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Atlas Shrugged and Social Change

EDWARD W. YOUNKINS

ABSTRACT: The purpose of this article is to discuss the several ways in which *Atlas Shrugged* is related to social change. It explains both how characters such as entrepreneurs and strikers introduce change in the novel as well as how *Atlas Shrugged* itself can be employed as a tool for bringing about change in the real world. The potential effects of the novel on readers are examined, as are the efforts of social movements that have embraced and incorporated the ideas found therein into their own philosophy.

KEYWORDS: Ayn Rand, novels of social change, social change, capitalism, entrepreneurship, social movements

Novels can provide a social message that can change people's outlooks and potentially contribute to social and cultural change. They can elicit intellectual and emotional responses that prompt readers to rethink their viewpoints. Novels can both entertain and lead individuals to think about the great moral questions of life. Novels are representations of reality that have human beings and society as their subject matter. The focus of attention on human problems and aspirations stimulates thought. When the creativity found in novels is added to the dynamics of society, then the potential for social change is inspired.

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Throughout recent history, by examining and illuminating social problems and issues, novelists have offered a powerful medium, agent, and vehicle for fostering social change. The cultural power of social novels is illustrated in works such as Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1839) and *Hard Times* (1854), Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* (1862), Émile Zola's *Germinal* (1885), Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906), John Dos Passos's *USA Trilogy* (1938), and *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck (1939).

Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* is a novel of social change that differs radically from those listed above. Unlike those novels, *Atlas Shrugged* illustrates and explains that only a free society is compatible with the nature of man and the world and that capitalism works because it is in accordance with reality. Although Rand structured her cautionary tale much like a long Dickensian novel, she inverted the message while keeping the form. Capitalism is shown to be the only moral system because it protects a man's mind, his primary means of survival and flourishing. *Atlas Shrugged* presents a moral social system that makes it possible for individuals to exist and to function. A model for thoughtful social change is played out in the pages of this novel—both as a work of art and as a philosophical and educational tract. *Atlas Shrugged* has been frequently hailed for its enduring impact on individuals' minds and on culture.

This novel has sold more than seven million copies. In addition, respondents to a joint Library of Congress–Book of the Month Club survey in 1991 hailed the book as second only to the Bible in its significant impact on their lives (Fein 1991). *Atlas Shrugged* has also had a significant influence on a variety of people including writers, artists, and political figures.

Although *Atlas Shrugged* embodies Ayn Rand's advocacy of free-market capitalism, this support is related to the underlying purpose of her work. As she put it:

The motive and purpose of my writing is *the projection of an ideal man*. The portrayal of a moral ideal, as my ultimate literary goal, as an end in itself—to which any didactic, intellectual, or philosophical values contained in a novel are only the means. (Rand 1971, 162)

Rand went on to say:

Since my purpose is the presentation of an ideal man, I had to define and present the conditions which make him possible and which his existence requires. Since man's character is the product of his premises, I had to define and present the kind of premises and values that create the character of an ideal man and motivate his actions; which means that I had to define and present a rational code of ethics. Since man acts among and deals with other men, I had to present the kind of social system that

makes it possible to exist and to function—a free, productive, rational system, which demands and rewards the best in every man, great or average, and which is, obviously, laissez-faire capitalism. (163–64)

Cowen (2008, 319–37) explains that some novels present informal models of reality and that individuals can profit from insights contained in novels that are full-length fictional stories intended to entertain, stimulate, and inspire readers. Such novels stand on their own as works of art while, at the same time, illuminating underpinning general principles and the implications of the author's underlying worldview. They tell memorable stories that elicit emotional responses and have models embedded in them that articulate the novelist's ideas about how the real world works. *Atlas Shrugged* is one of these novels. While the political, economic, and philosophical content of *Atlas Shrugged* fulfills Rand's goal, that content is not itself the goal of the novel. However, that content adds value to the novel with respect to its ability to stimulate social change.

The purpose of this article is to explain the various ways in which *Atlas Shrugged* is related to social change. This involves both how characters in the novel introduce change in the fictional world and how *Atlas Shrugged* itself can be a vehicle for change in the real world. The first of eight sections provides an introduction to the basic concepts of social change theory. The second discusses capitalism as social change. This is followed by a discussion of how the message and impact of *Atlas Shrugged* have been viewed by several prominent scholars. The next two parts illustrate how the heroic characters in the novel were practical men of action. The entrepreneurs and strikers in the novel are shown to be agents of economic, social, and cultural change. The sixth and seventh sections examine the potential effects on readers of *Atlas Shrugged* and explain that getting individuals to read *Atlas Shrugged* is a good initial step toward the establishment of a free society even though many additional actions will also be necessary. The final section of this essay surveys how some social movements have adopted or adapted the ideas found in *Atlas Shrugged* into, or as, their own philosophy.

