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Unborrowed Vision

Independence and Egoism in *The Fountainhead*

Tara Smith

Ayn Rand is well known as a champion of egoism, the view that individuals should act to promote their own self-interest.¹ *The Fountainhead* offers a dramatic portrait of independence. Through its fiercely independent hero, Howard Roark, as well as characters who reflect several varieties of dependence, Ayn Rand reveals the symbiotic relationship between independence and egoism. Egoism (and the achievement of rational interest and happiness that it makes possible) requires independence, and independence requires egoism. For the sacrifice of one's interest that is enjoined by other moral codes is incompatible with the exercise of independence. It is *The Fountainhead's* portrayal of this two-way relationship that I shall explore in this essay.

In the first part, by focusing on Roark, Keating, and Wynand, we will observe the way in which egoism depends on independence. Then, by considering Toohey (including the practical effects of his philosophy on Katie), we will see how altruism smothers independence. Finally, we will probe the most puzzling character in the book, Dominique, whose transformation relies on her realizing that she had underestimated the power of the independent egoist.

Ayn Rand writes that independence is "one's acceptance of the responsibility of forming one's own judgments and of living by the work of one's own mind."² Independence is a function of the fundamental method by which a person leads his life. In order to acquire knowledge and to gain values, to answer questions and to make decisions, where does a person direct his attention: to what other people think about reality, or to reality itself? Does he seek intellectual sustenance from the opinions of others or from his own judgment? Does he seek material sustenance from the labor of others or through his own productive work? Whereas the independent person's "concern is the conquest of nature," Roark observes, "the parasite's concern is the conquest of men" (679).³

The alternative to the independent person is the second-hander, who "regards the consciousness of other men as superior to his own and to the facts of reality."⁴ Rand sometimes refers to this type of person as a "social metaphysician," which vividly conveys such a person's premise that what is real and important is dictated by society's beliefs.⁵ While such parasitism can assume many forms (freeloader, dictator, social climber, sycophant, and so on), the shared essence in all its incarnations is the attempt to replace the sovereignty of reality with other people.

In commending independence, Ayn Rand is not endorsing the subjectivist view that any of a person's beliefs or desires or actions is valid, so long as it is. "One's own independent judgment is the *means* by which one must choose one's actions," she explains, "but it is not a moral criterion nor a moral validation."⁶ Because independence consists in the orientation to

reality, it requires *rational* judgment. The independent person's attitude is not "me first," but "reality first." Nor is Ayn Rand suggesting that the independent man is a nonconformist or antisocial. A deliberate effort at nonconformity would merely be an inverted form of subservience to others, a reverse game of Simon Says in which one still takes one's cues from others. And relationships with others can add inestimable value to one's life. Roark readily acknowledges that he needs people to give him work; he is "not building mausoleums" (160). What prevents this from compromising his independence is that it does not involve sacrificing his judgment to theirs. "An architect needs clients," he explains, "but he does not subordinate his work to their wishes. They need him, but they do not order a house just to give him a commission." Moreover, while "an architect requires a great many men to erect his building . . . he does not ask them to vote on his design" (682).⁷

The essence of independence, again, consists in the primary orientation to reality rather than to other men.⁸ The independent man does not filter his thoughts, values, or actions through the attitudes of other people. He is, in Roark's resonant phrase, the man of "unborrowed vision" (678).⁹

EGOISM REQUIRES INDEPENDENCE

While many readers are emotionally drawn to Roark's independence, it is important to appreciate that his independence is at the core of his egoism. Independence is indispensable to a person's ability to actually serve his interest and achieve happiness. A full demonstration of this point depends on a thorough explanation of the origin and objectivity of value, a far more involved issue than we can go into here.¹⁰ For our purposes, however, a few points are telling.

