that men are asked to sacrifice themselves for their inferiors. That is precisely how the symbolism is used. That is torture.

Has no religion, in your estimation, ever offered anything of constructive value to human life?

Qua religion, no – in the sense of blind belief, belief unsupported by, or contrary to, the facts of reality and the conclusions of reason. Faith, as such, is extremely detrimental to human life: it is the negation of reason. But you must remember that religion is an early form of philosophy, that the first attempts to explain the universe, to give a coherent frame of reference to man's life and a code of moral values, were made by religion, before men graduated or developed enough to have philosophy. And, as philosophies, some religions have very valuable moral points. They may have a good influence or proper principles to inculcate, but in a very contradictory context and, on a very – how should I say it? – dangerous or malevolent base: on the ground of faith.

Then you would say that if you had to choose between the symbol of the cross and the symbol of the dollar, you would choose the dollar?

I wouldn't accept such a choice. Put it another way: If I had to choose between faith and reason, I wouldn't consider the choice even conceivable. As a human being, one chooses reason.

Do you consider wealthy businessmen like the Fords and the Rockefellers immoral because they use their wealth to support charity?

No. That is their privilege, if they want to. My views on charity are very simple. I do not consider it a major virtue and, above all, I do not consider it a moral duty. There is nothing wrong in helping other people, if and when they are worthy of the help and you can afford to help them. I regard charity as a marginal issue. What I am fighting is the idea that charity is a moral duty and a primary virtue.

What is the place of compassion in your philosophical system?

I regard compassion as proper *only* toward those who are innocent victims, but not toward those who are morally guilty. If one feels compassion for the victims of a concentration camp, one cannot feel it for the torturers. If one does feel compassion for the torturers, it is an act of moral treason toward the victims.

Would it be against the principles of Objectivism for anyone to sacrifice himself by stepping in front of a bullet to protect another person?

No. It depends on the circumstances. I would step in the way of a bullet if it were aimed at my husband. It is not self-sacrifice to die protecting that which you value: If the value is great enough, you do not care to exist without it. This applies to any alleged sacrifice for those one loves.

Would you be willing to die for your cause, and should your followers be willing to die for it? And for the truly nonsacrificial Objectivist, is any cause worth dying for?

The answer to this is made plain in my book. In *Atlas Shrugged* I explain that a man has to live for, and

when necessary, fight for, his values—because the whole process of living consists of the achievement of values. Man does not survive automatically. He must live like a rational being and accept nothing less. He cannot survive as a brute. Even the simplest value, such as food, has to be created by man, has to be planted, has to be produced. The same is true of his more interesting, more important achievements. All values have to be gained and kept by man, and, if they are threatened, he has to be willing to fight and die, if necessary, for his right to live like a rational being. You ask me, would I be willing to die for Objectivism? I would. But what is more important, I am willing to *live* for it – which is much more difficult.

In your emphasis on reason, you are in philosophical conflict with contemporary writers, novelists and poets—many of whom are self-admitted mystics, or irrationalists, as they have been called.

Why is this so?

Because art has a philosophical base, and the dominant philosophical trends of today are a form of neomysticism. Art is a projection of the artist's fundamental view of man and of existence. Since most artists do not develop an independent philosophy of their own, they absorb, consciously or subconsciously, the dominant philosophical influences of their time. Most of today's literature is a faithful reflection of today's philosophy—and look at it!

But shouldn't a writer reflect his time?

No. A writer should be an active intellectual leader of his time, not a passive follower riding any current. A writer should shape the values of his culture; he should project and concretize the value goals of man's life. This is the essence of the Romantic school of literature, which has all but vanished from today's scene.

Leaving us where, literarily speaking?

At the dead end of Naturalism. Naturalism holds that a writer must be a passive photographer or reporter who must transcribe uncritically whatever he happens to observe around him. Romanticism holds that a writer must present things, not as they are at any given moment, but, to quote Aristotle, "as they might be and ought to be."

Would you say that you are the last of the Romanticists?

Or the first of their return – to quote one of my own characters in *Atlas Shrugged*.

What is your appraisal of contemporary literature in general?

Philosophically, immoral. Aesthetically, it bores me to death. It is degenerating into a sewer, devoted exclusively to studies of depravity. And there's nothing as boring as depravity.

Are there any novelists whom you admire?

Yes. Victor Hugo.

What about modern novelists?

No, there is no one that I could say I admire among the so-called serious writers. I prefer the popular literature of today, which is today's remnant of Romanticism. My favorite is Mickey Spillane.

Why do you like him?

Because he is primarily a moralist. In a primitive form, the form of a detective novel, he presents the conflict of good and evil, in terms of black and white. He does not present a nasty gray mixture of indistinguishable scoundrels on both sides. He presents an uncompromising conflict. As a writer, he is brilliantly expert at the aspect of literature, which I consider most important: plot structure.

