

# Philosophical and Literary Integration in Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*

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**ABSTRACT:** This expository essay relies on the views of scholars writing about *Atlas Shrugged* to make a case that it is a highly integrated work of imaginative literature. The article focuses on the ways in which integration is manifested in *Atlas Shrugged*. Part 1 examines the philosophical structure of the novel. Part 2 addresses literary structure. This is followed by a discussion of Rand's techniques of characterization. An analysis of the speeches and the theme of mind-body integration concludes the discussion.

In *Atlas Shrugged* (1957), Ayn Rand presents her original and controversial philosophy of Objectivism in dramatized form. More than a great novel, it expounds a radically new philosophy with amazing clarity. *Atlas Shrugged* presents an integrated and all-embracing perspective of man and man's relationship to the world and manifests the essentials of an entire philosophical system—metaphysics, epistemology, politics, and ethics. *Atlas Shrugged* embodies Objectivism in the actions of the story's heroes.

Leonard Peikoff (2004) explains that the most extraordinary quality of *Atlas Shrugged* is its integration. Ayn Rand understood that everything that is included in a novel affects that novel. She realized that the unity of a literary work depends upon the necessary causal and logical connections among its many aspects. It follows that she included no random elements or events. Rand tied everything to *Atlas Shrugged's* unifying theme of “the role of the mind in human existence” (Rand [1971] 1975, 81).

*Atlas Shrugged* is a model of integration among theme, story, and characters. All elements are logically connected, tied to the whole, and synthesized with the novel's unifying theme. In *Atlas Shrugged* every character, event, line of dialogue, or description is related to its theme. Even the philosophical speeches are integrated with the events of the story.

According to Chris Matthew Sciabarra (2007):

As a novel, *Atlas Shrugged* is a remarkable achievement of integration. Rand had always seen the plot of a novel, its story, as a structured totality: “A STORY IS AN END IN ITSELF,” she wrote to one correspondent. “It is written as a man is born—an organic whole, dictated only by its own laws and its own necessity—an end in itself . . .” (Letter to Gerald Loeb, 5 August 1944, in Rand 1995, 157). And so, it is no coincidence that *Atlas Shrugged* itself is a superbly integrated “organic whole,” one that fused action, adventure and sensuality with philosophy, contemplation and spirituality, incorporating elements of science fiction and fantasy, symbolism and realism. It launched a philosophical movement that has been nothing less than revolutionary in its implications. (31)

*Atlas Shrugged* is appealing on many levels. It is a moral defense of capitalism, political parable, social commentary, science fiction tale, mystery story, love story, and more. The longer and more deeply a person studies *Atlas Shrugged*, the more he or she will be able to appreciate how these multiple approaches to plot enrich one another. Taken together, these manifold perspectives impart a moral sense of life that inspires admiration for each individual person's highest potential (i.e., as he or she can be and ought to be).

Peikoff observes that *Atlas Shrugged's* marvelously constructed and interwoven plot is a miracle of organization encompassing multiple layers or tiers of depth. Every event, action, and character serves both dramatic and philosophical purposes. Every line is important. Rand's emblematic characters have all irrelevancies and accidents removed. Rand probes each character's motives, connects a set of personal traits to each character's motivation, and integrates the actions of the characters with their motivation and character traits.

Rand selects and integrates actions and events that dramatize the theme of the novel. *Atlas Shrugged* is a “story about human beings in action” (Rand 2000a, 17). Rand thinks in essentials in uniting all of the issues of the actions in the novel. Her concern is with values and issues that can be expressed in action. The story’s plot action is based on the integration of values and action and of mind and body. Rand thereby shows actions supporting wide abstract principles.

The events and characters of *Atlas Shrugged* portray the philosophical principles that affect the actual existence of men in the world. The conflict between the looters and the creators dramatizes the struggle between contradictory visions, values, and moralities. Because human values are abstractions made from observations, the reader is given concretes in the novel in order for the abstract values to become real for him or her.

By including only that which is essential, Rand illustrates the connections between metaphysical abstractions and their concrete expressions. *Atlas Shrugged* is a feat of complex structural integration. The author carefully selected the details with no event, character, line of dialogue, or description included that does not further and reinforce the theme of the importance of reason. Nothing is thrown in arbitrarily. Rand was aware of the specific purpose of every chapter, paragraph, and sentence and could state a reason for every word and punctuation mark in the novel (4).

This article is a “summary of the literature” that frequently relies on the views of people writing about *Atlas Shrugged* to make a case for *Atlas Shrugged* as a highly integrated novel. All of the parts of this article explain, in one way or another, how integration and unity are represented in *Atlas Shrugged*. The first section examines the philosophical structure and integration of this great philosophical novel. The next part deals with issues of literary structure and integration. This is followed by an examination of Rand’s techniques of characterization and character development as displayed in *Atlas Shrugged*. The subsequent section takes a look at the philosophical speeches. Mind-body integration is the subject of the last major section. The conclusion discusses *Atlas Shrugged* as the embodiment of a fully integrated philosophical novel.

## Philosophical Integration

*Atlas Shrugged* is an achievement of intricate structural composition and integration. The titles of its three major sections pay tribute to Aristotle, correspond to his basic laws of thought, and accomplish a thematic goal by implying something regarding the meaning of the events and actions in the respective sections of the novel. In part 1, called “Non-Contradiction,” there is a long series of strange and apparently contradictory events and paradoxes with no discernible logical solution. In part 2, “Either-or,” based on Aristotle’s Law of Excluded Middle, Dagny faces a fundamental choice with no middle road—to continue

to battle to save her business or to give it up. Part 2 also focuses on the conflict between two classes of humanity—the looters and the creators. Part 3, “A is A,” is based on Aristotle’s Law of Identity. In it, Dagny and Rearden (along with the reader) learn the true nature of the events, and all the apparent contradictions are identified and resolved (Minsaas 1994; Bernstein 1995). By part 3, both the characters and the readers are able to see the story as an interrelated network of events. In addition, there are multiple and integrated layers and levels of meaning and implications for each of *Atlas Shrugged’s* thirty chapters. Rand’s chapter titles are meaningful at the literal level in addition to being significant at deeper philosophical and symbolic levels (Bernstein 1995; Seddon 2007, 47–56).