Happiness results from the achievement of values—of those things that advance one's life. Values encompass a vast range of things, from food and shelter through recreation and art to a rewarding marriage or a challenging career. Values, however, are objective. While individuals may differ in the specific things that they *consider* valuable and while certain things can be valuable for some people but not others, it is a matter of fact whether a given thing carries a positive or negative impact on an individual's life. Value is not relative to different people's perspectives; value is not created by individual or group will, belief, or attitude.¹¹ The achievement of values, accordingly, requires rationality (the deliberate adherence to reality in the use of one's mind).¹² Since we live in reality, it is only through respect for reality (i.e., rationality) that we can take the actions necessary to attain life-sustaining ends. By its nature, however, rationality is a first-handed enterprise. "Thinking is something one doesn't borrow or pawn," as Kent Lansing remarks (313). "The mind is an attribute of the individual," Roark explains in his Cortlandt defense. "There is no such thing as a collective thought. An agreement reached by a group of men is . . . drawn upon many individual thoughts. It is a secondary consequence. The primary act—the process of reason—must be performed by each man alone" (679).

To fail to think for oneself is, truly, to fail to think. The repetition of the say-so of others—whether that represents rationally arrived at conclusions, on their part, or mere noises—without one's own first-handed confirmation of its validity, is not rational thought. It is the behavior of a parrot.¹³ All of which points to man's need for independence. To see this more vividly, consider Roark.

The Man Who Does Not Exist for Others

Roark is the only character who is happy, from start to finish. Only he consistently serves his interest. Although he confronts serious obstacles, he gets to build, he wins Dominique, and he is true to himself throughout.

We meet Roark in solitude, laughing at his expulsion from school (15). This reaction to adversity is a recurring motif: he laughs when he learns that Dominique was behind his losing the commission from Sutton (271), that Toohey arranged his selection for the Stoddard Temple (334), and that Monadnock Valley was a hoax intended to lose money (511). His laughter does not signify nervous denial, but the folly of these adversaries' schemes. Utterly at peace with himself and with the world, Roark brushes off others' efforts to thwart him, confident that they cannot succeed. This is not cockiness about the odds of his winning a particular battle. Rather, it reflects his consummate self-esteem. Because he lives rationally and because he knows that this is the only course by which human beings *can* achieve values, he is confident that his values will ultimately prevail. He knows that the world is conducive to human happiness and that he is living in the requisite manner. Roark's attitude reflects what Ayn Rand labels the benevolent universe premise, the conviction that the world is fundamentally hospitable to man's prosperity and that human beings' success and happiness are the norm rather than the exception.¹⁴

Unlike Keating, who suffers continuous inner turmoil as he ceaselessly struggles to decide whom to please, Roark matter-of-factly proceeds by his own rational judgment. His independence is the basis of his calm confidence and serene self-esteem.

We see Roark suffer pain only rarely, as when he learns that Dominique has married Keating (373–75). Clearly, he experiences serious setbacks: losing commissions, losing his practice, defeat at the Stoddard trial, separation from the woman he loves. Yet life's worst kind of pain results from letting oneself down (as Wynand poignantly illustrates). As long as Roark does not do that, external blows carry a limited sting, hurting "only down to a certain point" (344). Blows inflicted by others cannot hurt *him*, in the sense that they cannot damage his character. (During the Stoddard Temple imbroglio, he tells Dominique that what matters is not others' reactions to the building, but that he built it [344].)

Much of what is attractive about Roark is his integrity. He repeatedly refuses to compromise his convictions.¹⁵ His integrity consists not in stubborn adherence to socially sanctioned ideals, however. Roark adheres to *his* principles, based on the verdict of his rational judgment. When Heller chastises him for declining a compromised commission by remarking, "you've got to live," Roark replies: "not that way" (164). Roark lives on *his* terms. His independence comes through even more starkly in his refusal to accept the Manhattan Bank project, a job he desperately needs. He responds to incredulity at his "selflessness" in turning it down by saying, "that was the most selfish thing you've ever seen a man do" (197). The money he would have acquired from the job would have been of no value to *him*—to his goals and happiness. Only by declining could Roark preserve himself.