Social Change Theory

Social change has been defined by Rogers (1973, 7) as the process by which alteration occurs in the structure and function of a social system. Lippitt (1973, 37) has defined change as “any planned or unplanned alteration in the status quo in an organism, situation, or process.” An innovation is “an idea, practice, or object perceived as new by the individual” (Rogers and Shoemaker 1971, 19). Zaltman and Duncan (1977, 10) have modified this definition and have commented on the distinction between change and innovation as follows:

An innovation is any idea, practice, or material artifact perceived to be new by the relevant unit of adoption. The innovation is the change object. A change is alteration in the structure of a system that requires or could be required by relearning on the part of the actor(s) in response to a given situation. Often too, an appropriate response to a new requirement is an inventive process producing an innovation. However, all innovations imply change, but not all change involves innovations, since not everything an individual or formal or informal group adopts is perceived as new.

The process of gaining acceptance and/or adoption of an innovation is generally known as the diffusion of innovation process. Diffusion theory concerns the propagation of a new concept or object, called an innovation, among members of a given social system. According to Katz, Levin, and Hamilton (1963, 240):

The process of diffusion is defined as the (1) acceptance, (2) over time, (3) of some specific item—an idea or practice, (4) by individuals, groups, or other adopting units, linked to specific (5) channels of communication, (6) to a social structure, and (7) to a given system of values or culture.

Rogers and Shoemaker (1971, 22–23) have defined five perceived characteristics of an innovation that may influence its adoption. They include relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability. Ostlund (1974, 24) added perceived risk to this list. Zaltman and Wallendorf (1983, 251) expanded the list of perceived attributes of innovations by adding divisibility, reversibility, adaptability, cost, and realization. Other researchers have formulated their own lists of characteristics depending on the innovation under study.

The first of Rogers and Shoemaker's innovation characteristics is relative advantage, which is the degree to which an innovation is better than the idea that it is intended to displace. The next innovation attribute is compatibility with existing values and practices. This is the extent to which an innovation is consistent with the values, past experiences, and needs of potential users. Complexity, sometimes referred to as simplicity or ease of use, refers to the degree to which an innovation is easy or difficult to understand and use. Trialability is the extent to which an innovation can be experimented with or experienced on a limited basis. There is less risk involved with an innovation that can be tried on a limited basis. Observability, or communicability, is the degree to which the results of using an innovation are observable to others. The more observable the results of an innovation are to individuals, the more likely they are to adopt it.

The participants in the change process include the change agent, the change target, and the client system. Zaltman and Duncan (1977)

take a broad view of the change agent role to include people within as well as outside the client system who are attempting to create some change in that system whether it is sanctioned or not. Specifically, a change agent is any individual or group operating to change the status quo in a system such that the individual or individuals involved must relearn how to perform their role(s). The change target system is the unit in which the change agent(s) is trying to alter the status quo such that the individual, group, or organization must relearn how to perform its activities. The change client system is the individual or group requesting assistance from a change agent in altering the status quo. (17–18)

Capitalism as Social Change

Capitalism as defined in this article (i.e., laissez-faire capitalism) involves that set of economic arrangements that could exist in a society in which a state's only function would be to prevent one person from initiating force or fraud against another person. No one has ever witnessed such a totally unencumbered market economy. It is a theoretical innovation that Ayn Rand has referred to as "the unknown ideal." This is the innovation or social change that *Atlas Shrugged* can best be used to promote. Although Rand's unique philosophy of Objectivism can also be viewed as an innovation, it is not likely that many potential advocates for a free society will quickly accept her full philosophy with understanding and conviction. It follows that the innovation of free-market capitalism is the most relevant and marketable social change that *Atlas Shrugged* can be used to dramatize and explain. Advocates of capitalism differ in their arguments for a social system that maximizes individual freedom. However, these various proponents do agree that the appropriate social system is one in which the initiation of physical force or fraud is forbidden. That is the major idea that *Atlas Shrugged* can get across to a great many people. It can help to spread the desirability of capitalism and the philosophy of freedom to the general public. Because man has free will and survives by reason, the initiation of force must be banned.

Rogers and Shoemaker's innovation attributes can be applied to capitalism in general and to its depiction in *Atlas Shrugged* in particular. Capitalism has relative advantages over other political-economic systems with respect to productivity, efficiency, and especially morality. Capitalism is moral in its effects because it makes personal morality possible. Because it is based on freedom of

choice, it allows for the character development of each individual. With respect to compatibility, capitalism is consistent with the nature of man and the world. Each person has the right to have the opportunity to develop his potential as a free, individual human being. Capitalism is moral because it protects each man's right to his own mind—his survival instrument—and therefore it enables human survival. For centuries, the values of freedom and individualism have underpinned the American way of life. During the past one hundred years or so, people's values have been increasingly corrupted as they have become dependent on government. With respect to ease of understanding, the conceptual and moral foundations of a free society can be expressed in clear, cogent, and nontechnical language. In addition, its use simply means respect for the individual rights of other human beings. Capitalism can be tried on a limited and incremental basis with the gradual elimination of government activities, regulations, and so on. Finally, the results of a move toward a free society will be observable and easily communicated throughout society. *Atlas Shrugged* is an accessible, interesting, and exciting work that dramatizes and presents the case for freedom and against collectivism.

