

Introduction

Atlas Shrugged (1957), the philosophical and artistic capstone of Ayn Rand's novels, is the demarcation work and turning point that culminated her career as a novelist and propelled her into a career as a popular philosopher. This stunning intellectual achievement marvelously fulfilled her purposes and accomplished all she wanted to do in the realm of fiction. *Atlas Shrugged* has become one of the most influential books ever published impacting a variety of disciplines including philosophy, literature, economics, business, political science, and others.

In *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand presents her original, brilliant, 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.

Atlas Shrugged inspired both passionate admiration and violent antagonism. Over the years it has reached a large audience despite mainly negative initial attitudes of critics and intellectuals who wrote reviews savagely attacking it. Innumerable readers have affirmed and attested to the importance of *Atlas Shrugged* to their lives. It is obvious that Rand's evocative writing has enormous emotional impact with respect to the sense of life and view of man and the world that she portrays (Gladstein 2000, 19–25, 26–30).

Atlas Shrugged is a powerfully mythic work that evokes extraordinary responses. In part, its power to induce intense emotion and its mythic stature stem from the large time and emotional investment required to read Rand's nearly 1200 page *magnum opus*. For many individuals open to her ideas, *Atlas Shrugged* has become a foundational mythology that concretizes the meaning of Objectivism through the actions of the characters (Hunt 1984).

Atlas Shrugged is now being taught in colleges and universities in a variety of courses. It provides an excellent base for teaching issues in business, business ethics, economics, and political and economic philosophy. Use of *Atlas Shrugged* aids in moving from abstract principles to realistic business examples. The novel serves as a link between philosophical concepts and the practical aspects of business and illustrates that philosophy is accessible and important to people in general and to business people in particular. Reading and studying *Atlas Shrugged*

helps students better understand the philosophical, moral, and economic concepts underpinning business and capitalism.

In the so-called “Bible of Objectivism” Ayn Rand created the Objectivist philosophy and inspired the origin of the modern libertarian movement in America—a movement that she strongly disavowed. Despite her rejection of libertarianism, her novel did popularize libertarian ideas along with Objectivist doctrine and showed how a rational person can function in an irrational society. For many, Rand’s greatest legacy to mankind serves as a blueprint for the future and is a potential source for social change. *Atlas Shrugged* will be a force in the world for a long time and will be discussed and analyzed by thinkers in a variety of fields for many decades or perhaps even centuries (Gladstein 27–8).

Atlas Shrugged is written with conviction and precision of mind. To produce her novels, Ayn Rand became what she called a “writing engine” who exhaustingly planned, edited, and revised in order to make them better and better (Rand 1997, 48). All that mattered to her was to perform her work with solemn purposefulness until it was done properly. This is clear to anyone who reads Rand’s journals and drafts which illustrate her process of continually improving this great novel (Knapp 1998).

As illustrated and described in the original archival research of Shoshana Milgram Knapp (1998), Rand was a dedicated and disciplined artist who made many additions, subtractions, and other changes. Her purposeful revisions were of both the small and large types. She would: 1) remove or trim passages to gain greater impact while maintaining precision and unity; 2) improve dialogue and descriptions to make them more concise, to the point, and more telling; 3) remove large portions of text to achieve integration and conciseness; 4) continually search for the right words to attain clarity; 5) strive to make all aspects of the novel consonant with its tone; 6) find better events to illustrate her ideas; 7) develop more precise formulations; 8) add clarifying passages; 9) substitute implicit and action-oriented scenes in place of explicit descriptions; 10) develop passages that concurrently serve different purposes and that operate on various levels of meaning; and so on.

The most extraordinary quality of *Atlas Shrugged* is its integration. Ayn Rand understood that everything that was included in a novel affects that novel. The unity of a novel depends upon necessary causal and logical connections among its many aspects. It follows that she included no random elements or events. She tied everything to *Atlas Shrugged*’s unifying theme of “the role of the mind in human existence” (Peikoff 2004).

The plot of *Atlas Shrugged* is a model of integration among theme, story, and characters. The 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. She presents characters in stylized form in terms of their essential attributes. 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 (Peikoff).

This volume addresses the philosophical, literary, and other aspects of *Atlas Shrugged*. Although the essays are fun to read and geared to general readers who are fans of this great novel, scholars will also enjoy them and benefit from reading them. While all of the contributors are enthusiastic admirers of Rand's most famous novel, this does not keep them from making some critical observations about it. The authors are from a variety of fields including, but not limited to: philosophy, literature, economics, psychology, sociology, anthropology, communications, music, and engineering. Because *Atlas Shrugged* is a transdisciplinary novel that also works on many levels of meaning, these writers' multiple approaches are able to demonstrate how the novel's many aspects enrich one another. It follows that this anthology is a compelling examination for Ayn Rand scholars and enthusiasts alike.¹

The first section of this volume is devoted to providing an overview of *Atlas Shrugged*. In the opening essay I summarize the story and introduce readers to various philosophical and literary aspects of *Atlas Shrugged*. Chris Matthew Sciabarra's "*Atlas Shrugged*: Manifesto for a New Radicalism" then discusses how this novel provides a manifesto for a methodological radicalism upon which political and social change can be built. Next, Douglas B. Rasmussen considers Ayn Rand's view of logic and reality and the Aristotelian significance of *Atlas Shrugged*'s section titles. Fred Seddon then analyzes various tiers of meaning in the chapter titles of *Atlas Shrugged*. In his offering, Lester H. Hunt describes one of the literary methods employed by Rand in her highly intentional and integrated work. The final essay in this section consists of Hans Schantz's very detailed table of contents and outline of the events in *Atlas Shrugged*.