Douglas B. Rasmussen (2007, 33–45) explains that Rand’s reality-is-intelligible thesis is vividly expressed in the section titles of *Atlas Shrugged*. The basic meaning of this thesis is that the things of existence have an identity and that these things can be known. As he explains,

These titles correspond to the Aristotelian laws of thought: Non-Contradiction (the Law of Non-Contradiction [also sometimes called The Law of Contradiction]; Either-Or (the Law of Excluded Middle); and A is A (the Law of Identity). For Rand, as for Aristotle, these laws of thought are not merely how we must think in order to obtain knowledge; they also describe the fundamental character of reality. These laws are thus ontological and pertain to the very nature of being. Nothing can ultimately exist or be that fails to comply with these principles. The nature of reality is such that (1) something cannot be and not-be at the same time and in the same respect; (2) something either exists or does not exist at a given time and in a given respect; and (3) something is what it is at a given time and in a given respect. (34)

Rasmussen notes that for Rand, the laws of thought are not a priori mental categories that people impose on sense perceptions to make them intelligible. Rather, they are laws of reality. It follows that the method of logic is defined by the laws of reality. There is a difference between something as it exists in a man’s cognition and as it exists independently of that cognition.

According to Greg Salmieri (2007), the messages of part 1 are relatively concrete compared to the lessons of parts 2 and 3.<sup>1</sup> Part 1 sets the context of the novel and tells the story of Dagny Taggart’s greatest accomplishment, the construction of the John Galt Line, and its paradoxical consequences. It illustrates that rationality is the cause of the construction of the John Galt Line. Part 2 is essentially moral and is more abstract than part 1. It contrasts two opposite moral codes (the morality of life and the morality of death) and the effects of each. Part 2 also portrays Hank Rearden’s progressive liberation from guilt and Dagny’s conflict stemming from her mistaken premises regarding

the looters and the strikers. Part 2 also demonstrates the redounding sequence of events and consequences of the actions of the strikers and the looters and introduces the idea of the “destroyer.” Part 3 can be viewed as metaphysical or as moral/metaphysical. This part recasts moral issues in terms of opposite attitudes toward existence. It follows Rearden and Dagny as they grasp more abstractly, fully, and deeply the state of the world and how they should act in it. The whole truth becomes apparent to them when they hear Galt’s speech, every point of which is a structured restatement of a progressive reasoning process that has taken place throughout the novel. They ultimately come to understand the relevant principles, thereby realizing the need to go on strike.

Salmieri explains that *Atlas Shrugged* is epistemologically progressive and hierarchically inductive as its characters draw abstractions concurrently as the readers are intended to draw them. The characters perform successive inductions and abstractions throughout the novel, ending in extremely wide and abstract principles as expressed in Galt’s speech. As the characters operate at successively higher levels of abstraction, they see ever more remote and complex causal connections. Rand’s characters first comprehend narrow truths about alternative moral codes and then go broader and deeper with respect to the philosophical significance, meaning, and connection of these truths. Throughout the novel new realizations lead to more questions.

*Atlas Shrugged* becomes progressively more abstract as Dagny and Rearden come to understand increasingly broader abstractions and larger causal connections. By grasping more abstract and sophisticated concepts, these characters, along with the alert reader, gain a wider contextual perspective on the novel’s events. Both Dagny and Rearden steadily but gradually gain further realizations about what motivates the looters. They comprehend more deeply and abstractly the nature of two alternative moral codes and what happens if one chooses the wrong moral code. The climactic results are a way of thinking and capping integration that is expounded in Galt’s speech and evidenced in Dagny and Rearden’s decisions to go on strike. *Atlas Shrugged’s* plot-theme, the mind on strike, is the essential line of its events. It is the central means of presenting the theme and the main conflict and of linking the theme to the action (Rand 2000a, 40–44; [1971] 1975, 82–86). More specifically, the plot-theme is the “men of the mind going on strike against an altruist-collectivist society” (Rand [1971] 1975, 85). This is the central situation that dramatizes and expresses *Atlas Shrugged’s* abstract theme.

Rand presents conflict in terms of action thus creating a “purposeful progression of events” (2000a, 17). To do this she portrays strong willful characters, the creators and the looters, who are in sharp moral conflict with one another. She thereby expresses the plot conflict in action. Dagny Taggart and Hank Rearden, the primary creators, philosophically are against the looters,

but in action they support them. In addition, existentially Dagny and Rearden oppose Galt and the strikers but philosophically agree with them. The plot of *Atlas Shrugged* is a story of human action from which moral issues cannot be separated (Bernstein 1995).

The major plot of *Atlas Shrugged* is the story of the strike (Rand 1997, 399, 416–17, 428–33). In her 1994 audio course, Kirsti Minsaas explains that Rand gradually supplies hints and clues about the strike and that, through the use and emphasis of subsidiary surface plots, she is able to keep the events of the major plot hidden and to reveal the strike only in a step-by-step and retrospective manner. These secondary cover plots include (1) Dagny Taggart and Hank Rearden's struggle to save their respective companies and industries primarily through the construction of the John Galt Line and (2) Dagny's quests to find the inventor of the revolutionary motor and to find and stop the destroyer who is draining the brains of the world. Through the pursuit of the above objectives, the main plot is revealed, the mystery is solved, the question "Who is John Galt?" is answered, and the reasons for the collapse of the railroad and of industrial society are understood (Bernstein 1995). The plot of *Atlas Shrugged* has an inexorable internal logic in which the intellectual puzzle is acted out and solved by the heroes.

In his 1995 audio course, Andrew Bernstein observes that there are dual lines of action in *Atlas Shrugged* involving the observable and the unobservable. We perceive Dagny and Hank striving to construct the John Galt Line and searching for the inventor of the motor. We also see the looters, their policies, and the disastrous effects of their policies. What is not discernible is John Galt removing the men of the mind from the world and relocating them in Mulligan's Valley. The key link between these two spheres of action is Eddie Willers, who unknowingly feeds information to John Galt, disguised as a low-level worker with whom Eddie has lunch. The construction of the John Galt Line most directly depicts the mind's role in human existence. Much of the balance of the novel demonstrates the effects of the absence of the men of the mind (Rand 2000a, 12). *Atlas Shrugged* teaches that prosperity and productivity depend upon the mind by showing both the presence and absence of the producers in the world.