***Atlas Shrugged*: Message and Impact**

Ideas are the most powerful forces in the world and the motive power of human progress. Fortunately, there exists a novel that articulates a theoretically consistent, systematic, and intellectually sound defense of capitalism; expounds the principles of traditional liberalism, voluntary cooperation, and individual freedom; and exposes the errors of coercion and collectivism. That novel is *Atlas Shrugged*. As moral warriors for capitalism, people can use this profound novel to disseminate the conceptual and moral foundations of a free society. They can use the novel to introduce people to the idea of the free market as a moral institution and not solely as a means for efficient production. *Atlas Shrugged* is an excellent means to market these ideas. It is an accessible, interesting, and exciting work that presents an integrated case for freedom and against collectivism. It is a powerful tool to educate, persuade, and convert people to support a just and proper political and economic order that is a true reflection of human nature and the world properly understood.

Rand understood that the American Revolution had been partial and remained unfinished. This understanding was one of her reasons for writing *Atlas Shrugged*. In *Atlas Shrugged*, she demonstrated what was needed to complete the American Revolution. Rand saw that the Founders' political revolution was not accompanied by a much-needed revolution in moral philosophy. According to Mayer (2008, 191–219), the Founders had espoused an anti-individualistic moral code grounded in Judeo-Christian ethics based on altruism. The failure to derive a proper and coherent moral theory of individual

rights resulted in the subordination of self-interest to the notions of the public interest and the common good. What was needed was a firm philosophical underpinning to finish the work of the American Revolution. Mayer argues that through the demonstration and explication of a new code of morality in *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand supplies the missing ingredient of the American Revolution.

Onkar Ghate (2007) has called *Atlas Shrugged* America's "second declaration of independence," which has the potential to bring about an intellectual change in the culture. He explains that each individual needs an explicit moral statement of his own self-worth. According to Ghate, the original Declaration of Independence did not fully provide this moral statement due to the mystical Christian altruistic morality revealed in the Founders' writings. *Atlas Shrugged* offers a new conception of the moral ideal and can be viewed as a "declaration of moral independence." Whereas the Founding Fathers taught people not to accept undeserved political serfdom, *Atlas Shrugged* teaches people not to accept an unearned guilt, not for their vices but for their virtues.

The Declaration of Independence was not methodologically committed to individualism—it spoke in collective terms such as the "rights of the people" and "one people." In turn, the Constitution did not define rights, give a principled explanation of them, or assign the government the limited and narrow role of protecting and enforcing their rights (Jackson 2005, 405–44).

From the beginning, Rand intended *Atlas Shrugged* to be a "much more 'social' novel than *The Fountainhead*" (Rand, journal entry, 1 January 1945, in Harriman 1997, 390). She wanted to write a novel that would mainly be a portrait of the whole focusing on the relationships that make up society (392). Viewing each social problem from a transdisciplinary and multidimensional perspective, Rand dismissed all suggested one-sided solutions as inadequate and fragmentary. According to Sciabarra (2007, 23):

Atlas Shrugged explores these relations in every dimension of human life. It traces the links between political economy and sex, education and art, metaphysics and psychology, money and moral values. It concentrates on the union of spiritual and physical realms and on the specific, concrete means by which certain productive individuals move the world, and by which others live off of their creations. It shows the social importance of the creative act by documenting what would happen if the prime movers, the "men of the mind," go on strike.

Sciabarra continues:

As I have suggested in my book, *Ayn Rand: The Russian Radical*, Rand's mature analytical framework reaches its apex in *Atlas Shrugged*. In this

work, it can be said that Rand examines a collapsing social order and its dysfunctional social relations on three distinct analytical levels:

Level 1: The Personal. On this level, Rand explores the mystics' epistemological and psychological assault on reason and the human mind, as well as the altruistic ethical inversion that is required of each individual who submits to the edicts of statist politicians. Such submission entails the "sanction of the victim," without which the whole coercive edifice would be undermined.

Level 2: The Cultural. On this level, Rand explores the utter cultural, educational, and artistic bankruptcy of a society at war with human creativity, as well as the linguistic use of euphemism as a legitimating ideological tool of the politically privileged.

Level 3: The Structural. On this level, Rand is concerned with the devastation of economic and political structures wrought by statist regulations, prohibitions, and controls on production, which foster a tribalist war of all against all.

The novel shows how each of these levels entails relations among entities—Rand's characters, who are individual human beings acting purposefully within their given social context. In Rand's conception, the relations on these three distinct levels of generality—the personal, the cultural, and the structural—can only be abstracted and isolated for the purposes of analysis, but never reified as wholes unto themselves. The levels are *both* preconditions *and* effects of one another. This has vast strategic implications for social praxis, for the techniques of social change: A genuine revolution against the structural corruptions of politics and economics cannot succeed without a corresponding personal and cultural transformation. (24–25)

In *Total Freedom*, Sciabarra (2000) cautions us not to reduce the study and defense of freedom to economics or politics with an inadequate understanding of the interconnections between the philosophical, the historical, the personal, and so forth. Sciabarra's message is that libertarians need an effective strategy that recognizes the dynamic relationships between the personal, political, historical, psychological, ethical, cultural, economic, and so on, if they are to be successful in their quest for a free society. He explains that attempts to define and defend a nonaggression axiom in the absence of a broader philosophical and cultural context are doomed to fail. Typical libertarian opposition to state intervention is not enough. Libertarians must pay greater attention to the broader context within which their goals and values can be realized. The battle against statism is simultaneously structural (political and economic), cultural (with implications for education, race, sex, language, and art), and

personal (with connections to individuals' tacit moral beliefs, and to their psycho-epistemological processes). The crusade for freedom is multidimensional and takes place on a variety of levels, with each level influencing and having reciprocal effects on the other levels.

