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Edited by
ALLAN GOTTHELF AND
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A Companion to Ayn Rand

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A Companion to Ayn Rand

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Allan Gotthelf and Gregory Salmieri

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In the pages that follow, you will read a great deal about a heroism that consists in loving one's life and living it fully. This book is dedicated to the memory of two of its authors who were such heroes – men who, throughout their lives, projected a profound benevolence and love of this world; and who, during their battles with cancer, often served as a comfort and an inspiration to the friends who sought to comfort them.

To John David Lewis (1955–2012), a consummate fighter for his values.

And to Allan Gotthelf (1942–2013), whose spirit and wisdom have informed every page of this Companion, both through his own editorial work and through his influence on those of us who live on – his coeditor, especially.

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John David Lewis (1955–2012), after a 25-year career in business, changed direction and earned a PhD in Classics at the University of Cambridge in 2001. At the time of his death, in 2012, he was Visiting Associate Professor in the Philosophy, Politics, and Economics Program at Duke University and Adjunct Associate Professor of Business at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He published three books, *Solon the Thinker: Political Thought in Archaic Athens* (Bristol Classics, 2006), *Early Greek Lawgivers* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2007), and *Nothing Less than Victory: Decisive Wars and the Lessons of History* (Princeton University Press, 2010), and many articles and reviews in academic journals and the public press.

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Acknowledgments

Work on this book began in December of 2006 when Allan Gotthelf and I first discussed the possibility of a companion-style volume on Ayn Rand. He was my teacher and dear friend, and his death in 2013, after a 15-year battle with prostate cancer, was a loss to the philosophy profession and a profound loss to me personally. Our collaboration on this project was one of the great joys of my life, and I wish he could have lived to see its completion. Now that the work is finished, I can find no better way to express my gratitude to Allan than by repeating the words of a friend to whom he introduced me 17 years ago: οὕτω δ' ἔοικε καὶ τοῖς φιλοσοφίας κοινωνήσασιν· οὐ γὰρ πρὸς χρήμαθ' ἡ ἀξία μετρεῖται, τιμὴ τ' ἰσόρροπος οὐκ ἂν γένοιτο, ἀλλ' ἴσως ἰκανόν, καθάπερ καὶ πρὸς θεοὺς καὶ πρὸς γονεῖς, τὸ ἐνδεχόμενον (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1164b2–6).

There are many others who deserve thanks for their role in making this book possible. First, I trust that I speak for all the contributors to this *Companion* when I acknowledge the great debt we owe to Leonard Peikoff, who has been a teacher to all of us (whether in person or through his books and recorded courses). The many citations to him throughout this book are testament to this debt. Moreover, as the executor of Rand's estate he is responsible for making available the many posthumously published and archival materials that have enriched all of our understanding of Rand's thought and life.

This brings me to the subject of the Ayn Rand Archives. Thank you to Mike Berliner, Jeff Britting, and Jennifer Woodson for building and maintaining the Archives, for making it available to us, and for all of your help navigating it over the years. The Ayn Rand Institute, of which the Archives is a department, has been responsible for a host of programs and events over the past 30 years that contributed immeasurably to the work and intellectual development of many of the contributing authors (myself included).

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has been a source of professional advice in the years since. Debi Ghate, Anthem's president 2009–2013, was a constant supporter of my and Allan's careers and an able executive in difficult times. The same is true of Yaron Brook, the executive director of the Ayn Rand Institute, who also serves as the chairman of Anthem's board of directors and who took over as president when Debi left.

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Gregory Salmieri

A Note on Abbreviations and References

Rand's own works and certain others that we have identified as "quasi-primary sources" are listed in the annotated bibliography at the end of this volume and cited in the text by the abbreviations indicated below. The numbers after the abbreviations indicate where they can be found in the bibliography.

In some cases, where a passage exists in two sources, we cite it to both separated by a slash. In such cases, the quoted material (if any) is as it appears in the first of the two citations. This format is used (among other times) when quoting from the original archival sources of material by Rand that has been posthumously published in an edited form.

Citations to works by figures in the history of philosophy are given in the standard formats used by scholars of those figures: Bekker numbers for Aristotle, Academy numbers for Kant, and so on. Other works are cited in the author/date format; bibliographic information for these works can be found in the references at the end of each chapter. Multiple works by an author from the same calendar year are distinguished by letters, and these references are standardized throughout the volume; so, for example, Allan Gotthelf's essay on "Dagny's Final Choice" is referenced as Gotthelf 2009b even in chapters that do not also make reference to Gotthelf 2009a.