## Literary Integration

Many articles could be devoted to the study of Ayn Rand's literary theory and practice as exemplified in *Atlas Shrugged*. Among the topics that could be studied are her controlled and consistent literary patterns, plot and plot-theme, dialogues, use of action, method of portraying values, use of symbolism and imagery, use of mythology, approach to characterization and character development, method of controlling perspective, descriptive style, rhetorical approaches, and use of literary forms such as utopia, dystopia, tragedy, comedy,

chronicle, and epic (Saint-Andre 2006; Cox 1986). This section of this article serves as a brief introduction to the literary aspects of *Atlas Shrugged*.

The most crucial events in *Atlas Shrugged* are dramatized. The key events are shown to the reader as if they were occurring before the reader's eyes. Rand also uses flashbacks (e.g., Eddie Willers thinking back to his childhood) to convey important information. Less critical information is simply narrated (Rand 2000a, 145–58).

Rand applies her inductive theory of concept formation in writing *Atlas Shrugged*, as well as in her other works of fiction. Rand projects important abstractions dealing with values, virtues, emotions, and so on in specific concrete actions. She first presents a “visual description by means of essentials and then the symbolic and philosophic meaning of that description” (127).

*Atlas Shrugged* is primarily presented to the reader in a form that a person would perceive it in real life. Although Rand chooses the focus or perspective, she presents the reader with “direct sensory evidence” and does not tell him or her what to think or to feel. She provides information by giving the reader precise, “concrete, objective facts” and observational details. The reader is given the evidence in context, and it is up to him or her to make a reasoned judgment (97).

Andrew Bernstein (1995; 2007, 53–62) has examined four of the integrated literary techniques Rand employed to magnify the plot-theme of the great minds on strike and, as a result, the theme of the mind's role in human life. These techniques included symbolism, irony, recasting Greek myths, and what Bernstein has called the juxtaposition of philosophical opposites. Bernstein points out that these literary techniques are never employed as ends in themselves, but rather only in order to further integrate and embody *Atlas Shrugged's* plot-theme and theme.

Rand mainly dramatizes the meaning of *Atlas Shrugged* in action, but still effectively uses some symbolism as a supplemental technique. She often, but not always, first illustrates an idea in action and then uses a symbol to bring abstract subject matter down to the observational level. Some symbols in *Atlas Shrugged* are introduced before they are supported by observational detail. But there are no “floating symbols” in *Atlas Shrugged*. Rand has the reader experience particular concrete actions in order to have enough information to inductively derive and understand the principle involved, and she employs a symbol to capture the essence of the abstraction (Bernstein 1995). The idea that a tangible symbol represents is something abstract. Key symbols in *Atlas Shrugged* include (1) the oak tree, (2) the calendar, (3) the bracelet of Rearden metal (in the form of a chain), (4) Wyatt's torch, (5) the sign of the dollar, (6) Galt's motor, and (7) the cigarette.

The oak tree on the Taggart estate had represented greatness, permanence, and strength to Eddie Willers until lightning struck it, tearing it apart and revealing that it was hollow and had rotted away on the inside. This symbolizes both the deterioration of Taggart Transcontinental, as evidenced by the presidency of the incompetent James Taggart, and the disintegration of modern industrial civilization. The calendar ominously looking over the city evokes the phrase “your days are numbered” to Eddie, thus supplying another symbol of the decay and encroaching demise of the economy. The bracelet of Rearden metal made from the first pouring of this metal is symbolic, at one level, of Hank Rearden’s life work and of his accomplishments. When he gives it to his wife, this shows his pride in his achievements. Later, Lillian calls it “the chain by which he holds us all in bondage,” inviting the question of who is in bondage to whom and by what means. This implies to the reader that it is the spiritual chain of altruistic ethics that has Rearden tethered to his family members. When Ellis Wyatt leaves the outside world he sets fire to his oil fields. “Wyatt’s torch” continues to burn long after he departs, symbolizing both defiance of the looters and the fact that the mind cannot be forced to work. The dollar sign stands for the currency of the United States as a free society, and for the belief in capitalism as the most moral and productive system. Galt’s motor is symbolic of the power of the human mind and of how the producers are needed in the world. Both Galt’s motor and the men of the mind are withdrawn from the market economy. Finally, given the time period during which the novel is written, the cigarette may have been intended as a symbol of pleasure (Merrill 1991, 60–61; Bernstein 1995).

Irony, as a literary device, involves the use of words to convey an actual meaning that is opposite of their literal meaning. Irony in literature involves incongruity between the actual meaning of a statement, character, or event and its apparent meaning. Irony in *Atlas Shrugged* is integrated into the conflict and has both aesthetic and epistemological value to the reader. As explained by Andrew Bernstein (2007),

*Atlas Shrugged* as a whole is a single, integrated, sustained exercise in literary irony. This is inevitable because of the multiple action levels, the duality between appearance and reality. Since Dagny and the other narrators know nothing of the strike, they interpret the disappearances, the collapse, and the haunting question as inimical to man’s life on earth. But to those privy to the strike, the meaning of these events is positive, for the events actually establish cultural groundwork for the intellectual-moral-political renaissance that, for the first time, will make possible the full flourishing of human life on earth. The all-encompassing global irony integrated into the very



essence of the plot produces a riveting stream of brilliantly ironic scenes and passages. (56)

Robert Bidinotto (2007) observes that “Rand’s subtlety extends to dialogue . . . where double and triple meanings are often embedded in what seems to be casual conversations. For example, there is a delightful irony in many of the early references to inventor-hero John Galt, but since they occur long before he appears in the story, most of them won’t be apparent during a first reading” (52).

Rand also effectively alters and adapts some famous Greek myths in order to tell them from an Objectivist viewpoint. These myths include (1) Phaëton, (2) Prometheus, (3) Atlantis, (4) Atlas, (5) Odysseus and the Sirens (as alluded to in the story of Roger Marsh), and (6) King Midas. Ayn Rand’s use and recasting of ancient Greek myths adds to the epic scope of *Atlas Shrugged*. By changing them, she challenges their traditional meaning and endorses them with new meaning reflecting a revolutionary worldview complete with a new moral philosophy.