It is possible to analyze society from different vantage points and on different levels of generality in order to develop an enriched picture of the many relationships between the various different areas. It cannot just be dictated from the political realm, but must filter through all of the various levels and areas. Any attempt to understand or change society must entail an analysis of its interrelations from the perspective of any single aspect.

People need to understand both the necessity for objective conceptual foundations and the need for cultural prerequisites in the fight for the free society because some cultures promote, and others undermine, freedom. Freedom cannot be defended successfully when severed from its broader requisite conditions. We must attempt to grasp and address all of freedom's prerequisites and implications. Rand's greatest legacy to mankind, *Atlas Shrugged*, addresses all of these prerequisites and implications, serves as a blueprint for the future, and is a potential source for social change. According to Sciabarra (2007):

As a manifesto for a new radicalism, *Atlas Shrugged* dramatizes the poisonous nature of predatory, coercive power upon many social dimensions. Rand's magnum opus celebrates as antidote a rational and heroic conception of human freedom—and the unique constellation of psychological, moral, and cultural factors that nourish it. (31)

David Kelley (2007, 40–49) maintains that *Atlas Shrugged* is still relevant and no less important today than when it was published. He is convinced, as so many of us are, that its message will still matter in the coming years. As he puts it:

Atlas Shrugged is a timeless work, because it is a philosophical work. Much in the book is dated, to be sure, but not its philosophical core. *Atlas* is a ringing defense of capitalism as the only social system consistent with human nature and human values. It lays out in dramatic form the worldview on which a capitalist society depends; that human life in this world is the standard of value and morality; that reason is man's means of survival and the glory of his nature; that production, not sacrifice, is the most exalted form of human activity; that producers are the Atlases who carry our world on their shoulders; that thinking, creating, and producing are activities of individuals, who must be free to act on their own judgments, following their own visions; that the

individual has the moral right to live for himself and to pursue his own happiness, and does not need to justify his existence by service to God or country. (41)

According to Yaron Brook (2007):

Scores of business leaders, from CEOs of Fortune 500 companies to young entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley, say that they have derived great spiritual fuel from *Atlas Shrugged*. Many tell me that the novel has motivated them to make the most of their lives, inspiring them to be more ambitious, more productive, and more successful in their work. And many of America's politicians and intellectuals who claim to fight for economic freedom name *Atlas Shrugged* as the book that has most inspired them. I have no doubt that the novel has played a considerable role in discrediting socialism as an ideal and in making discussion of capitalism intellectually legitimate. . . . So while *Atlas Shrugged* has provided millions with inspiration and with some level of appreciation for the virtues of capitalism and the evils of statism, it has not had nearly the influence it could have had, had its underlying ideas gained wider understanding. Though it has changed individual lives, it has not changed the world. But I believe it could—and should. . . . But in order to get there, the novel's full philosophic meaning must be grasped.

Entrepreneurs as Change Agents

An entrepreneur's discovery of economic opportunities comes from leading a life of purposeful action. Entrepreneurs discover new ways of creating and combining resources to meet the needs of other people. They recognize and take advantage of previously unexploited profit opportunities. The art of selecting particular projects, while rejecting other ones, characterizes entrepreneurial behavior as essentially moral in nature. An entrepreneur is an active moral agent whose life is interconnected with the lives of others. By pursuing his own self-interest the entrepreneur creates value for other people.

In addition to being an agent of economic change, the entrepreneur is also an agent of social and cultural change. The economy is an integral part of the culture. The actions of entrepreneurs are open-ended and can be imagined and realized independently of existing social arrangements. They act upon their visions to effect economic changes that can lead to social and cultural changes. Culture is not immutable or homogeneous. It can change and evolve through the introduction of economic innovations in the form of goods and services. The introduction of these

innovations can supply the means for others to bring about additional changes in the economy, culture, and society. An innovative idea or product by one entrepreneur not only contributes to the progress of others, but can also create conditions permitting people to advance even further. Ideas interact in unexpected ways and are frequently used in unforeseen applications. Innovations build upon innovations in a free society. For example, skyscrapers, automobiles, and farm technology all built upon Carnegie's mass production of inexpensive steel.

In their 2016 book, *The Perfectionist Turn: From Metanorms to Metaethics*, Douglas Den Uyl and Douglas Rasmussen have a chapter titled "The Entrepreneur as Moral Hero." In this chapter, they discuss the creativity of human beings both in producing wealth and in making moral character, two activities that are parts of a flourishing life. Both of these projects require openness and alertness to new opportunities in the midst of changing circumstances across multiple dimensions of one's life. In general, it can be said that both entrepreneurship and ethics apply to virtually any type of human activity. Both entrepreneurship and moral action involve an insightful and evaluational approach to living one's life. The goal of both is integrity of action. Profit making can be a legitimate form of ethical expression. As acting agents, entrepreneurs should be concerned with the universal ethical question of what type of life one should pursue for oneself. As ethical agents, they must decide how they should change the world to achieve that same goal. Discovery and evaluation are key concepts in both ethics and entrepreneurship. Success in the market can be related to success in living one's life. "Ethical wealth, like economic wealth, will be a function of the degree to which individuals take it upon themselves to produce good lives" (Den Uyl and Rasmussen 2016, 441).