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| <i>Answers</i> | <i>Ayn Rand Answers: The Best of Her Q&A.</i> #46. |
| <i>Anthem</i> | Revised edition of <i>Anthem.</i> #3. |
| <i>Anthem38</i> | 1938 edition of <i>Anthem.</i> #3. |
| <i>AOF</i> | <i>The Art of Fiction: A Guide for Writers and Readers.</i> #44. |
| <i>AON</i> | <i>The Art of Nonfiction: A Guide for Writers and Readers.</i> #45. |
| <i>ARL</i> | <i>The Ayn Rand Letter.</i> #18. |
| <i>Atlas</i> | <i>Atlas Shrugged.</i> #5. |
| <i>Biographical Interviews</i> | Biographical interviews of Ayn Rand conducted by Barbara and Nathaniel Branden in 1960–1961. #49. |
| <i>Column</i> | <i>The Ayn Rand Column.</i> #14. |
| <i>CUI</i> | <i>Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal.</i> #8. |
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| Ideal | <i>Ideal: The Novel and the Play</i> . #39. |
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| OPAR | Leonard Peikoff. <i>Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand</i> . #52. |
| Papers | The Ayn Rand Papers, a collection of the Ayn Rand Archives. #48. |
| Parallels | Leonard Peikoff. <i>The Ominous Parallels: The End of Freedom in America</i> . #35. |
| Playboy Interview | Ayn Rand's interview in <i>Playboy Magazine</i> . #23. |
| Plays | <i>Three Plays</i> . #37. |
| PWNI | <i>Philosophy: Who Needs It</i> . #12. |
| RM | <i>The Romantic Manifesto: A Philosophy of Literature</i> . #10. |
| ROTP | <i>Return of the Primitive: The Anti-Industrial Revolution</i> . #15. |
| Russian Writings | <i>Russian Writings on Hollywood</i> . #43. |
| Speaking | <i>Objectively Speaking: Ayn Rand Interviewed</i> . #47. |
| TIA | <i>The Intellectual Activist</i> . #19. |
| TO | <i>The Objectivist</i> . #17. |
| TOF | <i>The Objectivist Forum</i> . #20. |
| TON | <i>The Objectivist Newsletter</i> . #16. |
| TPO | Leonard Peikoff. <i>The Philosophy of Objectivism</i> . #34. |
| Unconquered | <i>The Unconquered</i> with another, earlier adaptation of <i>We the Living</i> . #38. |
| VAR | Nathaniel Branden. <i>The Vision of Ayn Rand: The Basic Principles of Objectivism</i> . #51. |
| VOR | <i>The Voice of Reason</i> . #13. |
| VOS | <i>The Virtue of Selfishness: A New Concept of Egoism</i> . #7. |
| WIAR | Nathaniel Branden. <i>Who Is Ayn Rand?</i> #31. |
| Workshops | Transcript of the Objectivist Workshops. #50. |
| WTL | Revised edition of <i>We the Living</i> . #1. |
| WTL36 | 1936 edition of <i>We the Living</i> . #1. |

Part I
Context

1

An Introduction to the Study of Ayn Rand

GREGORY SALMIERI

“Ayn Rand ... is among the most outspoken – and important – intellectual voices in America today,” wrote *Playboy Magazine* in 1964. “She is the author of what is perhaps the most fiercely damned and admired best seller of the decade, *Atlas Shrugged*.” The magazine goes on to describe the novel’s impressive sales (“more than 1,200,000 copies since its publication six years ago”), the discussion groups and debate it spawned on college campuses, and the thousands of people who subscribed to Rand’s *Objectivist Newsletter* or attended lecture courses on her philosophy.

That any novel should set off such a chain reaction is unusual; that *Atlas Shrugged* has done so is astonishing. For the book, a panoramic novel about what happens when the “men of the mind” go on strike, is 1,168 pages long. It is filled with lengthy, sometimes complex philosophical passages; and it is brimming with as many explosively unpopular ideas as Ayn Rand herself. Despite this success, the literary establishment considers her an outsider. Almost to a man, critics have either ignored or denounced the book. She is an exile among philosophers, too, although *Atlas* is as much a work of philosophy as it is a novel. Liberals glower at the very mention of her name; but conservatives, too, swallow hard when she begins to speak. For Ayn Rand, whether anyone likes it or not, is *sui generis*: indubitably, irrevocably, intransigently individual. (*Playboy Interview* 35)

Over 50 years later, and 33 years after her death, Rand remains one of the most important intellectual voices in our culture. In the last six years alone (2009 through 2014) *Atlas* has sold 2.25 million copies – one million more than in the six years immediately after its publication. In total, more than 30 million copies of Rand’s books have been sold.¹ Her ideas are as radical today as they were during her lifetime. And there remains a pronounced disconnect between the inspiration (both esthetic and intellectual) that so many readers take from her books and the dismissive or scornful response that these same books still often meet in academia.