In the original Greek myth Phaëton, the son of Helios, steals his father’s chariot, tries to drive the sun across the sky, and perishes. However, in Richard Halley’s opera of the same name he succeeds. Prometheus in the original version gives fire to man and Zeus punishes him by having a vulture eat his liver every night only to have the liver grow back each morning. In Rand’s version Prometheus is not doomed. She writes that John Galt is Prometheus who changed his mind. He has broken his chains and has withdrawn his fire until the day when men withdraw their vultures. The Atlantis myth tells the story of an initially noble and partly divine race of people who become corrupt and are punished by the gods who sink their island. In *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand creates her valley of heroes (known as Galt’s Gulch, Mulligan’s Valley, and Atlantis) as a utopian society where rational people can enter and live. In the original myth, Atlas was condemned to carry the weight of the world on his shoulders. In *Atlas Shrugged* the weight of the world is placed on the shoulders of the producers. Francisco tells Rearden that he would tell Atlas “to shrug.” Atlas symbolizes the prime movers or creators who are asked to shrug by going on strike in order to shake off their burden and to show the world how desperately that it needs them. Odysseus has been warned about the lovely Sirens whom he will encounter on his voyage home. The Siren’s beautiful singing lures sailors to their death by leaping overboard in their attempts to join the Sirens. Odysseus has his men plug their ears with beeswax and has them bind him to the mast of the ship. He alone hears their seductive song as he begs to be unchained. His faithful men follow his instructions and bind him even tighter. In *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand tells the story of Roger Marsh, of Marsh Electric, who told Ted Nielsen, of Nielson Motors, that he did not want to become one of the

deserters. He said that he would have himself chained to his desk so that he would not be able to leave regardless of the temptation. He said that if he did vanish he would leave a note explaining why. He departed to live in the valley and left no such letter (Bernstein 1995; Minsaas 1994; 2007, 141–50). In Greek mythology, Dionysus granted Midas, king of Phrygia, the power to turn everything into gold by touch. After he turned his daughter into gold through a hug, he begged to be relieved of the gift. In *Atlas Shrugged*, Midas Mulligan received his name because he had a great talent to make profitable investments. Unlike the legendary King Midas, Mulligan is happy with his gift and does not want to give it up.

Rand's frequent use of the literary technique of the juxtaposition of opposites involves the sequential presentation and contrasting in consecutive scenes of the universe of the irrational Kantian-Marxists and the universe of the rational men of the mind. By dramatizing the world of the emotional and inefficacious looters with that of the creative and life-promoting producers in side-by-side scenes, Rand successfully illustrates entire opposed philosophical systems in action and in conflict (Bernstein 1995; 2007, 60–63). Minsaas (1995) instructs the reader of Rand's novels to pay close attention to the author's "thematic interweaving of ideas through the causal patterning and organization of the events." This involves the use of analogical juxtaposition—the method of holding up parallels and contrasts in scenes, descriptions, events, characters, symbols, and so on.

Lester Hunt (2007, 57–62) has commented that *Atlas Shrugged* is a very intentional novel with every detail designed to mean something. Every aspect of the story has a "why" and a "what for." Hunt then describes the extraordinary meaning-saturation of this novel. Hunt terms one structural feature Rand's "twinning device." Such mirroring with a difference involves "meaning-bearing elements that are linked by salient similarities and at the same time opposed to one another in potentially significant ways" (59). For example, there are two steel magnates (Rearden and Orren Boyle), two major characters with mixed philosophical premises (Rearden and Dr. Robert Stadler), two dysfunctional marriages (Hank and Lillian Rearden's and James and Cheryl Taggart's), two scientists (Galt and Stadler), and so on. Hunt explains that one of the results of this twinning device is to guide the reader's attention toward making mental integrations based on perceiving real similarities and real differences. This reflects Rand's epistemological theory, which holds that the creation of human knowledge involves the finding of bona fide similarities and differences among things.

*Atlas Shrugged* is a story of human action on a monumental scale in which Rand skillfully ties physical actions to important human values. Values and value premises, especially those relating to productive work and romance, are

both implicit and explicit in *Atlas Shrugged*. The creator of this integrated work of literature realized that it is important to dramatize values. People need to see values embodied in concrete form in the world. *Atlas Shrugged* provides specific examples of what individuals' values are or ought to be (Plauché 2007, 25–36). It inductively demonstrates the values of a new moral philosophy of rational self-interest. As a result, it provides the emotional fuel to stimulate one's love of existence and to motivate a person toward his or her full flourishing as a human being. This joyous "sense of life" involves admiration for man's highest potential (Madden 2007, 167–75) and the disposition that achievement and happiness are normal and expected whereas suffering and disaster are merely exceptions in life. Such a sense of life depends upon the acceptance and consistent practice of rationality in every area of one's life.

Rand illustrates in *Atlas Shrugged* that rationality is the primary virtue and moral requirement. Holding that morality is not primarily social, she explains and illustrates that morality applies even and especially to man alone. A man must choose to think. Rand maintains that rationality, the primary virtue, requires the exercise of six derivative virtues that can be viewed as expressions of rationality: honesty, independence, justice, integrity, productiveness, and pride (i.e., moral ambitiousness).<sup>2</sup> The heroes of *Atlas Shrugged* are characterized as possessing all of these virtues.

## Characterization and Character Development

Rand adeptly presents the nature of the heroes and villains in *Atlas Shrugged* in terms of their motives. Her main means of characterization are actions and dialogue (i.e., "words in the context of a character's actions"; Salmieri 2007). By observing a Randian character's actions and hearing his conversations, a reader is able to grasp the character's motives and to discern what is at that character's philosophical root. Rand masterfully integrates a character's internally consistent actions, decisions, and words with his or her motives. The particular details she presents are related to wider fundamental abstractions and deeper motivations of the character presented. A man's basic values and premises form his character and inspire him to action (Rand 2000a, 59–63).

Rand's characters are formulated with reference to philosophical principles and premises. Her character development involves characters making their philosophical premises ever more explicit. They follow up and build upon the logic of true premises, continue to follow false premises, correct their false premises, or betray their formerly held true premises (Salmieri 2007).