While Roark does not care what others think of him and does not compare himself to others (26, 72–73), his disposition toward other people is entirely benevolent. He is respectful in his meeting with the Dean and frequently generous with Keating and Wynand. Roark is perfectly willing to help others; he is not willing to sacrifice for them—to surrender greater values for lesser values or non-values.¹⁶ Roark does not view human relations as adversarial, such that one person's well-being can come only at the expense of others (681). When Keating asks Roark why he hates him, Roark innocently asks, "why should I?" (89). At his trial, the crowd realizes that "no hatred was possible to him" (677; also see 515). When Toohey asks what Roark thinks

of him, his response is: “but I don’t think of you” (389). (In simply asking the question, we see Toohey’s opposite orientation.)

Roark enjoys close friendships with Mike, Mallory, and Wynand—bonds built on the values that each, individually, brings to these relationships. He is glad that Wynand likes him not because Wynand is a “VIP,” but because he respects Wynand. Roark candidly acknowledges his need and love of Dominique, going so far as to say that she “owns” him—as much as he can be owned (311). Roark loves select individuals and is prepared to die for them, but not to live for them (608). This again reflects his independence. To love another person is not to subordinate oneself to him. It is to recognize the objective value that he offers to one’s happiness.¹⁷

Roark’s independence is not an idiosyncratic personality quirk. He appreciates the importance of independence—for others as well as himself. Early on, when Keating solicits his career advice, Roark points out that even to ask for it is a mistake (33). When Dominique tells him that she would annul her marriage to Keating if Roark told her to, he knows that such submission would destroy any chance for their happiness. He does not dictate to people because he realizes that dependence on “the right people” offers no more value than any other form of dependence. Notice how he waits for Dominique to learn her error for herself, rather than attempting to impose the lesson before she is ready. Similarly, Roark makes Keating explain why Roark should design Cortlandt rather than simply dictating the reasoning (578–81). Roark realizes that rationality demands that individuals understand proper principles for themselves. “Yes men”—in any relationship—offer no objective value.¹⁸

Roark is his own man *par excellence* and he wishes others to be the same. He does not regard the thoughts or actions of other people, as such, as important. Other people have no standing in his mind *simply because* they are other people. He articulates his attitude at the Cortlandt trial, when he declares that the egoist is not concerned with others in any primary manner—in his aim, motive, thinking, desires, or as the source of his energy (681–82). The egoist does not exist for others (681, 684). And this independence is critical to his happiness. Its role emerges more fully when we consider two characters who mean to serve their own interests, but fail, because of their second-handed methods.

The Self Betrayed

Keating represents a commonplace type of second-hander, the shameless conformist. He is introduced, fittingly, as a member of a crowd, barely distinguishable within “a soft, shivering aspic made of mixed arms, shoulders, chests and stomachs” (28). From the outset, he is keenly aware of others’ eyes on him (28). For it is others who give Keating a feeling of his own value (72–73). He was as “great as the number of people who told him so,” as “right as the number of people who believed it” (188). As Roark describes it, “others dictated [Keating’s] convictions . . . others were his motive power and prime concern. He didn’t want to be great, but to be thought great” (605). Keating advises Roark that the shrewd policy for success in life is to “always be what people want you to be” (261). Whereas Roark’s orientation to reality is apparent from his passion for building, Keating has difficulty concentrating on the work in front of him and cannot even remember his projects (72, 172–73, 30). While craving success as an architect, Keating “hated every piece of stone on the face of the earth” (72; also see 172–73).

Keating is selfish—in the conventional sense. He is a social climber “looking out for number 1,” ruthlessly seeking career advancement at any price (witness his manipulation of Tim Davis, Claude Stengel, and Lucius Heyer). Yet what is searingly exposed, over the course of the

story, is Keating's utter lack of self. "It's his ego that he has betrayed and given up," Roark observes (605)—every time he acquiesced to the preferences of his mother, a client, Toohey, society. He would do anything to get ahead—by others' standards of what that meant. Correspondingly, he was willing to *be* anything, which meant that *his* identity was dissolved in the process.