In the political arena, liberals still despise and mock her, as do many leaders of the Christian right, neo-conservative, and libertarian movements. Yet Rand’s influence is always evident wherever one finds morally self-confident opposition to regulation, taxes, or entitlements, and wherever one sees celebrations of business and the free market. Thus, sales of Rand’s books

soared to record levels in 2008 and 2009 as Americans struggled to make sense of the financial crisis, and slogans referencing John Galt (the hero of *Atlas*) were ubiquitous at the early “Tea Party” protests against the interventionist measures by which the Bush and Obama administrations responded to the crisis. Rand has been frequently referenced in American political discourse since, both by those who cite her as an inspiration and by commentators who attribute many of the nation’s ills to Rand’s influence.² But references to Rand, on both sides, are usually superficial. They are attempts to evoke or to smear – but not to engage with – that strand in the American consciousness which resonates to Rand’s distinctive vision of what a human life can and should be.

She described this vision as “the concept of man as a heroic being, with his own happiness as the moral purpose of his life, with productive achievement as his noblest activity, and reason as his only absolute” (*Atlas* 1070).³ Rand viewed “man” as a “heroic being” in the sense that she thought that human nature sets a demanding ideal that each individual can and should achieve in his own life and character (though few people do achieve it). This ideal is the fit object of the emotion of reverence, and Rand sometimes speaks of “worshiping” it or the people (real or fictional) who embody it. This ideal – the life proper to a human being – is egoistic in the sense that an individual leading such a life is dedicated as a matter of moral principle to his own happiness. Happiness, for Rand, is not mere pleasure or desire-satisfaction. It is that state of “non-contradictory joy” (*Atlas* 1022) that is the concomitant of achieving what one has rationally identified as objectively good. A heroic human being is committed to the fullest use of his reason; and he uses it to conceive ambitious, life-sustaining goals, and to achieve them via productive activity. All the aspects of this vision and Rand’s arguments for them are discussed in detail in later chapters. So are other aspects of her thought, including the view that, because such a life requires the political freedom to live by one’s own judgment, laissez-faire capitalism is the only moral social system. It is enough for now to note that this vision evokes intense reactions in many people: some are inspired; others, revolted; some find it profound; others, juvenile.

Rand used the phrase “sense of life” to designate the aspect of a person’s or a culture’s psychology that generates the differing emotional reactions we have to artworks and (especially) to the view of the world and of humanity that they project. A sense of life is an implicit worldview – a “pre-conceptual metaphysics” that is experienced as a “constant, basic emotion” and expressed in a person’s “widest goals or smallest gestures” (“Philosophy and Sense of Life” *RM* 8, 18, 22).⁴ Part of maturing, Rand held, is translating one’s sense of life into conscious convictions, which one can rationally evaluate; correct, if necessary; and then consistently implement. Adopting this terminology, then, we can say that, for better or for worse, Rand’s vision holds a deep and enduring appeal for something in “the American sense of life” – or, at least, for a sense of life that is shared by many Americans and that contributes to the character of the nation. If so, then engagement with her works and thought is a crucial means by which scholars can help America to understand itself, and by which they can help the many people, in every country, who find Rand inspiring or repugnant to understand one another.⁵

Taking Rand Seriously

The scholarly study of Rand’s works was postponed by two generations of academics who found her vision appalling and thought or hoped that she was a passing fad, and that their students’ attraction to her was a youthful indiscretion. These hopes have been dashed. Decades after her

death, Rand's appeal and influence cannot be denied; and very often something of her heroic vision of man remains even in the souls of readers who "outgrow" her and resign themselves (sadly or smugly) to a world in which they believe the kind of life she projects is impossible or vicious.

Happily, these facts are beginning to be recognized. Rand's novels have, perhaps grudgingly, been admitted to the literary canon. They are seldom discussed in journals, but one increasingly finds *Anthem* and *The Fountainhead* taught in high school English courses or listed on summer reading lists, and *Atlas Shrugged* has begun to appear in university syllabi. Objectivism, as Rand called her philosophical system, may still be regarded as a curiosity by most philosophy professors, but her defense of egoism is now often covered in ethics textbooks, excerpts from her essays are widely anthologized, and there are entries on Rand in the two major encyclopedias of philosophy.⁶ Moreover, there is a small but growing number of scholars and advocates of Objectivism within the philosophy departments of America's colleges and universities.⁷

Indeed, the last decade saw a boom in quality Rand scholarship. Among the highlights are Tara Smith's (2006) *Ayn Rand's Normative Ethics*, Robert Mayhew's (2004, 2005a, 2007, 2009, 2012a) edited collections of essays on each of Rand's novels, and the first two volumes of the Ayn Rand Society's *Philosophical Studies* series: *Metaethics, Egoism, and Virtue* (2011) and *Concepts and Their Role in Knowledge* (2013), both edited by Allan Gotthelf and James Lennox. Since its founding in 1987, the Society (of which I am co-secretary) holds sessions on Rand's ideas at meetings of the American Philosophical Association. There have been 30 such meetings, collectively involving 48 panelists who represent 41 academic departments from institutions on three continents.⁸ Some of these panelists are advocates for Objectivism; many are not; but all are participating in the stimulating exchange of ideas that occurs whenever philosophers take Rand's works seriously.