What do you think of Faulkner?

Not very much. He is a good stylist, but practically unreadable in content—so I've read very little of him.

What about Nabokov?

I have read only one book of his and a half – the half was *Lolita*, which I couldn't finish. He is a brilliant stylist, he writes beautifully, but his subjects, his sense of life, his view of man, are so evil that no amount of artistic skill can justify them.

As a novelist, do you regard philosophy as the primary purpose of your writing?

No. My primary purpose is the projection of an ideal man, of man "as he might be and ought to be." Philosophy is the necessary means to that end.

In your early novel, *Anthem*, your protagonist declares, "It is my will which chooses, and the choice of my will is the only edict I respect." Isn't this anarchism? Is one's own desire or will the only law one must respect?

Not one's own will. This is, more or less, a poetic expression made clear by the total context of the story in *Anthem*. One's own rational judgment. You see, I use the term free will in a totally different sense from the one usually attached to it. Free will consists of man's ability to think or not to think. The act of thinking is man's primary act of choice. A rational man will never be guided by desires or whims, only by values based on his rational judgment. That is the only authority he can recognize. This does not mean anarchy, because, if a man wants to live in a free, civilized society, he would, in reason, have to choose to observe the laws, when those laws are objective, rational and valid'. I have written an article on this subject for *The Objectivist Newsletter*—on the need and proper function of a government.

What, in your view, is the proper function of a government?

Basically, there is really only one proper function: the protection of individual rights. Since rights can be violated only by physical force, and by certain derivatives of physical force, the proper function of government is to protect men from those who initiate the use of physical force: from those who are criminals. Force, in a free society, may be used only in retaliation and only against those who initiate its use. This is the proper task of government: to serve as a policeman who protects men from the use of force.

If force may be used only in retaliation against force, does the government have the right to use force to collect taxes, for example, or to draft soldiers?

In principle, I believe that taxation should be voluntary, like everything else. But how one would implement this is a very complex question. I can only suggest certain methods, but I would not attempt to insist on them as a definitive answer. A government lottery, for instance, used in many countries in Europe, is one good method of voluntary taxation. There are others. Taxes should be voluntary contributions for the proper governmental services, which people do need and therefore would be and should be willing to pay for—as they pay for insurance. But, of course, this is a problem for a distant future, for the time when men will establish a fully free social system. It would be the last, not the first, reform to advocate. As to the draft, it is improper and unconstitutional. It is a violation of fundamental rights, of a man's right to his own life. No man has the right to send another man to fight and die for his, the sender's, cause. A country has no right to force men into involuntary servitude. Armies should be strictly voluntary; and, as military authorities will tell you, volunteer armies are the best armies.

What about other public needs? Do you consider the post office, for example, a legitimate function of government?

Now let's get this straight. My position is fully consistent. Not only the post office, but streets, roads, and above all, schools, should all be privately owned and privately run. I advocate the separation of state and economics. The government should be concerned only with those issues, which involve the use of force. This means: the police, the armed services, and the law courts to settle disputes among men. Nothing else. Everything else should be privately run and would be much better run.

Would you create any new government departments or agencies?

No, and I truly cannot discuss things that way. I am not a government planner nor do I spend my time

inventing Utopias. I'm talking about principles whose practical applications are clear. If I have said that I am opposed to the initiation of force, what else has to be discussed?

What about force in foreign policy? You have said that any free nation had the right to invade Nazi Germany during World War II ...

Certainly.

... And that any free nation today has the moral right—though not the duty—to invade Soviet Russia, Cuba, or any other “slave pen.” Correct?

Correct. A dictatorship—a country that violates the rights of its own citizens—is an outlaw and can claim no rights.

Would you actively advocate that the United States invade Cuba or the Soviet Union?

Not at present. I don't think it's necessary. I would advocate that which the Soviet Union fears above all else: economic boycott. I would advocate a blockade of Cuba and an economic boycott of Soviet Russia; and you would see both those regimes collapse without the loss of a single American life.

Would you favor U.S. withdrawal from the United Nations?

Yes. I do not sanction the grotesque pretense of an organization allegedly devoted to world peace and human rights, which includes Soviet Russia, the worst aggressor and bloodiest butcher in history, as one of its members. The notion of protecting rights, with Soviet Russia among the protectors, is an insult to the concept of rights and to the intelligence of any man who is asked to endorse or sanction such an organization. I do not believe that an individual should cooperate with criminals, and, for all the same reasons; I do not believe that free countries should cooperate with dictatorships.

Would you advocate severing diplomatic relations with Russia?

Yes.