In contrast to the serenity of Roark, Keating is at war with himself throughout. His life is littered with acts of self-betrayal. He pursues a career in architecture despite his preference for painting. He hates Dominique for her failure to respond to his kiss but doesn't let that get in the way of their relationship's strategic utility (180–81). He never marries Katie, the one woman he truly loves. During an uncharacteristically honest, penetrating conversation with Dominique about the way he has led his life, he leaps at the escape offered by Toohey's phone call (427). At every decision point at which he could assert *his* judgment, Keating defers to others, treating their will as master. (The pattern is set at the outset in a seemingly trivial incident: though Keating wants his mother to leave him alone with Howard, he tells her the opposite [34–35].)

Frequently, Keating does struggle, before abdicating. He initially tells Katie that he doesn't want to meet her uncle, for instance, because he fears he might use her to get on her uncle's good side (60). Yet he quickly reverses himself, making light of his previous reservations (84). Similarly, when Wynand proposes to buy Dominique for the Stoneridge commission, Keating indignantly refuses—momentarily. He quickly succumbs, further burying *his* will (450). The erosion of Keating's identity is evident not only in his repeated failures to stick to his guns, however. He also routinely has trouble in even forming his will. When Dominique proposes marriage, he is unnerved by the need to make up his mind and longs "to escape the responsibility of consciousness" (369). He never brings himself to decide that he wants to marry Katie. Rather, he tentatively ventures at one stage, "we're engaged, aren't we?" (85). He later tells Katie to insist on their marrying, instead of insisting on it himself (157). No definite, firm values are possible to Keating, because he recedes in the face of others' desires.

After selling Dominique to Wynand, Keating feels as if he has sold himself (455). This is exactly what he has done—as he has on numerous previous occasions, this being simply one of the most grotesque. By doing so, he has forfeited all identity of his own. Far from serving himself, Keating has immolated himself on the altar of others' standards. The result is not the happy life that a self-interested person seeks. Indeed, we increasingly observe the hollowness of Keating's satisfactions. At the opening of his Cosmo-Slotnick triumph, he feels no joy (320). The gratification from gaining the Stoneridge commission is "faded and thin" (476). Even late in the story, when he has succeeded spectacularly by conventional measures (head of an important firm winning prestigious commissions, boasting a trophy wife and the patronage of Toohey), his days are plagued with boredom and disquiet, indifference to his work and panicky insecurity in his desperate quest for others' reassurance. Despite having attained everything he'd ever wanted, Keating is not happy (479). The reason is that *he* didn't want those things. Keating attempted to obtain his values, his self-esteem—his very identity—from others. They could not supply it.

Over the course of their marriage, Dominique has deliberately served as a mirror to Keating, exposing the hollowness of his being. His description, one night, of how she has behaved actually reveals what he has been, his entire life. Keating laments that Dominique has not expressed her own desires, during their marriage. "There's no real *you* any more," he observes, and her soul—"the thing that thinks and values and makes decisions"—has been dormant. When he finally asks, "Where's your I?" she responds, with devastating effect, "Where's yours, Peter?" (425; the scene begins on 418).

Eventually, Keating himself realizes that his greatest guilt is his betrayal of his own wants (598).

The other prime case of a mistakenly betrayed self is Wynand. By conventional images of egoism, Wynand has amassed what any selfish person might want: wealth, fame, power. Yet what is he doing when the reader first meets him? Contemplating suicide (390). His flirtation with suicide is only casual, we learn, yet that makes it all the greater an indictment of the state of his life. That he could toy with the thought of killing himself indicates how bereft of values his life has become. All his “success” has hardly won him happiness.

Wynand is not a textbook conformist. Unlike Keating, who compliantly marches to others’ tunes, Wynand seemingly calls the tune. Yet his quest for power amounts merely to a different form of second-handedness. Wynand seeks his happiness from standing on top—from attaining a certain relationship *to other people*. He seeks to rule not because he has an independent vision of the good that he benevolently thinks he can rationally lead other people to realize. Rather, he simply lusts after others’ submission.