Turning from scholarly to popular books, two biographies of Rand were published in 2009, by Jennifer Burns and Anne C. Heller. Burns's book, especially, is less informative than one might hope about Rand's ideas and intellectual development; and both authors, in what seem to be attempts to create what they regard as a satisfying narrative about Rand's later life, emphasize the painful episodes and underplay the bright points; but each biography is a significant improvement over any previously available book-length treatment of Rand's life.⁹ There is also Gary Weiss's (2012) *Ayn Rand Nation*, which, though not very deep and rife with inaccuracies, clearly recognizes the need for sustained reflection by leftists about the nature of Rand's ideas and the source of their appeal.¹⁰ Weiss is trying to combat Rand's influence, but there have also been several recent books put out by major publishing houses that expound some of Rand's ideas sympathetically for a popular audience: Donald Luskin and Andrew Greta's (2011) *I Am John Galt: Today's Heroic Innovators Building the World and the Villainous Parasites Destroying It*, Yaron Brook and Don Watkins's (2012) *Free Market Revolution: How Ayn Rand's Ideas Can End Big Government*, and Peter Schwartz's (2015) *In Defense of Selfishness: Why the Code of Sacrifice Is Unjust and Destructive*.

There are other books that could be named as well, but this list is sufficient to illustrate a growing recognition – both within academia and without, in several disciplines, and across the ideological spectrum – that Ayn Rand should be taken seriously.

To take an author seriously means to read her, not with an eye toward confirming one's prejudices (whether favorable or unfavorable), but simply with an eye to understanding what she thinks and why. If one finds her approach unfamiliar and difficult, it means working to overcome that. If one finds what she says implausible or unmotivated, it means taking the time

to consider why it seems otherwise to her and to the readers who find her convincing – and it means giving thought to the question of whether it is you or she who is mistaken. By the same token, if she strikes you as obviously correct with respect to an issue where you know many people find her views counterintuitive, it means working to identify the premises that you share with her and not with them, and then figuring out how to determine whether those premises are true.

This approach is especially important in the case of Rand, because she is (as *Playboy* put it) “brimming” with “explosively unpopular ideas.” In particular, she maintained that our society is unjust in deep and pervasive ways, and that at the heart of this corruption are the moral ideals by which we are taught to live our lives, and on which we are taught to base our self-esteem. Rand is thus a *radical* critic of society. In this respect she is analogous to other radical thinkers of various stripes – nineteenth-century abolitionists, twentieth-century Marxists, and those who inveigh against what they see as the inherent racism, sexism, or imperialism of Western culture.

As with many such thinkers, Rand’s writing often has a confrontational character. For example, she explains, in the introduction to *The Virtue of Selfishness*, that she gave the work the title she did “For the reason that makes you afraid of it” (VOS vii). The title *is* frightening. It challenges our fundamental moral beliefs – beliefs that are central to all of our goals, to our sense of self-esteem. It takes courage and a commitment to introspective honesty to consider challenges to such beliefs. When one’s sense of self-worth is threatened, there is always a temptation to seize upon any convenient rationalization for rejecting the challenge (and the challenger) rather than taking the time, and putting forth the effort, required to understand and evaluate it. On the other hand, if one feels alienated from or unappreciated by one’s fellow human beings, a radical criticism of one’s society can serve as a rationalization for these feelings and a weapon with which one can lash out against others. Whether one finds Rand appealing or repugnant, the sorts of issues that she raises are fraught with temptations for intellectual dishonesty, and one will find no shortage of facile reasons to dismiss or embrace her ideas too quickly.

Readers who resist these temptations, and approach Rand seriously, will, I think, find her to be a powerfully unconventional artist and a philosopher of great breadth and subtlety. They may also come to see her, as I do, as the discoverer of some profound and empowering truths. But it is not my aim here to argue for this evaluation of Rand, nor is that the purpose of any of the chapters in this book. All of the contributing authors are professional intellectuals who have made mastering Rand’s works and philosophy a significant part of their careers, despite working in fields where she is too seldom taken seriously and where a perceived interest in her can be a professional liability. It stands to reason that we would all be great admirers of her, and two of us (Allan Gotthelf and Harry Binswanger) counted her as a mentor and a personal friend. In other contexts, many of us have written as defenders of her philosophy, but our purpose throughout this book is to serve, not as advocates, but as guides. This is something that Allan Gotthelf and I, in our capacity as editors, stressed throughout the editorial process, from our initial invitations to the contributors, to our (often extensive) feedback on drafts.