Part II examines some philosophical aspects of *Atlas Shrugged*. Tibor Machan begins by exploring Rand's original idea, first proposed in *Atlas Shrugged*, of the "sanction of the victim." This is followed by Roderick Long's article in which he suggests that *Atlas Shrugged* was intended by Ayn Rand to offer an enduring assessment of, and alternative to, some of the main ideas in Plato's *Republic*. Gennady Stolyarov then provides an analysis of the role, significance, and essential ideas of John Galt's speech.

The selections in Part III look at the nature of *Atlas Shrugged* as a literary work. In "Ayn Rand's Cinematic Eye" Mimi Gladstein explains that, because of Ayn Rand's experience in film writing and long history with the movies, she writes her novels with a "cinematic eye" and a cinematic mode of narration. Jeff Riggensbach then explains how *Atlas Shrugged* could be regarded as a work of science fiction as well as of romantic realism. In the last piece in this section, Kirsti Minsaas discusses how *Atlas Shrugged* recalls the epic-heroic literature of the past and how Ayn Rand reworks ancient myths in this novel.

Part IV is concerned with aesthetics. Ron Lipp discusses Ayn Rand's theory of art as expressed in *Atlas Shrugged* and her other works. Next, Roger Bissell's innovative essay expresses the idea of romantic music through a "lecture" given by Dr. Richard Halley. Then in his "Fuel for the Soul" Russell Madden explains how *Atlas Shrugged* provides the emotional fuel to stimulate one's love of existence and to motivate a person toward his full flourishing as a human being.

The next section deals with issues of political economy. Peter Boettke argues that *Atlas Shrugged* is the most economically literate work by a major novelist in the history of literature and explains that the economic principles her novel communicates include rewards for productive efficiency and innovation, the benefits of trade, and the destruction of production and the distortions in exchange relationships that result from government intervention in the economy. In his essay, Larry Sechrest suggests that woven throughout the story are elements which strongly communicate the spirit of anarcho-capitalism. Spencer MacCallum then discusses how businessman Werner Stiefel, made great strides in practically applying the principles of social organization illustrated in Galt's Gulch. Next, Sam Bostaph analyzes Ayn Rand's "Atlantis" as a free market economy. In turn, Bryan Caplan analyzes the parallels between *Atlas Shrugged* and Public Choice Theory. The essay by Steven Horwitz argues that Ayn Rand built a great number of valuable insights about money in Francisco d'Anconia's "money speech." Next, Jack Criss discusses the role of human productivity in *Atlas Shrugged*.

The articles in Part VI all examine human relationships. In her selection, Karen Michalson discusses how she wanted to be the glorious hero that Dagny Taggart was, but was not because of the lack of having Dagny's context for action in the world. Next, Joy Bushnell analyzes Dagny's search for her perfect partner. Peter Saint-Andre then investigates Ayn Rand's philosophical insights into the nature of friendships and the degree to which the relationships between the four primary characters in *Atlas Shrugged* live up to her ideal. In the last two essays in this section, Jennifer Iannolo analyzes romantic love in *Atlas Shrugged* and Susan Love Brown examines sexuality in the novel.

Part VII looks at some of the characters in *Atlas Shrugged*. Virginia Murr discusses Hank Rearden's mind-body split in her essay. In the next selection, Ken Schoolland, along with Stuart Hayashi, relates his many years of teaching to the situation of Hugh Akston. Then, Robert Campbell discusses the moral but flawed character of Eddie Willers. Next, Jomana Krupinski describes the moral evolution and redemption of Tony, the "Wet Nurse." Jennifer Rhodes then analyzes the tragic story of Cherryl Brooks, Rand's hero-worshipper.

The last section of this readings book looks at *Atlas Shrugged* in an historical context. In his article, Stephen Cox discusses the significant debt Ayn Rand owed to Isabel Paterson and the great influences that Paterson's vision of human action had on *Atlas Shrugged*. Douglas Den Uyl next analyzes the degree to which *Atlas Shrugged* reflects the essence of America. Walter Block then takes a look at individuals who he considers to be real-life counterparts of Robert Stadler. Finally,

Stuart Hayashi discusses an array of incidents in which Atlas has actually shrugged throughout history.

The contributors to this volume provide a great deal of evidence that *Atlas Shrugged* is the greatest novel ever written. Taken together these essays instill a greater appreciation for Ayn Rand's monumental achievement and show that there is much to be gained from the intellectual exploration of it.

Note

- 1 Interested individuals may want to read Nathaniel and Barbara Branden's *Who Is Ayn Rand?* (Random House, 1962); Mimi Gladstein's *Atlas Shrugged: Manifesto of the Mind* (Twayne, 2000); William Thomas's (ed.) *The Literary Art of Ayn Rand* (The Objectivist Center, 2005), and Robert Mayhew's (ed.) highly anticipated forthcoming *Essays on Ayn Rand's Atlas Shrugged*. Mayhew has edited collections of essays on Ayn Rand's other novels all of which have been published by Lexington Books.

References

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