Wynand chooses journalism as a career because it promises the widest possible influence. “What was there that entered all those houses?” he asks himself, when deciding. “What reached into every room, into every person?” (405). What, in short, would allow him to rule? Later, by training the *Banner*’s staff to identify the news not as objectively significant events but as “that which will create the greatest excitement among the greatest number” (409), Wynand hitches his success to the fickle tides of popular tastes. Although his yacht’s name, *I do*, is intended as a bold declaration of Wynand’s supremacy over others (“I run things around here”), the attitude it conveys confesses his abiding subservience. He remains consumed by his relationship to other people. Bristling under the orders he receives from others as a youth, Wynand erroneously concludes that the only alternative to being ruled lies in ruling (400–401). He assumes that men’s interests are in perpetual conflict and that life is a competition for social position: what is most important is not the achievement of objective values, but the domination of other people.¹⁹

Though Wynand aspires to a seemingly different position than does Keating, his second-handed path is equally barren. Even his prize accomplishment, his power, is an illusion. This is painfully revealed when he attempts to mobilize the *Banner* for a cause that *he* believes in, the defense of Roark from prosecution for the Cortlandt explosion. He discovers that his empire is a house of cards and that he has actually been a slave to the people, all along, able to exert only as much power as they were willing to grant (603; also see 656). While Wynand might wish, as he tells Toohey, not to be confused with his readers (396), he has relinquished the independence that would have preserved the basis for that distinction. All he has been is whatever they wanted him to be.

Through Wynand, Ayn Rand is illustrating that the person who seeks to dominate others is still dependent on others. By treating the conquest of others as the means to happiness, Wynand has actually created the power that destroys him (663). He gave others the power to control his success and it is he who is crushed, in the process. Wynand’s pursuit of power is destined to fail because, as he himself ultimately realizes, “a leash is only a rope with a noose at both ends” (660). The man intent on ruling makes himself a slave.

In many respects, Wynand is far superior to Keating. My point here, however, is that whatever their differences, Keating and Wynand both abide by Keating’s policy of being whatever people want you to be. Keating is simply more self-aware on this score. Whereas we observe Keating selling his soul piecemeal over the course of the story, Wynand sells his soul wholesale, early on, when he charts the course for conquest from which he rarely deviates. The

exceptions—his private art collection, his relationships with Dominique and Roark—offer glimpses of the glorious soul he has sacrificed. (They reveal, as Roark puts it, that he was not “born to be a second-hander,” 608; also see 663, where Wynand himself thinks the same.) Yet Wynand affirms his second-handedness by caving in to the strikers’ demands and abandoning the fullest assertion of self he had ever ventured.

Both Keating and Wynand mean to be egoists; they seek to advance (what they think is) their self-interest. Because of the second-handed methods that each adopts, however, their happiness remains miserably unrealized. Egoistic intentions are not sufficient. Independence is essential for achieving one’s interest. Man cannot succeed in reality by erecting any sovereign above reality, and a person cannot achieve self-interest through means that destroy his self.²⁰

INDEPENDENCE REQUIRES EGOISM

Through Roark, Keating, and Wynand, then, we have seen that rational egoism requires independence. Egoism and independence are entwined even more intimately, however. Primarily through Toohey, Ayn Rand reveals the way in which altruism destroys independence. Independence can be sustained only through the consistent practice of rational egoism.²¹

Like all second-handers, Toohey’s life revolves around other people. Yet Keating and Wynand seem amateurs, in comparison—easily forgivable children. Toohey brings second-handedness to profoundly more sinister depths. Both Keating and Wynand experience some attraction to the good and exert some element of egoism, however quickly suppressed or compartmentalized. Toohey does not.

Like Wynand, Toohey seeks power (634).²² Whereas Wynand’s attitude is to give people whatever they want and cash in from doing so, Toohey has a distinct vision of what people *should* want and he methodically schemes to make them conform. Toohey does not merely practice second-handedness, in other words; he preaches it, systematically planting seeds so that it will take root and rule. The specific moral code that Toohey spouts is altruism, which crucially depends on second-handedness.