The consistent aim of the book is to facilitate the study of Rand’s works and thought by identifying Rand’s key theses and methods and her reasons for them, by tracing the role that these theses and methods play in her thought, by showing the evidence in her texts for all of our interpretive conclusions, and by drawing illuminating comparisons between Rand and other thinkers. Of course, there are many occasions when the contributing authors (myself included) have found that this end is best served by raising and/or responding to objections to Rand’s positions, but such arguments are presented here only as means to clarification. We hope that

the book will be useful to critics and admirers of Rand alike, and that it will thereby help to increase the intellectual sophistication and scholarly rigor of the discourse about her both within the academy and in the culture at large.

Some Challenging Features of Rand's Ideas and Writings

Reading Rand seriously, as opposed to merely reacting passively to her writings, is demanding intellectual work. This is true to some extent of all authors, but there are several features of Rand's corpus and of her position in the culture that make it particularly difficult in her case.

Scholars and students of philosophy trained in analytic departments (as were most of the contributors to this volume) may find that Rand's philosophical essays read as though they come from an alien tradition. She addresses recognizable philosophical issues, but they are framed differently; the context and values she assumes are unfamiliar, as are her methods of argument and analysis. In all these respects, reading Rand is like reading a figure from a different philosophical school (or a different period in the history of philosophy). However, she is not only an outsider to the specific tradition of analytic philosophy; she is (as *Playboy* put it) *sui generis*. Rather than working within an established school of thought, Rand's essays are addressed either to a general audience or (more often) to the audience that she herself created. Most of her non-fiction was written for her own periodicals, and it sometimes presumes familiarity with her novels and with the ideas expounded in earlier issues.

When Rand does engage with the intellectual traditions of her time, she does so as an outsider – often a hostile one. In this respect, she is like such early modern intellectuals as Bacon, Descartes, Locke, and Spinoza. The comparison I am making is not to the intellectual stature of these thinkers, but to their relation to the intellectual establishment of their day. When they wrote, the universities were dominated by Scholasticism, an entrenched intellectual tradition with an established vocabulary, shared assumptions, an institutional structure, conventions of discourse, and a credentialing method. Rather than developing and presenting their ideas within this structure, the early modern intellectuals struck out on their own. They found their own audience and often explained their ideas in ways that made little reference to the establishment. When they did discuss Scholasticism it was in broadsides that the scholastics must have thought missed the nuances of their arguments and trivialized the differences between their positions (e.g., the differences between Scotists and Thomists). Likewise, Rand's often contemptuous remarks about the academic philosophy of the mid-twentieth century did not win her many friends in the philosophy departments of the time. However, 50 years later, most academic philosophers do not have much more regard for the positions Rand dismissed (e.g., logical positivism and flagrant subjectivism about ethical principles) than she did in the 1960s.¹¹

The philosophers with reference to whom Rand situates herself are not her contemporaries in the academy, but world historical figures – chiefly, Plato, Aristotle, and Kant. And, rather than engaging in minute scholarship of these thinkers, she speaks of them as they most often spoke of one another – in essentialized sketches. (See James Lennox's discussion of Rand's take on the history of philosophy, Chapter 13, below.)

Like these world historical philosophers, Rand aimed to be *systematic*. Objectivism (as she called her philosophy) comprises five branches: metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, political theory, and esthetics. It also includes theses that we might describe as belonging to philosophical psychology, the philosophy of economics, and the philosophy of history. In many essays, Rand

used this system as a framework within which to interpret the events of her time, and to recommend courses of political action and cultural activism.

There is a definite hierarchical structure to her thinking. At the base of this system is the metaphysical conviction that Rand called “The Primacy of Existence” – the thesis “that the universe exists independent of consciousness (of *any* consciousness), that things are what they are, that they possess a specific nature, an *identity*. The epistemological corollary is the axiom that consciousness is the faculty of perceiving that which exists” (“The Metaphysical Versus the Man-Made” *PWNI* 32). (See Jason Rheins’s discussion in Chapter 11, below.) The distinctively human form of consciousness is reason, which enables us to understand the world and to guide our actions by means of a system of concepts that are formed, ultimately, on the basis of sense-perception. Unlike sense-perception, which Rand regarded as a direct, inerrant, and automatic awareness of external objects, reason is volitional and (consequently) fallible. Because of this, human beings need epistemology, the “science devoted to the discovery of the proper methods of acquiring and validating knowledge” (*ITOE* 36). The centerpiece of Rand’s epistemology is her theory of concept-formation. In Chapter 12, I examine this theory, and explain the role that Rand thought her theory (and epistemology as a whole) played in enabling human beings to achieve objectivity in their thinking. This thinking includes, importantly, the reasoning by which we validate moral principles and by which each of us conceives and pursues personal values. Thus Rand’s ethics rests on her epistemology and metaphysics.