Powell and Candela (2014, 258–72) observe that practical reason and entrepreneurship interact to enable a process of moral discovery. They explain that entrepreneurship is an innate potentiality of all human beings and that practical wisdom is an entrepreneurial moral discovery process, mainly of ourselves, but also of our possible relationships with other people.

The ascent of the sharing economy illustrates how entrepreneurs can create social change, make all parties better off, and improve the allocation of resources in the economy. For example, Uber and Airbnb create new marketplaces, prompt individuals both as consumers and property owners to change their behavior, and provide everyone who has property (that is, capital) with opportunities to become entrepreneurs. People's views on capitalism, and themselves as capitalists, are likely to change as ideas in the structure of social change are embedded, intertwined, and distributed with other ideas and with new products, services, and marketplaces. As stated by McCloskey (2016, xii): "That is what mattered were two levels of ideas—the ideas of entrepreneurs for the betterments themselves (the electric motor, the airplane, the stock market);

and the ideas in society about the businesspeople and their betterments (in a word, liberalism).” Munger and Netle (2013, 1–30) explain that such entrepreneurs (as middlemen) aid people in correcting errors by making exchanges that produce value for both parties. They contend that the profit motive can be consistent with virtue, that entrepreneurship is the habit of right action, and that efforts in facilitating positive-sum exchanges increase the division of labor, thereby expanding both the breadth and quality of resources available to everyone. Such a voluntary process of entrepreneurial discovery is both self-directed and dependent upon particular, specialized, and local knowledge.

Rand (1957) presents entrepreneurs in *Atlas Shrugged* as the moral heroes of our modern world. She has Francisco d’Anconia refer to the American industrialist as “the real maker of wealth, the greatest worker, the highest type of human being” (414). She illustrates this in characters such as Dagny Taggart, Ellis Wyatt, Ken Danagger, Dan Conway, Midas Mulligan, Andrew Stockton, and especially Hank Rearden. Rearden is an inventor, metallurgist, and agent of economic change who takes ten painstaking years to envision, invent, and market a revolutionary metal alloy that is stronger, lighter, and less expensive than steel. Rand’s entrepreneurial heroes illustrate the mind’s role in producing the practical requirements of human lives. Adapting nature to people’s wants and needs creates material abundance for the purpose of surviving, flourishing, and enjoying life on earth.

Israel Kirzner (1973; 1989) has observed that certain people become alerted to the existence of opportunities that have been left unexploited simply because they have not been noticed by others. He explains that the act of discovering an opportunity can be viewed as a unique moral claim that confers property rights to the discoverer. In other words, the discovering entrepreneur is entitled to the profit that he has made.

A scene in *Atlas Shrugged* demonstrates this idea. When James Taggart tells Cheryl Brooks that Hank Rearden does not deserve to own his invention of Rearden Metal because he didn’t invent all of the processes that led to its discovery, Cheryl answers: “But the iron ore and all those other things were there all the time. Why didn’t anybody else make the Metal, but Mr. Rearden did?” (Rand 1957, 262).

In the real world, the entrepreneur in Silicon Valley can identify with the novel’s emphasis on heroic individuals and their work ethic. To some extent, Silicon Valley is consistent with Rand’s philosophy as depicted in *Atlas Shrugged*. The creative mind-set of the independent innovators, inventors, investors, and founders in Silicon Valley is in accord with ideas found in *Atlas Shrugged*.

The Strike as a Force for Change

Rand’s epic is a story about a heroic group, led by John Galt, who rebel, struggle against, and defeat the state and its allied looter businessmen. Galt is a creative genius and brilliant inventor of a revolutionary motor powered by

static electricity who secretly convinces the thinkers and producers to vanish mysteriously one after the other. He does this by educating and persuading them of the immorality of a culture that expropriates their talents. Galt's strategy is to "stop the motor of the world" by getting the creators to refuse to be exploited any longer by joining his slow-spreading strike and going to live in his secret utopian community founded on the philosophy of freedom. Knowing that the country will ultimately implode, Galt and the strikers will hasten its collapse by withdrawing the "sanction of the victims." At that point, they will return to the outside world. Galt is a rational man of action who pursues his goal despite obstacles, espouses a message of liberation through strategic withdrawal, and founds a community based on voluntarism, individuality, and self-interest.

The striker-heroes use the strategy and tactic of direct action against the state and its looter businessman allies. At the most general level, this occurs when the entrepreneurs, industrialists, inventors, and engineers altogether withdraw from society. By translating the theoretical products of reason into the practical requirements of individuals' lives, these producers, leaders, and wealth creators had been the foundation of the economy. When Galt announces and explains the strike in his radio speech, the American people come to understand the mind's role in material production and the mind's nonnegotiable need of freedom.