In her stylized portraits of the characters in *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand's goal is to present no random details and to focus on the essentials to understanding each character. The challenge in characterization is to present that which is

essential to a particular type of person. By eliminating irrelevant and trivial attributes and actions, her characters become moral projections. Rand's characters are persons in whom certain characteristics and patterns of behavior are pinpointed more constantly and distinctly than in typical persons (Gladstein 2000, 62–63; Rand [1971] 1975, 87–89). Her method of slanted realism focuses selectively on motives, traits, and especially actions that constitute character differences. Rand realizes that what a hero or villain in a novel does paints the character better than what he or she says and enormously better than whatever the author may say about him or her. A character's actions always reveal key aspects of his or her character. Of course, like any good novelist, Rand uses various approaches to providing information about her characters. For example, the speeches by Francisco, Rearden, and Galt are critical to the characterization of each of these Randian heroes. By excluding superficial or accidental facets of a character's personality, Rand makes certain that attention is not averted from essential purposes and motives. As a result, the reader is able to gain clear and deep insight into her characters.

Each character in *Atlas Shrugged* serves a purpose, and each one is an integral part of the entire structure. Rand integrates the characters into the story through the creation of bonds between the various characters.

According to Bidinotto (2007), "Good drama is built on conflict. But strong conflict requires extremely willful characters pursuing incompatible goals tied to the story's theme. Their conflicts build powerfully throughout the story, until they're finally resolved in a climax that demonstrates that theme. . . . Ayn Rand shared this view of good fiction writing. In *Atlas*, her theme is the importance of reason to human life. Her plot, characters, dialogue, and descriptions all reinforce and advance that theme" (53).

Rand is a master of orchestration, as evidenced by her matching different kinds of characters against one another. At the most general level we have the looters and the nonlooters (i.e., the thinkers and producers). At a more micro level the reader is able to gain clear and deep insight into characters such as the self-made martyred industrialist with mixed moral premises (Hank Rearden); the ideal epic heroine (Dagny Taggart); the supremely able man who enjoys an exalted life on earth (Francisco d'Anconia); the brilliant scientist turned moral traitor and looter-politician (Robert Stadler); the envious nihilist death worshiper (James Taggart); the vacuous power luster (Lillian Rearden); the pivotal rational character who forces the conflict from beginning to end (John Galt); the man of justice who takes from the parasitical looters to restore wealth to the creative and productive people (Ragnar Danneskjöld); the loyal, morally courageous common man of modest ability (Eddie Willers); the mistaken hero-worshiper (Cherryl Brooks); the cynical young Washington bureaucrat just out of college who begins as a moral relativist but comes to admire and emulate

the industrialist, Hank Rearden, and dies as a man of reason (Tony, the Wet Nurse); the villainous politician (Wesley Mouch); the immoral businessman (Orren Boyle); and so on.

Salmieri contrasts the heroes (i.e., the producers) and the villains (i.e., the looters) with respect to their motivations and worldviews. The heroes are motivated by final causes and are rationally purposeful. Their lives have directionality and unity of purpose, and they recognize the role of the mind in man's life. In contrast, the villains are not finally caused—they are merely efficiently caused as they are moved by outside forces. They are unlike the heroes who, as prime movers, initiate courses of action in pursuit of their ultimate goals. Heroes, like Dagny, understand and follow causality and are focused on doing things better and on earning their profits. The villains are portrayed as malicious, purposeless (or at best having short-term irrational purposes), and as seeking the unearned. *Atlas Shrugged's* villainous characters manifest different forms of irrational thought, actions, and pronouncements as Rand skillfully has the various villains expound a variety of economic and other fallacies. This technique aids in developing their characterization.

The looters are proponents of high taxation, big labor, government ownership, government spending, government planning, regulation, and redistribution. They include politicians and their supporters, "intellectuals," government bureaucrats, scientists who sell their minds to the bureaucrats, and liberal businessmen who, afraid of honest competition, sell out their initiative, creative powers, and independence for the security of government regulation. The non-looters—the thinkers and doers—are the competent and daring individualists who innovate and create new enterprises. These prime movers love their work, are dedicated to achievement through their thought and effort, and abhor the forces of collectivism and mediocrity. The battle is thus between nonearners who deal by force and "profit" through political power and earners who deal by trade and profit through productive ability and enterprise.

Darryl Wright (2007) explains that the looters are impervious to reason and always believe that the "prime movers" will come to their aid and save them.<sup>3</sup> The looters also want to reverse the order of cause and effect. They believe that by expropriating the wealth of the creators they will gain unearned moral status and self-esteem, but the world does not work that way. By being rational and productive, a man gains moral status and self-esteem, and as a consequence, creates truly earned wealth. It follows that wealth is the effect of one's moral status. The looters engage in self-deception in order to fake their moral status and self-esteem to themselves. They use the code of altruism in their efforts to transfer moral status and self-esteem from those who have earned them to those who have not. Rather than attempting to earn wealth, self-esteem, and the respect of others, the looters seek to obtain money, the result of production, through the use of altruism and/or government force.

Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* presents the virtuous businessman in a realistic, favorable, and heroic image by emphasizing the possibilities of life in a free society, the inherent ethical nature of capitalism and of the good businessman, the strength and self-sufficiency of the hardworking man of commerce, and the value of the entrepreneur as wealth creator and promoter of human economic progress. *Atlas Shrugged* shows the legitimate businessman's role as potentially heroic by celebrating the energy and opportunity of life for men of talent and ability to make something of themselves. This great novel teaches that acts of courage and creativity consist in following one's sense of integrity rather than in blind obedience, and in inspiring others instead of following them. *Atlas Shrugged* portrays the business hero as a persistent, original, and independent thinker who pursues an idea to its fruition. Rand's 1957 masterpiece dramatizes the positive qualities of the businessman by showing the triumph of individualism over collectivism, depicting business heroes as noble, appealing, and larger than life, and by characterizing business careers as at least as honorable as careers in medicine, law, or education—if not more so.<sup>4</sup>

Rand, like Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, holds an agent-centered approach to morality and concentrates on the character traits that constitute a good person. Reading *Atlas Shrugged* prompts people to reflect on what is constitutive of a good life. Rand's heroes are shown to hold proper principles and to develop appropriate character traits. The villains in the novel provide examples of what happens to people when they hold faulty principles (or compromise certain important principles) and fail to develop essential virtues.