In ethics, Rand articulates the essential values that constitute “man’s life” (the moral ideal we discussed earlier); she argues that these values are based in the requirements of human survival, and she shows how they form a standard by reference to which an individual can form and pursue rational goals. These issues are the subjects of the chapters that make up Part II of this volume. Part III concerns her social theory – especially her endorsement of capitalism as the ideal social system. I indicated earlier how this endorsement follows from her ethics.

In esthetics, Rand’s aim is to identify the essence of art and the human need that it serves. Doing so makes possible objective standards by which art can be evaluated. The function of art, she maintains, is to enable a human being to experience concretely his (or another’s) sense of life. Rand explores the epistemological function of a sense of life, and its nature as a psychological phenomenon. A sense of life is a body of implicit metaphysical convictions, and Rand defines the school of art to which she belongs by identifying its core metaphysical conviction: “Romanticism is a category of art based on the recognition of the principle that man possesses the faculty of volition” (“What Is Romanticism?” *RM* 91).

Rand is a systematic philosopher in the sense that her thinking has a self-conscious, wide-ranging, and complex logical structure; but she did not present her philosophy systematically. There are theoretical essays on foundational issues in different branches of philosophy, but no architectonic presentation of the whole, and key concepts or theses are sometimes introduced in unexpected places. For example, it is in an essay on capitalism that Rand first expresses her view that there are three broad theories of the relationship between human consciousness and existence (“What Is Capitalism?” *CUI* 13–16; for discussion, see below 67–68, 228–232, 290–292, 446–447). This tendency to discuss fundamental philosophical issues as they arise in the course of addressing other subjects is fairly common among systematic thinkers, and it is part of why many of us find such thinkers – and Rand, in particular – so stimulating. What may seem at first to be a delimited treatment of some discrete phenomenon, suddenly opens up into a discussion of a fundamental question bearing on all of human life; one is exposed to new possibilities and new ways of thinking; and, perhaps most importantly, one becomes attuned to

the many, often non-obvious ways in which philosophy bears on one's life, and one learns to dig deeper and to cast a wider net in one's own thinking. Nonetheless, this feature of Rand's writing poses challenges to students and scholars, especially when first approaching her corpus.

Rand did speak sometimes of her intention to write "a detailed, systematic, presentation in a philosophical treatise" (*FTNI* vii), but she never did so. After her death, her student Leonard Peikoff did write such a treatise – *Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand (OPAR)* – based upon a lecture course he delivered that Rand endorsed as "the only *authorized* presentation of the entire theoretical structure of Objectivism, i.e., the only one that I know of my own knowledge to be fully accurate" ("A Last Survey" *ARL* 4(3) 387). Because of its origins in this course, and because of Peikoff's close intellectual relationship with Rand over the course of 30 years, *OPAR* can be seen as a quasi-primary source for Objectivism – a sort of extension or supplement to Rand's corpus. It is not an exercise in exegesis of Rand's own writings (though it does often refer to them), but a presentation of her philosophic system as Peikoff learned it from Rand. *OPAR* is an impressive work of philosophy in its own right, and an invaluable aid to interpreting Rand. You will find it referenced very frequently in the chapters below.

Rand's own most comprehensive presentation of Objectivism can be found in her last novel, *Atlas Shrugged*. The novel contains several speeches, which can be read as philosophical essays in their own right, and which were reprinted (along with excerpts from her other novels) in her first non-fiction book, *For the New Intellectual (FTNI)*. Of these speeches, the largest is Galt's radio address (*Atlas* 1009–1068). It covers a startling range of topics from all the fields of philosophy, and Rand's introduction to it in *FTNI* reads simply "This is the philosophy of Objectivism" (130). You will find many quotations from this speech in the chapters that follow.¹²

Though the speeches from Rand's novels can be read as philosophical essays, they are best read in the context of the novels, as summations of ideas that have been demonstrated by the prior events through which the characters have lived. Each novel is a work of philosophy, not only or primarily because it contains philosophical speeches, but in the very construction of the plot. In each novel, philosophical premises figure into the characters' motivations, and the central conflict is resolved when reflecting on earlier events leads one or more of the characters to correct a mistaken premise or grasp a new principle.¹³ One can think of the novels as, in effect, elaborate thought experiments, the results of which are summarized by the speeches.

We find a complex, iterative version of this construction in *Atlas Shrugged*. As the story progresses, certain of the protagonists (and, with them, observant readers) identify in increasingly abstract terms the events of the story, their own motives, and the motives of the other characters. At each stage in this process, the identifications become deeper, and this enables the protagonists to understand more fully and on a larger scale what is happening in their world and what causal role they themselves are playing. This new understanding enables them to act in new ways that lead (among other things) to new discoveries and deeper understanding. Galt's speech occurs at the culmination of this process.

Philosophical engagement with Rand's novels as works of literature is intellectually rewarding in its own right and is a vital means to understanding her philosophy. The novels are, therefore, frequently discussed in many of the chapters that make up this volume.