How do you feel about the test-ban treaty, which was recently signed?

I agree with Barry Goldwater's speech on this subject on the Senate floor. The best military authorities, and above all, the best scientific authority, Dr. Teller, the author of the hydrogen bomb, have stated that this treaty is not merely meaningless but positively dangerous to America's defense.

If Senator Goldwater is nominated as the Republican presidential candidate this July, would you vote for him?

At present, yes. When I say “at present,” I mean the date when this interview is being recorded. I disagree with him on a great many things, but I do agree, predominantly, with his foreign policy. Of any candidates available today, I regard Barry Goldwater as the best. I would vote for him, if he offers us a plausible, or at least semi-consistent, platform.

How about Richard Nixon?

I'm opposed to him. I'm opposed to any compromiser or me-tooer, and Mr. Nixon is probably the champion in this regard.

What about President Johnson?

I have no particular opinion about him.

You are a declared anticommunist, anti-socialist and anti-liberal. Yet you reject the notion that you are a conservative. In fact, you have reserved some of your angriest criticism for conservatives. Where do you stand politically?

Correction. I never describe my position in terms of negatives. I am an advocate of *laissez-faire* capitalism, of individual rights—there are no others—of individual freedom. It is on this ground that I oppose any doctrine which proposes the sacrifice of the individual to the collective, such as communism, socialism, the

welfare state, fascism, Nazism and modern liberalism. I oppose the conservatives on the same ground. The conservatives are advocates of a mixed economy and of a welfare state. Their difference from the liberals is only one of degree, not of principle.

You have charged that America suffers from intellectual bankruptcy. Do you include in this condemnation such right-wing publications as the *National Review*? Isn't that magazine a powerful voice against all the things you regard as "statism"?

I consider *National Review* the worst and most dangerous magazine in America. The kind of defense that it offers to capitalism results in nothing except the discrediting and destruction of capitalism. Do you want me to tell you why?

Yes, please.

Because it ties capitalism to religion. The ideological position of *National Review* amounts, in effect, to the following: In order to accept freedom and capitalism, one has to believe in God or in some form of religion, some form of supernatural mysticism. Which means that there are no rational grounds on which one can defend capitalism. Which amounts to an admission that reason is on the side of capitalism's enemies, that a slave society or a dictatorship is a rational system, and that only on the ground of mystic faith can one believe in freedom. Nothing more derogatory to capitalism could ever be alleged, and the exact opposite is true. Capitalism is the only system that can be defended and validated by reason.

You have attacked Governor Nelson Rockefeller for "lumping all opponents of the welfare state with actual crackpots." It was clear from his remarks that among others, he was aiming his criticism at the John Birch Society. Do you resent being lumped with the John Birchers? Do you consider them "crackpots" or a force for good?

I resent being lumped with anyone. I resent the modern method of never defining ideas, and lumping totally different people into a collective by means of smears and derogatory terms. I resent Governor Rockefeller's smear tactics: his refusal to identify specifically whom and what he meant. As far as I'm concerned, I repeat, I don't want to be lumped with anyone, and certainly not with the John Birch Society. Do I consider them crackpots? No, not necessarily. What is wrong with them is that they don't seem to have any specific, clearly defined political philosophy. Therefore, some of them may be crackpots; others may be very well meaning citizens. I consider the Birch Society futile, because they are not *for* capitalism, but merely *against* communism. I gather they believe that the disastrous state of today's world is caused by a communist conspiracy. This is childishly naïve and superficial. No country can be destroyed by a mere conspiracy; it can be destroyed only by *ideas*. The Birchers seem to be either nonintellectual or anti-intellectual. They do not attach importance to ideas. They do not realize that the great battle in the world today is a philosophical, ideological conflict.

Are there any political groups in the United States today of which you approve?

Political groups, as such—no. Is there any political group today which is fully consistent? Such groups today are guided by or advocate blatant contradictions.

Do you have any personal political aspirations yourself? Have you ever considered running for office?

Certainly not. And I trust that you don't hate me enough to wish such a thing on me.

But you are interested in politics, or at least in political theory, aren't you?

Let me answer you this way: When I came here from Soviet Russia, I was interested in politics for only one reason—to reach the day when I would not have to be interested in politics. I wanted to secure a society in which I would be free to pursue my own concerns and goals, knowing that the government would not interfere to wreck them, knowing that my life, my work, my future were not at the mercy of the state or of a dictator's whim. This is still my attitude today. Only today I know that such a society is an ideal not yet achieved, that I cannot expect others to achieve it for me, and that I, like every other responsible citizen,

must do everything possible to achieve it. In other words, I am interested in politics only in order to secure and protect freedom.