*Atlas Shrugged* illustrates that there are good and bad businessmen and that businessmen don't always act virtuously. There are two kinds of businessmen—those who lobby government for special privileges, make deals, as well as engage in fraud and corrupt activities. Then there are the real producers who succeed or fail on their own.

Rand's business heroes are independent, rational, and committed to the facts of reality, to the judgment of their own minds, and to their own happiness. All of them think for themselves, actualize their potential, and view themselves as competent to deal with the challenges of life and as worthy of success and happiness (Locke 2000). *Atlas Shrugged* makes a great case that the businessman is the appropriate and best symbol of a free society. Rand shows that, because life requires the production of values, true businessmen's actions are morally proper. The heroes of *Atlas Shrugged* find joy in taking risks and bringing men and materials together to produce what people value.

*Atlas Shrugged* chronicles the rise of corrupt businessmen who pursue profit by dealing with dishonest politicians. They avoid rationality and productivity by using their political pull and pressure groups to loot the producers. Rand is scathing in her indictment of these villains who would rob the creative thinkers who are responsible for human progress and prosperity. Wright describes the

looters as secondhanders who exploit the creators in both physical and spiritual concerns. They attack reason through government directives that supersede the rational judgment of the creators. They assault purpose by reducing the selection of attainable goals down to those dealing with crises. In addition, they attack the self-esteem of the producer by advocating the morality of altruism, which holds that the pursuit of happiness is a source of guilt. The looters employ need, weakness, and incompetence as a demand on the creators. They claim that it is permissible and desirable to receive altruistic “gifts” when a person is weak, suffering, or incompetent.

Onkar Ghate (2004, 335–55) explains that the unreason of the looters is exemplified by James Taggart. The looters as secondhanders exploit the creators both materially and spiritually. Taggart is antieffort and has the need to feel superior. For him, abstract ideas are meaningful only as a tool to bring or keep people down. For example, ideas like “public interest” and “social responsibility” are used to destroy the Phoenix-Durango Railroad, Taggart’s main competitor in Colorado. Feeling a deep sense of inferiority, Taggart desires the unearned when it comes to physical or spiritual concerns. He does not have any positive ambitions or purposes. He is aimless, wants political influence, and sees only the opportunity to destroy. He ultimately seeks to destroy value because it is value. Although he wants to get unearned money, he does not view money as a value. Operating from the death premise, his unacknowledged goal is to destroy the values required by life. Taggart rationalizes, evades, and disregards his responsibility to think. As a whim-worshipper, he wants consciousness to control existence. He thinks that all he has to do is to “want” something. He wants to become rich without earning any wealth and wants to be loved and admired without earning the right to be loved and admired. Taggart desires a world in which reason and purpose are not required to survive and flourish in it. Rebelling against life and existence, he conceals his nihilism even from himself. He simulates concern with values that promote life. He is under the illusion that obtaining wealth and “success” without effort or rational thought will give him moral status and self-esteem. Ultimately, the self-deceived Taggart’s desire to steal becomes a yearning to destroy values even though such destruction will result in the loss of his own life.

Minsaas (1995) has drawn attention to Rand’s considerable use of analogy in her characterizations. The purpose of this device of presenting characters as parallels and contrasts is to allow the reader to perceive a character’s distinctive nature through comparison with other characters. Her characters are presented contextually as she employs other characters as contrasts that draw out and emphasize each character’s uniqueness. Minsaas explains that such analogical juxtapositions permeate Rand’s novels. An awareness of this network of parallels and contrasts enhances the reader’s understanding of the characters.

According to Minsaas, Rand's use of parallels and contrasts stems from her epistemology. Rand applies her theory of concept formation in portraying her characters, observing similarities and differences between them in order to comprehend their underlying motivations and conceptual and moral nature.

Rand's use of contrasts allows her to illustrate what it means for a human being to be a fully integrated person. At least three of her fictional heroes reflect mind-body integration through their total integrity and consistent loyalty to rational principles. These three are John Galt, Francisco d'Anconia, and Dagny Taggart. Dagny is the primary narrator of *Atlas Shrugged* (that is, more is told from Dagny's point of view than from any other). Dagny is arguably the most developed character of these three and can be contrasted with two other characters who accept two different versions of the mind-body dichotomy—Hank Rearden and Robert Stadler.

Dagny, like Hank Rearden, is a self-initiator who goes by her own judgments and is the motive power of her own happiness. Unlike Rearden, she does not feel guilty for her achievements. She realizes that the world lives because of the work of the prime movers and then hates them for it. She also understands that sex is the supreme admiration of one human being for another and that the values of one's mind are connected to the actions of one's body.

Hank Rearden is a great productive industrialist and master of reality whose erroneous surface ideas do not corrupt his essential deeper character. Rearden's words and deeds initially sanction an unearned guilt. The doctrine of altruism held him guilty because of his greatest virtues. Similarly, in the beginning he also viewed his passion for Dagny as animalistic and degrading. Down deep he does not believe the notion of the mind-body split. Under the tutelage of Francisco and Dagny, Rearden awakens to the truth. By the end of the story, he understands the evil of the idea of the mind-body dichotomy both in economics and business and in romantic and other human relationships.

Robert Stadler is a Plato-like character who holds a theoretical versus applied science split. He is a cynical theorist and intellectual elitist who believes that most people are corrupt, stupid, and incapable of virtuous behavior. Stadler is contemptuous of applied science and material production. Thinking that his work must be sustained through government force, he resorts to extorting from citizens to finance his theoretical noncommercial projects. Stadler is doomed once he turns his mind over to force-wielders.<sup>5</sup>

## The Philosophical Speeches

The lengthy philosophical speeches in *Atlas Shrugged* are integrated components of the plot, make explicit the principles dramatized throughout the actions of the novel, and move the story onward. For example, Francisco's "money speech"



attends to Rearden's moral turmoil, frees him from his feelings of guilt, aids him in his trial, and moves him toward joining the strike.