Though Rand's novels are works of philosophy in the sense I have been discussing, she did not intend them as pedagogical devices. They are intended, rather, as art – as the profound esthetic experiences that so many readers have found them to be. Rand was emphatic on this point – see "The Goal of My Writing" (*RM* 163). But the philosophical sophistication of her characterization and plots poses a challenge to readers interested in studying her novels as

works of literature. It is not the only challenge. I have met many people to whom Rand's novels are a guilty pleasure – guilty, because, although they respond to them esthetically, they think that they are poorly written. Often they think this (usually without conviction) because they are judging the novels by parochial and inapplicable standards – for example, whether the dialogue is realistic (as though anyone actually spoke in iambic pentameter, like Hamlet, or in incisive witticisms, like Algernon Moncrieff). It is not always obvious which standards are applicable when judging a piece of literature, nor how to understand our own responses to it. It can help to know something about an author's literary aims and methods – especially when they are outside of the contemporary mainstream. On this issue, I direct readers to Tore Boeckmann's Chapter 17 on Romanticism, the literary school with which Rand identified.

Historians, political scientists, and other readers interested in Rand's analyses of the concrete political and cultural events of her time, will also need to contend with her positions on a wide range of philosophical issues and with the historical narrative in light of which she interpreted contemporary events. Since a person's actions are caused primarily by his ideas, Rand reasoned, so too a culture's thinking – its philosophy – is the dominant cause of its history. Thus the principal actors in Rand's historical narrative are philosophers. She held that, over the course of generations, the ideas of a period's prominent philosophers diffuse out through cultural products and institutions, eventually shaping the public's daily life and sense of life.

Rand saw many of the developments of the fourteenth through nineteenth centuries as the results of the Aristotelianism that had come into the mainstream of European thought through the work of Thomas Aquinas. Though Aristotle's philosophy was "far from perfect" (*Papers* 031_04x_005_001/*Journals* 692), Rand thought it contained the essentials of a rational metaphysics and epistemology: the world we perceive is real and populated by entities with determinate natures that we can come to understand by means of a rational process that begins with sense perception and culminates in a systematic knowledge in universal and essentialized terms.¹⁴ The Aristotelian emphasis on observation, logical rigor, and causal explanation made possible the Renaissance in art and the scientific revolution. A growing respect for reason and an appreciation of life on earth led people to value the freedom that reason and the pursuit of happiness require. In the seventeenth century, John Locke identified the rights that (in Rand's terms) "define and sanction" this freedom; and, in the eighteenth century, these rights were implemented in the American Declaration of Independence and Constitution. There were important contradictions in the American form of government – worst of all, the toleration of slavery in the South – but America's distinguishing feature was an explicit (if compromised) commitment to rights. The resulting social system, capitalism, made it possible for the businessmen of the nineteenth century to use the growing scientific knowledge in new and innovative ways to "fill men's physical needs and expand the comfort of men's existence" (*FTNI* 27).

The creative energy, the abundance, the wealth, the rising standard of living for *every* level of the population were such that the nineteenth century looks like a fiction-Utopia, like a blinding burst of sunlight in the drab progression of most of human history. If life on earth is one's standard of value, then the nineteenth century moved mankind forward more than all the other centuries combined. ("Faith and Force" *PWNI* 89)

Thus Rand thought that the period held forth the promise of a future ideal society – one that would implement the principle of individual rights fully and consistently. But this ideal was not to come.

While the practical consequences of Aristotelianism were reaching men's daily existence, its theoretical influence was long since gone: philosophy, since the Renaissance, had been retrogressing overwhelmingly to the mysticism of Plato. Thus the historically unprecedented events of the nineteenth century – the Industrial Revolution, the child-prodigy speed in the growth of science, the skyrocketing standard of living, the liberated torrent of human energy – were left without intellectual direction or evaluation. The nineteenth century was guided, not by an Aristotelian philosophy, but by an *Aristotelian sense of life*. (And, like a brilliantly violent adolescent who fails to translate his sense of life into conscious terms, it burned itself out, choked by the blind confusions of its own overpowering energy.) (“What Is Romanticism?” RM 95)

Rand thought that all of the prominent philosophers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries contributed (in most cases, unwittingly) to this retrogression into mysticism, but she identified the key figure as Immanuel Kant. As Rand understood it, Kant's philosophy is an attack on all the essentials of a rational way of life; his epistemology undercuts human beings' confidence in reason, and his ethics pits morality against self-interest. She regarded all of the prominent philosophies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as minor variations on Kant's, and she thought this pervasive Kantianism stunted the newly formed sciences of esthetics and economics, thereby preventing some of the achievements of the nineteenth century from being properly identified or defended. The nineteenth century's great esthetic achievement, Romantic art, was supplanted first by Naturalism and then by increasingly unintelligible and ugly modern art. Capitalism also gave way in the twentieth century, and much of Europe descended into dictatorship. The descent was slower in America, which had a more deeply Aristotelian sense of life, but Rand saw signs that the country was moving in the same direction. Objectivism is the philosophy she thought was needed to reverse this trend: a more consistent Aristotelianism that exposes the fallacies of Kantianism and provides the guidance needed to achieve the future promised by the nineteenth century.