As change agents, the novel's heroes also take more specific steps and direct actions. For example, John Galt and Francisco d'Anconia, the strike's primary recruiters, meet with leading industrialists and engineers in order to educate and persuade them to join the strike. Galt's other direct actions include his unwillingness to introduce his revolutionary motor to the market economy and his takeover of public radio broadcasting for his three-hour speech in which he spells out the tenets of his philosophy. Francisco also deliberately destroys his copper mines methodically instead of allowing them to be taken over by the looters. Through this action and by his previous manipulations of the stock market, he contributes to the downfall of looter businessmen who invested in his company as well as to the disintegration of other businesses.

Other heroes employ direct action in their efforts to change society. Here are a few examples. In an act of defiance in response to the destructive Colorado Directives, Wyatt sets fire to his oil wells and disappears. Banker Midas Mulligan withdraws from society when he is ordered to lend money to an incompetent and undeserving loan applicant. He liquidates his bank holdings, pays off his depositors, converts his wealth into gold, and purchases land that becomes Galt's Gulch, the hideaway of the striking entrepreneurs. An alternative currency, minted by Mulligan, is used in Galt's Gulch. The money supply in this hidden counter-economy consists of gold and silver coins. Then there is the pirate, Ragnar Danneskjöld, who raids state-owned cargo relief ships sent to Europe in order to return to the producers what is rightly their property.

In addition, we witness Ragnar leveling a factory of Orren Boyle's Associated Steel to the ground after giving his employees a ten-minute warning to leave the plant. Then toward the end of the novel, we see Dagny, Francisco, Ragnar, and Rearden invading the State Science Institute in order to free John Galt, who is being held as a prisoner there.

The Effects of *Atlas Shrugged* on Readers

Reading a novel is a private act and an individual undertaking that can have transformative effects. Its unpredictable effects are matters of individual rational discernment and emotional response. Ultimately, the impact of a work of literature depends upon the mind and heart of the particular reader. A meaningful reaction requires partnership between the author and the reader. There is a metadiscursive relationship between the novel and the individual reader. Each person must judge a work of imaginative literature for himself. Some people who read *Atlas Shrugged* will be turned off and others will be inspired by its vision. Of those motivated by the novel, some may embrace Rand's complete rethinking of philosophy based on the advocacy of a particular social system and a particular notion of human existence within a social context. However, it is more likely that the majority of those excited by her ideas will go no further than to embrace the idea of the desirability of free-market capitalism. Then there may be some individuals informed and excited by *Atlas Shrugged* who develop novel perspectives on Rand's ideas or take them into new directions. Ideas beget new ideas.

For some readers, *Atlas Shrugged* will be seen as the embodiment of the grandeur of human achievement in its heroic vision of individuals who do their work well and to the best of their ability, whatever that work and that ability may be. Such readers are likely to experience the joy of seeing other people doing their work extremely well. In Dagny Taggart's words: "The sight of an achievement was the greatest gift that one human being could offer to others" (237).

Many people process information in narrative form and are therefore strongly influenced by stories. For such individuals, *Atlas Shrugged* can be a memorable and inspirational tale that can elicit an emotional response. It can make a difference to those who read it by providing a place to examine values, ethics, and morals. By projecting themselves into the story, readers can learn a great deal about reality. Through reading *Atlas Shrugged*, people may actually end up changing their own values, ideas, and actions.

Atlas Shrugged offers a total reformulation of philosophy and its function in the various dimensions of an individual's life. Its speeches lay out a new philosophy and moral code and the heroes' actions dramatize that philosophy and moral code. It supplies a number of specific insights into

the nature of human beings and the actions required to live a flourishing life as a unique individual. The novel prompts its readers to consider the moral and ethical principles that they accept either explicitly or implicitly. It also disseminates and illustrates the principles and theories underpinning the freedom philosophy and promotes the values of the free enterprise system in understandable language and depiction. *Atlas Shrugged* offers a vision of capitalism as a moral ideal. This novel has provided a gateway to many people to free-market ideas and will continue to do so. *Atlas Shrugged* can lead readers to discover works by other free-market-oriented philosophers and economists such as John Locke, Adam Smith, Jean-Baptiste Say, Herbert Spencer, Carl Menger, Ludwig von Mises, Murray Rothbard, Friedrich A. Hayek, Milton Friedman, James M. Buchanan, Robert Nozick, Thomas Sowell, and others. It has the power to convert beliefs and to elicit changes in a person's thinking.

A Good Start, But Not Enough

At the end of *Atlas Shrugged*, the utopian entrepreneurs rescue Galt, the looters are vanquished, and the strikers return to the Valley. There we see Judge Narragansett correcting contradictions in the Constitution and adding a new clause stating that "Congress shall make no law abridging the freedom of production and trade . . ." (1167–68). Then we hear Galt pronouncing "The road is cleared, we are going back to the world" (1168).