Salmieri observes that Francisco's money speech is an abstract summation of many points previously dramatized in the first part of the novel. Specifically, Francisco explains that reason is the root of production, that production is the root of money, that money is destroyed when detached from these roots, and that there is a moral difference between trade and force. This speech provides Rearden with new knowledge that will be important for his liberation from guilt (e.g., at his trial) as well as with gaining gratitude from Francisco. He also learns to enjoy the wealth that he has earned from his production especially when he buys luxury items for Dagny—Rearden gains pleasure through such purchases.

Many readers skip or skim Galt's speech, at least on their first reading of *Atlas Shrugged*. They see it as a digression, as an interruption of the action, as a means to promulgate Rand's ideas, or as repetitive and redundant with respect to what has already been presented before in the story. Bennett Cerf, the head of Random House, begged Rand to cut Galt's speech because she had already made the same points numerous times earlier in the novel.

Although it may be true that people who skip Galt's speech do not totally miss Rand's message or lose the plot, reading the speech and comprehending its purpose certainly elicits a fuller understanding and appreciation of *Atlas Shrugged*. Ghate (2009, 363–74) maintains that Galt's speech is critical to the story and to its climax and that it is logically and inextricably connected to both the novel's theme and plot-theme. The theme is "the role of the mind in man's existence" and the plot-theme is "the men of the mind going on strike against an altruist-collectivist society." Ghate concludes, "What an analysis of Galt's speech reveals—an analysis of its purpose, its content, its structure, its role in the story, and its contribution to the novel's theme—is that far from being 'propaganda,' a digression in the story's plot or even simply a pause in the action, the speech is integral to the novel. Without Galt's Speech, John Galt would not be John Galt—and *Atlas Shrugged* would not be *Atlas Shrugged*" (373).

Galt's speech on the radio ties together all the ideas previously dramatized in action in the novel, leads to Galt's capture and the story's climax, hastens the collapse, and makes the rebuilding of society easier. Galt's speech is necessary in order to understand the climax of the novel. When the looters hear his speech, they realize that he is the best thinker in the world and thus search for him in order to enlist his help in saving the deteriorating economy. It is the speech that moves Galt from mythical to concrete status in the novel. The events and actions prior to the speech provide the inductive evidence needed to derive the principle that "the mind is man's tool of survival." By then the reader and the American people in the novel 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. It is a matter of justice for Galt to tell the people what he has done. It is through this speech that Galt demonstrates the value of the men of the mind. Galt's long speech is warranted because the detailed and complex events previously presented concretize the message given in his speech. The knowledge contained in Galt's speech is what convinced the strikers earlier in the novel to abandon their firms and to retreat to Galt's Gulch. The philosophy of the morality of life embodied in the speech is what the producers needed to hear and accept in order for them to realize their own greatness and to stand up against the looters. Galt's speech was not given until the American people were ready to hear it (Bernstein 1995; Ghate 2001; 2009, 363–74). In large part, his Objectivist statement is addressed to the common but rational listeners, many of whom are part victims and part supporters of the looters' creed, in an effort to gain their support by going on strike themselves. In his audio course, Ghate explains that after a brief introduction, Galt's speech is broken into three parts: (1) the Morality of Life (i.e., the Code of the Producers), (2) the Morality of Death (i.e., the Code of the Looters), and (3) the importance of choosing the morality of life (i.e., acting as a rational human being).

A national broadcast by Mr. Thompson, the head of the state, is interrupted by Galt, who, in a three-hour speech, spells out the tenets of his philosophy (Rand 1957, 923–79). Among his many provocative ideas is the notion that the doctrine of original sin, which holds man's nature as his sin, is absurd—a sin that is outside the possibility of choice is outside the realm of morality. The fall of Adam and Eve was actually a positive event since it enabled man to acquire a mind capable of judging good and evil—man became a rational moral being. Another provocative idea is that both forced and voluntary altruism are evil. Placing the welfare of others above an individual's own interests is wrong. The desire to give charity, compassion, and pleasure unconditionally to the undeserving is immoral.

Galt explains that reality is objective, absolute, and comprehensible and that man is a rational being who relies upon his mind as his only means to obtain objectively valid knowledge and as his "basic tool of survival." The concept of value presupposes an entity capable of acting to attain a goal in the face of an alternative. The one basic alternative in the world is existence versus nonexistence. "It is only the concept of 'Life' that makes the concept of 'Value' possible." An organism's life is its standard of value. Whatever furthers its life is good, and that which threatens it is evil. It is therefore the nature of a living entity that determines what is good or bad for it, and for those living things that can choose, it is the ultimate basis for how life is to be lived (and thus what ought or ought not to be done).

Galt identifies man's life as the proper standard of man's value and morality as the principles defining the actions necessary to maintain life as a man. Because life as a man is one's purpose, he has "a right to live as a rational being." To live, man must think, act, and create the values his life requires. In other words, since a man's life is sustained through thought and action, it follows that the individual must have the right to think and act and to keep the product of his thinking and acting (i.e., the right to life, liberty, and property).

He asserts that since men are creatures who think and act according to principle, a doctrine of rights that is enforced ensures that an individual's choice to live by those principles is not violated by other human beings. All individuals possess the same rights to freely pursue their own goals. These rights are innate and can be logically derived from man's nature and needs—government is not involved in the creation of rights and merely exists to protect an individual's natural rights. Because force is the means by which one's rights are violated, it follows that freedom is a basic good. Therefore, it follows that the role of government is to "protect man's rights," through the use of force, but "only in retaliation and only against those who initiate its use" (Ghate 2001; 2009, 363–74; Gladstein 2000, 98–106; Stolyarov 2007, 99–106; Gotthelf 2009, 375–95).

### Mind-Body Integration

*Atlas Shrugged* illustrates the inextricable linkage of the mind and the body. In it, Rand argues that the rational, purposeful, and creative character of the human person is reflected in the act of material production. The mind, humans' highest and noblest aspect, enables them to deal with physical reality in order to create wealth and abundance that sustain and promote their practical survival and flourishing on earth. Productivity involves the use of reason to adapt nature to humans' life requirements (Rand 1997, 549–51).