Rand's view of and relation to Aristotle, Kant, and other historical philosophers is discussed in many of the chapters below, in connection with her positions on various philosophical issues (see the entries for these thinkers in the index). Chapter 13 by James Lennox is an overview of her take on the history of philosophy and its influence; and, in Chapter 15, John Lewis and I discuss the use Rand made of this historical perspective in interpreting the events and trends of her own time.

We have discussed some of the reasons for studying Rand, some of the challenges involved, and some of the ways in which the chapters of this book will address those challenges. I would like to discuss now a few features of Rand's corpus and her life that should be borne in mind when studying her.

Rand's Works and Related Sources

The Fountainhead, published in 1943, is the book that made Rand's reputation as a novelist. Prior to it, she had published one other novel, *We the Living* (in 1936) and a novella, *Anthem* (in 1938). She had also written a successful Broadway play, *Night of January 16th* (which premiered in 1935), and a number of plays and short stories that would not be performed or published until later in her life or, in some cases, after her death.

Rand seems to have regarded *The Fountainhead* as her first mature work of fiction. She later wrote that, in the period prior to *The Fountainhead*, she sometimes “felt that my means were

inadequate to my purpose, and that I had not said what I wanted to say as well as I wished” (WTL ix). Accordingly, she produced revised versions of *Anthem* (in 1946) and *We the Living* (in 1959). (A detailed account of these revisions can be found in Mayhew 2012b and 2005b.) By contrast, in later editions of *The Fountainhead*, she “left the text untouched” because “I want it to stand as written” – this despite the fact that she thought there was a minor semantic error in the novel and one misleading statement, both of which she explained in her introduction to the 25th anniversary edition (*Fountainhead* x–xi).

If *The Fountainhead* marks Rand’s maturity as a novelist, it is *Atlas Shrugged*, published in 1957, that marks her maturity as a philosopher. In her afterword to the novel, she wrote that she has “held the same philosophy I now hold, for as far back as I can remember” and that, though she “learned a great deal through the years and expanded my knowledge of details, of specific issues, of definitions, of applications,” she “never had to change any of my fundamentals” (*Atlas* 1070). This is the same afterword in which she writes that her philosophy is “in essence, the concept of man as a heroic being, with his own happiness as the moral purpose of his life, with productive achievement as his noblest activity, and reason as his only absolute.” Indeed nascent forms of all the ideas she names in that quote are prominent in the posthumously published notes and short stories from the 1920s that are her earliest surviving writings in English (*Early* 3–146, *Journals* 4–48). What we do not find in these early materials – or even in *The Fountainhead* – is the philosophical system whose outline I sketched above. Much of the content of her ethics is explicit from the beginning (though formulations and emphases change), but it is only in the period between *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged* that she worked out her view of reason and of volition (or “free will”), and these ideas enabled her to integrate her thoughts into a system and remove some important ambiguities.¹⁵

In particular, the idea that reason is a volitional faculty led her to the conviction that an individual’s values and moral character derive from his choices – fundamentally, from the choice between engaging one’s reason in order to grasp reality and subverting one’s consciousness in order to indulge a contradiction. In Rand’s mature system, the fundamental virtue is rationality, and it consists in choosing the first of these alternatives – in volitionally recognizing the primacy of existence. In *The Fountainhead*, she had treated independence as the primary virtue; and it is left ambiguous in much of her work prior to *Atlas* whether all of the morally significant differences she sees among people are matters of choice. The centrality of reason and volition to Rand’s system explains her choice to name it “Objectivism”; for to be “objective” is (as Peikoff aptly formulates Rand’s view) “volitionally to adhere to reality by following certain rules of method, a method based on facts and appropriate to man’s form of cognition” (*OPAR* 117).

Most of Rand’s significant philosophical ideas are explicit in *Atlas* (though not always in the same terminology in which Rand would later express them in her non-fiction). Of those that are not present, the most significant is Rand’s theory of concepts, which did not appear in print until 1966, but the core of this theory was formed in the years between *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas*, when she was systematizing her thought.¹⁶ After *Atlas*, the system was essentially complete, and such ideas as she added (e.g., probably, some of her esthetic theories, the concepts of certain fallacies, and some of her classifications of philosophical theories) took their place within an existing structure.

Atlas was Rand’s last novel. Her later work is all non-fiction, most of it talks or essays. In these later works, she elaborates on her philosophical system and uses it as a framework from which to comment on contemporary events. These works are also informed by the historical narrative discussed earlier, which seems to have been formulated while she was writing *Atlas*,