Literally, “altruism” means other-ism.²³ “The basic principle of altruism is that man has no right to exist for his own sake, that service to others is the justification of his existence, and that self-sacrifice is his highest moral duty, value and virtue.”²⁴ Wynand believes (albeit mistakenly) that he can gain genuine value from attaining power over others. Toohey, in contrast, seeks power purely as a means of destruction. Toohey’s motive in promoting altruism is not a sincere, if misguided, love of his fellow men. He seeks only to bring others down. His basic attitude is crystallized in the episode in which, at age seven, he turns a hose on Johnny Stokes in his new Sunday suit (293–94). Over the course of his life, Toohey turns that hose on everyone.²⁵ Toohey’s campaign is importantly different from Wynand’s effort to hire writers of talent on the condition that they henceforth publish only shlock. For Wynand, this is part of an ill-conceived attempt to prove that integrity is impossible—and thereby excuse his own breach of integrity. Wynand needs to prove it because he doesn’t truly believe it (as evidenced in his response to Roark and his buildings). Toohey, in contrast, has no doubts that integrity *is* possible. That is why he sets out to destroy it.

Toohey knows exactly what he is doing, as his explanations of his methods to Dominique and to Keating, at various stages, make clear (281, 567–68, 634–39). He recognizes great achievements, such as the brilliance of Roark’s buildings (281). Yet he thirsts to see Roark following orders (633). Nor does he doubt the unvarnished joy that creative achievement makes

possible. He despises the photo of Roark's face lifted to the Enright House with an air of "utter rapture" (308) precisely because he grasps what it signifies. Toohey doesn't want that, for himself or for anyone else. (This is what drives Mallory to shoot him [225–26].)

Roark's description, in his climactic courtroom speech, of the basic alternative between the parasite and the creator is not news to Toohey. Toohey realizes that he is a parasite. This occasions no internal conflict or self-reproach, as it does, sporadically, for Keating and for Wynand. A parasite is what he wants to be. Toohey is willfully committed to sucking life from those who create values and to training others to do the same. He fully realizes that altruism offers no genuine value to human life.²⁶

It is important to appreciate that Toohey reflects not merely an exotic, virulent strain of altruism, or strange distortions introduced by a perverse man. Toohey represents the essence of altruism. He exhibits a masterful understanding of its fundamental character and full implications. By its nature, altruism destroys. This is not to say that every person who embraces altruism realizes its destructive repercussions and intends them, as Toohey does. These are what the practice of altruism inescapably delivers, however. The only way to practice altruism is to subvert one's own mind. Subservience to others—to their needs, their desires, their beliefs—is the paramount imperative. This way lies only destruction, however, insofar as independence is prerequisite to the creation of objective, life-sustaining values. It is only through an unwavering respect for reality as one's touchstone (rather than any person's opinions about reality) that human beings can create the values that propel our lives. (The damage inflicted by altruism is often minimized by the diluted form in which it is typically practiced. The more consistently a person obeys altruism's command and sacrifices objective values, the more destructive its effects.)²⁷

To fully understand altruism's assault on independence, it is worth examining the relationship a little more closely.

Altruism instructs people to sacrifice their good for the good of others. It is only a short step from the idea that a person should surrender his interest to the idea that he should surrender his judgment. For altruism's repudiation of the self is all-encompassing. Altruism does not leave a person half a loaf; it does not say: "keep your soul, your mind, but give us your physical labors and their material fruit." Rather, altruism claims all of a person, spiritually as well as materially. It does so because the only way it can reliably draw from people materially is by claiming people spiritually (that is, by subduing their minds). A whip will suffice to enslave a person's body; no acceptance of altruism is needed for that. Altruism seeks a person's voluntary enlistment in the service of others, however. And the only way to entice people to voluntarily adopt such a code is to dismantle their rational capacity. All moral codes must appeal to minds, of course, if they are to be voluntarily adopted. What Toohey realizes is that since the prescriptions of altruism make no sense, people cannot rationally embrace them. The only way to win converts, therefore, is to make people abandon their rational, independent judgment.