Throughout your work you argue that the way in which the contemporary world is organized, even in the capitalist countries, submerges the individual and stifles initiative. In *Atlas Shrugged*, John Galt leads a strike of the men of the mind—which results in the collapse of the collectivist society around them. Do you think the time has come for the artists, intellectuals and creative businessmen of today to withdraw their talents from society in this way?

No, not yet. But before I explain, I must correct one part of your question. What we have today is not a capitalist society, but a mixed economy—that is, a mixture of freedom and controls, which, by the presently dominant trend, is moving toward dictatorship. The action in *Atlas Shrugged* takes place at a time when society has reached the stage of dictatorship. When and if this happens, that will be the time to go on strike, but not until then.

What do you mean by dictatorship? How would you define it?

A dictatorship is a country that does not recognize individual rights, whose government holds total, unlimited power over men.

What is the dividing line, by your definition, between a mixed economy and a dictatorship?

A dictatorship has four characteristics: one-party rule, executions without trial for political offenses, expropriation or nationalization of private property, and censorship. Above all, this last. So long as men can speak and write freely, so long as there is no censorship, they still have a chance to reform their society or to put it on a better road. When censorship is imposed, *that* is the sign that men should go on strike intellectually, by which I mean, should not cooperate with the social system in any way whatever.

Short of such a strike, what do you believe ought to be done to bring about the societal changes you deem desirable?

It is *ideas* that determine social trends that create or destroy social systems. Therefore, the right ideas, the right philosophy, should be advocated and spread. The disasters of the modern world, including the destruction of capitalism, were caused by the altruist-collectivist philosophy. It is altruism that men should reject.

And how would you define altruism?

It is a moral system which holds that man has no right to exist for his own sake, that service to others is the sole justification of his existence, and that self-sacrifice is his highest moral duty, value and virtue. This is the moral base of collectivism, of all dictatorships. In order to seek freedom and capitalism, men need a nonmystical, nonaltruistic, *rational* code of ethics—a morality which holds that man is not a sacrificial animal, that he has the right to exist for his own sake, neither sacrificing himself to others, nor others to himself. In other words, what is desperately needed today is the ethics of Objectivism.

Then what you are saying is that to achieve these changes one must use essentially educational or propagandistic methods?

Yes, of course.

What do you think of your antagonists' contention that the moral and political principles of Objectivism place you outside the mainstream of American thought?

I don't acknowledge or recognize such a concept as a "mainstream of *thought*." That might be appropriate to a dictatorship, to a collectivist society in which thought is controlled and in which there exists a collective mainstream—of slogans, not of thought. There is no such thing in America. There never was. However, I have heard that expression used for the purpose of barring from public communication any innovator, any nonconformist, anyone who has anything original to offer. I am an innovator. This is a term of distinction, a term of honor, rather than something to hide or apologize for. Anyone who has new or

valuable ideas to offer stands outside the intellectual status quo. But the status quo is not a stream, let alone a “mainstream.” It is a stagnant swamp. It is the innovators who carry mankind forward.

Do you believe that Objectivism as a philosophy will eventually sweep the world?

Nobody can answer a question of that kind. Men have free will. There is no guarantee that they will choose to be rational, at any one time or in any one generation. Nor is it necessary for a philosophy to “sweep the world.” If you ask the question in a somewhat different form, if you say, do I think that Objectivism will be the philosophy of the future, I would say yes, but with this qualification: If men turn to reason, if they are not destroyed by dictatorship and precipitated into another Dark Ages, if men remain free long enough to have time to think, then Objectivism is the philosophy they will accept.

Why?

In any historical period when men were free, it has always been the most rational philosophy that won. It is from this perspective that I would say, yes, Objectivism will win. But there is no guarantee, no predetermined necessity about it.

You are sharply critical of the world as you see it today, and your books offer radical proposals for changing not merely the shape of society, but the very way in which most men work, think and love. Are you optimistic about man’s future?

Yes, I am optimistic. Collectivism, as an intellectual power and a moral ideal, is dead. But freedom and individualism, and their political expression, capitalism, have not yet been discovered. I think men *will* have time to discover them. It is significant that the dying collectivist philosophy of today has produced nothing but a cult of depravity, impotence and despair. Look at modern art and literature with their image of man as a helpless, mindless creature doomed to failure, frustration and destruction. This may be the collectivists' psychological confession, but it is not an image of man. If it were, we would never have risen from the cave. But we did. Look around you and look at history. You will see the achievements of man’s mind. You will see man’s unlimited potentiality for greatness, and the faculty that makes it possible. You will see that man is not a helpless monster by nature, but he becomes one when he discards that faculty: his mind. And if you ask me, what is greatness? – I will answer, it is the capacity to live by the three fundamental values of John Galt: reason, purpose, self-esteem.