Likewise, *Atlas Shrugged* teaches, especially in the romance between Dagny and Rearden, that love is rooted in reason and that sexual choice is the result of a person's basic convictions and values. Sex is a "celebration of life," the ultimate form of admiration and respect of one person for another, and the physical expression of a person's spirit. Just as productive activity is the conversion of values into physical form, "sex is the means and form of translating spiritual admiration for a human being into physical action" (606–7). In an important way, the romance between Dagny and Hank ties the entire story together and shows that production and sex have a mutual essence that joins them (465). The same principles used in one's creative (i.e., productive) life are applied to one's personal life.

*Atlas Shrugged* demonstrates that man is an indivisible entity that can be separated only for purposes of discussion. There are inextricable linkages and

correspondences among one's mind, body, and actions. It follows that the values of one's mind are not disconnected from the actions of one's body. Cartesian dualism of mind and matter is incompatible with true human existence. Man is an indivisible union of consciousness and matter (551).

Galt's speech embodies the principles of integration at the core of Objectivism. During the period in which she was working on this sixty-page speech, Rand commented, "You had set every part of you to betray every other, you believed that your career bears no relation to your sex life, that your politics bear no relation to the choice of your friends, that your values bear no relation to your pleasures, and your heart bears no relation to your brain—you had chopped yourself into pieces which you struggled never to connect—but you see no reason why your life is in ruins and why you've lost the desire to live?" (Rand 1997, 661–62).

Rand's integrated worldview totally rejects the mind-body dichotomy and all of the additional mistaken dichotomies that are based on it. According to Sciabarra (2007, 26),

By connecting reason and production, thought and action, theory and practice, fact and value, morality and prudence, Rand intended to uncover the "deeper, philosophical error" upon which these various dichotomies were based. As such, *Atlas Shrugged* was designed to "blast the separation of man into 'body' and 'soul,' the opposition of 'matter' and 'spirit'" (Rand 1997, 551). Rand rejected the metaphysical dualists who had bifurcated human existence. She proclaimed in her journal that "Man is an indivisible entity." Mind and body "can be considered separately only for purposes of discussion, not in actual fact," she explains. Thus, in the projection of her "ideal man," John Galt, there is "*no intellectual contradiction and, therefore, no inner conflict*" between mind and body. (29 June 1946 in Rand 1997, 512)

It was this kind of "indivisible union" (663) that Rand glorified in her exalted conception of human sexuality as a response to values. She explained in her journals that she had wanted to concretize the "*essential, unbreakable tie between sex and spirit—which is the tie between body and soul*" (6 October 1949 in Rand 1997, 609).

Sciabarra (2007) explains,

In Rand's view, the "spiritual" does not pertain to an other-worldly faculty. The "spiritual" refers to an activity of human consciousness. Reason, as "the highest kind of spiritual activity," is required "to conquer, control, and create in the material realm" (Rand 1997, 551). Rand does not

limit material activities to purely industrial production. She wishes to “show that *any* original rational idea, in any sphere of man’s activity, is an act of creation” (550). This applies equally to the activity of industrialists and artists, businessmen and intellectuals, scientists and philosophers. Each of these spheres is accorded epistemological significance—and supreme respect. (26)

*Atlas Shrugged* masterfully illustrates that the production of goods, services, and wealth metaphysically precedes their distribution and exchange. The primacy of production means that we must produce before we can consume. Production (i.e., supply) is the source of demand. This means that products are ultimately paid for with other products. It follows that the passionate producer is the prime mover and visible hand in markets (Salsman 1997). Production, like existence, is primary and rests on the laws of identity and causality. Recognizing the integration of mind and body, Rand illustrated in *Atlas Shrugged* that the rational, purposeful, and creative character of human creation is manifested in the act of material production.

From the beginning, Rand intended *Atlas Shrugged* to be a “much more social novel than *The Fountainhead*” (Rand 1997, 398). 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.

### **A Fully Integrated Philosophical Novel**

*Atlas Shrugged* concretizes through hierarchical, progressive, and inductive demonstration Rand’s systematic philosophy of Objectivism. In her novel, Rand dramatizes grand themes and presents an entire and integrated view of how people should live their lives. She does this by providing an abstract and holistic moral perspective on the concretes presented in the novel. Rand is able to both concretize abstractions and draw abstractions from a number of concretes. She is able to project in action what each abstraction means. Rand’s great power comes from her ability to unify everything in the text to form an integrated whole. The major theme of *Atlas Shrugged*, the role of reason in man’s life, is embodied in every event, character, and line of dialogue. As a great novel of romantic realism, *Atlas Shrugged* magnificently demonstrates that men can objectively and rationally know the good and can freely choose the good. The theme and plot are inextricably integrated. Rand is a superb practitioner of synthesis and unity whose literary style and subject are organically linked and fused to the content of her philosophy. She unifies the many

aspects of *Atlas Shrugged* according to principles of reality. Rand made many revisions and changes in this novel to make certain that everything fit together.<sup>6</sup> Believing that a novel should be an end in itself, she created *Atlas Shrugged* as a remarkably integrated organic whole. *Atlas Shrugged* is a brilliantly integrated and unified philosophical novel.

## NOTES

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1. Greg Salmieri's 2009 essay, in Mayhew 2009, is based on his 2007 lecture.
2. For an excellent discussion of the role of the virtues in human flourishing, see Smith 2006.
3. Much of the material found in Darryl Wright's 2007 audio course can also be found in his chapter in Mayhew 2009.
4. For invaluable discussions of businessmen as heroes and prime movers, see Locke 2000, Rand 2000b, Locke 2009, and Debi Ghatge 2009.
5. Andrew Bernstein (1995; 1996; 2001) provides in-depth and detailed perceptive analyses of Dagny Taggart, Hank Rearden, Robert Stadler, and many more of *Atlas Shrugged's* dramatic characters in his audio courses. Readers interested in gaining a greater understanding of Rand's characters and process of characterization are encouraged to listen to Bernstein's more thorough and systematic explanations along the same lines as the brief character descriptions provided above.
6. Milgram (1998) illustrates and describes in her original archival research that Rand was a disciplined artist who made many additions, subtractions, and other changes.

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