This ending has always puzzled me. I wanted to see more. The strategy of the men of ability going on strike and moving to a remote valley where they could flourish in the absence of state regulation may be a good one but it is not sufficient or realistic with respect to bringing about a long-term social change in the form of a free-market society. In the real world, attempts at achieving strategic withdrawal include the Free State Project in New Hampshire, Liberland in Europe, and seasteading and homesteading proposals in Central America and Somalia led by Werner Stiefel, Michiel van Notten, and others.

I have often wondered what would happen when Galt and the other heroes return to rebuild society. Yes, Galt explained the strike and the philosophy of life in a three-hour radio speech to the American people. In addition, the American people have seen the men of the mind in the world, their gradual disappearance, the effects of the looters' policies, and the resulting crumbling of the world. But have these events been enough to win their minds and hearts with respect to the need for a free society? The needed individual, cultural, and institutional changes require a lot of time and effort. The story of how the strikers rebuild America would be a great sequel to *Atlas Shrugged*, depicting them struggling through obstacles and opposition.

In the real world, there are a number of procedural and practical institutional steps that need to be taken in a disjointed incremental manner in order to move toward a society of *laissez-faire* capitalism. These steps include, but are not limited to, (1) privatizing government property, programs, and functions such as education; (2) reducing and ultimately abolishing income and inheritance taxes; (3) establishing freedom of production and trade by abolishing labor, licensure, antitrust, zoning, and other laws and regulations; (4) abolishing the central bank and instituting gold as money; (5) eliminating Social Security, Medicare, public welfare, and public hospitals; (6) separating government and sciences because force and mind are not compatible; (7) ending business subsidies; (8) allowing free trade by eliminating tariffs, quotas, and other protectionist measures; (9) ceasing to be the world's policemen while maintaining a strong defensive military; and (10) eliminating government agencies and most cabinet departments, leaving a minimal state sufficient to protect contractual and property rights and provide for American's defense. Many intermediate, transitional, and incremental steps are needed to reach such a destination.

The institutions of a society can be affected by the ideas of the majority of the people in that society. If the goal is to create a capitalistic society, then it is important to get people to change their ideas. This will help to create a culture of liberty that would serve as a foundation for a free society. Intellectual, attitudinal, and behavioral changes are a function of culture and vice versa. There is a need to study the cognitive, cultural, and nonrational factors that affect people's attitudes and actions with respect to political, economic, and moral-cultural freedom. The key to going from our current interventionist political and economic system to a society of *laissez-faire* capitalism is long-term education aimed at rational persuasion and conversion.

As discussed by Sciabarra ([1995] 2013; 2000; 2007), attaining social change is a complex, nonlinear, interlocking process that occurs at the levels of (1) the perspectives of the cognitive, psychological, and moral dimensions of individual human beings; (2) the cultural traditions and ideologies that prevail in society; and (3) the political structures that define and protect individual rights and that make and enforce laws, regulations, taxation, and so on. These three levels are factors of social influence and change and they each have reciprocal effects on one another. Heterogeneous individual agents primarily working at different levels frequently interact when pursuing their activities. Respect for one another's metanormative rights and adherence to the rules of the game are crucial ingredients in this social change process.

Prospects for one monumental leap to a free-market society are not realistic. Many intermediate, transitional, and incremental steps are needed. It is necessary to disseminate the principles and theories of the freedom philosophy and promote the values of the free enterprise system in understandable nontechnical

terms in order to attain a shift of conventional wisdom. The institutions of any society stem from the ideas of the majority of the people in that society. It is important to get influential people to change their ideas. These ideas will then filter throughout society. The ideas of original thinkers like Rand need to be accepted by intellectuals and popularizers such as journalists, teachers, radio and TV commentators, writers, and so forth. In order to win the hearts and minds of a significant portion of the population, a multipronged educational approach is needed. This will require a long time horizon and involves academic institutions, traditional and social media, popular culture, literature, and so on.

There are a great many coercive challenges, encroachments, and constraints that have inhibited the establishment of a society based on the natural liberty of the individual and the realities of the human condition. By nature, these barriers tend to be philosophical, economic, and political. Some of the strongest attacks on, and impediments to, a free society include collectivist philosophies, cultural relativism, communitarianism, environmentalism, public education, taxation, protectionism, antitrust laws, government regulation, and monetary inflation. These bureaucratic and socialistic ideologies and schemes tend to stem from various sources such as true human compassion, envy, the insecurity of people who want protection from life's uncertainties, categorical "solutions" proposed to solve social problems, idealism, and the tendency to think only of intended, primary, and immediate results while ignoring unintended, ancillary, and long-term ones.

Activists for freedom will not accomplish much unless they work to bring about a cultural renaissance to countermand the trends in today's culture that threaten individual liberty. They will have a difficult time making progress toward their goal of a free society unless they consider and analyze particular cultural, institutional, social, psycho-epistemological, and historical conditions of freedom and social order. It is essential for them to discover how these conditions can be changed in order to move toward the establishment of a free society. It will be easier to establish a minimal state in a culture in which people prize freedom, objectivity, responsibility, achievement, and personal happiness. To do so, they will need to evaluate various cultures and work to change individuals' cultural assumptions. There are reciprocal causes and effects between culture and the attitudinal and behavioral changes of individuals. It is essential for change agents to advance rational ideas throughout all aspects of our culture—education, commerce, science, art and music, media, politics, and so on. They need to promote a culture of reason and individualism and a sense of life oriented to production, innovation, material prosperity, great art and music, self-responsibility, happiness, and others. To reach their goal will require many small but meaningful changes in our culture.

There is a crucial need for cultural intellectuals who can help spread the philosophy of freedom to the general public. There are currently very few libertarians in the media and academia who advocate a free society. People must work to lessen the prevalent bias against capitalism in newspapers, magazines, novels, plays, television programs, philosophy and history books, and so on. For years, the media have consistently and persistently attacked capitalism, commerce, and the premises of classical liberalism. Change agents must cultivate a new generation of artists and reporters who will help to disseminate the ideas of liberty.

Individuals and private mediating institutions must take the lead in promoting a culture of liberty and virtue in which reason and independent thinking are highly valued. This can be done by example and through moral discourse, education, art and literature, praise and blame, and so on. All of this must be done without contradicting the nonaggression principle, which provides a metanormative foundational floor of basic morality for individual lives and societies.

A classical liberal social order allows people to be free to pursue their own ends and to associate with those they choose. Individuals are able to be self-directed and to express their diverse interests, values, and life goals once their rights are secured and protected. The desirability, legitimation, or justification of a minimal state that protects and secures freedom and diversity does not depend upon the existence of a particular type of moral-cultural order. Such a political order is objectively based on the nature of human beings who need a protected moral sphere for the possibility of self-directedness. It follows that a legitimate political order is not concerned with the culture, morals, values, and virtues of individuals. A political philosophy is not a philosophy of life.

Although a metanormative political order is not necessarily coincidental with, or dependent upon, a particular moral-cultural system, the establishment and support of such a political order would be easier to bring about if there were widely shared beliefs and articulations with respect to its underpinning political principles as well as with certain moral principles. It follows that people need to work as individuals, and in concert with others in civil society, to build a freedom-friendly culture of moral and virtuous people who strive to create a good life, to flourish, and to be happy.

***Atlas Shrugged* in Social Movements**

People join social movements because they want to manifest their beliefs in the world along with others who hold the same ideas. There are some social movements that have taken Rand's ideas as expressed in *Atlas Shrugged* and adapted or adopted them into, or as, their own philosophy. To some degree, *Atlas*

Shrugged has inspired the Tea Party movement. Signs quoting characters from *Atlas Shrugged*, especially John Galt, proliferate at Tea Party rallies and protests. Tea Partiers resonate with the novel's messages of anti-big government, confidence in individual liberty, and the ethic of work and self-responsibility.

As a social movement, Objectivism is most strongly represented today by such organizations as the Ayn Rand Institute (ARI) and the Atlas Society. The members of both of these organizations believe that *Atlas Shrugged* is a book that can aid in changing the world. Both organizations use Rand's novel in their efforts to bring about a cultural renaissance that will revise the anti-freedom, anti-reason, anti-individualist, and anti-capitalist concepts in modern culture. Whereas Objectivism is a closed system for ARI, for the Atlas Society it is an open system in which its ideas are susceptible to extension by individuals who accept its basic premises.

In 2017, ARI, under the general rubric of Objectivist Movement 2.0, plans to place a greater emphasis on community building and cultural change. The idea is to bring together professional intellectuals—that is, scholars and advanced students—to discuss their work, to plan collaborative projects, and to exhibit and to increase the energy of the Objectivist community. Workshops are planned to bring together professional individuals from a variety of areas including philosophy, economics, business, education, science, psychology, law, and so on. In addition, ARI has held worldwide essay contests for students on Rand's novels (including *Atlas Shrugged*) for more than thirty years.

The Atlas Society, in keeping with its emphasis on reaching the next generation of leaders, has announced a new partnership with Turning Point USA. The Atlas Society and Turning Point will jointly screen the three *Atlas Shrugged* films on more than seventy-seven campuses in early 2017. The goal is to use *Atlas Shrugged* to introduce the next generation of citizens to the moral foundations of the free market. The Atlas Society is also working with Students for Liberty to provide an introductory course on Objectivism to their large following.

Atlas Shrugged is now being taught in colleges and universities in a variety of courses. These inroads have been largely made due to the tireless efforts of one man. Not only did John Allison, former president and CEO of BB&T Bank, require his managers to read *Atlas Shrugged*, he also funded nearly seventy programs at institutions of higher learning throughout the United States, which were required to use *Atlas Shrugged* in the classroom to study the moral foundations of capitalism and commerce. This is his strategy to spread free-market principles on U.S. campuses. This change agent is a man with a purpose. He is on a crusade to counteract the anti-capitalist orthodoxy and culture that are prevalent at most universities.

BB&T-funded institutions have offered a variety of classes in economics, the moral foundations of capitalism, business ethics, and so on. In addition, many

have established centers or institutes, funded faculty chairs or professorships, held speakers series, funded faculty research, and established Ayn Rand or capitalism reading rooms.

It is clear that Ayn Rand's magnum opus *Atlas Shrugged* is making advances into education and academia. It has already had various cultural effects that can only serve as the fuel for genuine institutional and social change.

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