If a person were to think about altruism honestly, for himself, and judge it by the yardstick of reality rather than by its widespread approval by others, he would easily see its basic contradictions and unanswerable questions. Ayn Rand poses some of these in Galt's speech in *Atlas Shrugged*:

Why is it moral to serve the happiness of others, but not your own? If enjoyment is a value, why is it moral when experienced by others, but immoral when experienced by you? If the sensation of eating a cake is a value, why is it an immoral indulgence in your stomach, but a moral goal for you to achieve in the

stomach of others? Why is it immoral for you to desire, but moral for others to do so? Why is it immoral to produce a value and keep it, but moral to give it away? And if it is not moral for you to keep a value, why is it moral for others to accept it? If you are selfless and virtuous when you give it, are they not selfish and vicious when they take it? Does virtue consist of serving vice? Is the moral purpose of those who are good, self-immolation for the sake of those who are evil?²⁸

Given the absence of logical reason to practice self-sacrifice, for people to accept that self-sacrifice is nonetheless what they *must* practice; what is needed is the stifling of their exercise of reason. Because independent judgment threatens to expose the absurdity of the altruist doctrine, independent judgment is the enemy of altruism.²⁹

The antagonism between altruism and independence runs still deeper, however. Independent judgment is anathema not only as a means of exposing altruism's irrationality. An individual's independent judgment is a central part of what altruism's basic directive of self-sacrifice includes.

Rational action requires rational evaluation of one's options.³⁰ For a person to have reason to do something is for him to have an understanding of why he should do it, of the good (within his hierarchy of values) that it will accomplish. There can be no such thing as understanding why one should sacrifice a value, however, or why one should surrender a greater value for a lesser or non-value. Consequently, in demanding sacrifice, altruism demands that a person disregard his judgment of reality. Altruism essentially instructs a person to *stop caring* about whether he has reason to do something. He should shut down his mind and turn himself into an obedient, unthinking serf. By sacrificing his values, therefore, he *is* sacrificing his independence. This is why Ayn Rand observes:

It is your *mind* that they want you to surrender—all those who preach the creed of sacrifice. . . . Those who start by saying: "It is selfish to pursue your own wishes, you must sacrifice them to the wishes of others"—end up by saying: "It is selfish to uphold your convictions, you must sacrifice them to the convictions of others."³¹

Toohy understands all of this completely. He astutely recognizes what it takes for altruism to prevail, and he conducts his campaign accordingly. Notice that his efforts are not focused on great benefits that can allegedly come about through altruistic offerings. Instead, he targets all those who create values. The soul cannot be ruled, he believes; therefore, it must be broken (635). In his final speech to Keating, Toohy explains his principal techniques: kill aspiration and integrity (by making men feel small and guilty); kill man's sense of values (by enshrining mediocrity); kill reverence (by laughter); kill happiness and joy in living (by taking "away from them whatever is dear or important to them. . . . Make them feel that the mere fact of a personal desire is evil" (635–36). The altruist goal is a world in which "no man will hold a desire for himself, but will direct all his efforts to satisfy the desires of his neighbor who'll have no desires except to satisfy the desires of the next neighbor who'll have no desires—around the globe, Peter. Since all must serve all" (638).

Toohy's employment of these techniques is on display throughout. From his youth, Toohy befriends all comers and proceeds to talk each out of his intended career path (301–2); he discourages Katie from attending college (59). He eventually advises Katie that she must stop

wanting anything—that is, to become a complete second-hander, devoid of personal desires (364). (More savvy than he expects, Katie wonders: when she attains this lofty status, *who* will enter the pearly gates? [365].) Toohey’s characteristic response to anyone’s expression of concern about some weighty matter is to trivialize, to mock, to leaven with humor (e.g., 232, 236). He identifies love with drugstore chocolates and reduces marriage to the domestic comfort of cream of wheat (232). He admonishes Katie’s request for his approval of her engagement “as if the whole thing were important enough to disapprove of” (236) and wearily dismisses happiness itself as “so middle class” (257). When Katie seeks his counsel about her unhappiness, he makes light of her “cosmic tragedy” and ridicules her for caring so selfishly about *her* happiness (364).³² Nothing is ever serious with Toohey; he declares a sense of humor to be the only thing that’s sacred (232, 236). His superficially above-it-all posture is itself carefully calculated, because he knows that the things he casually dismisses as insignificant are actually anything but.

The destructiveness of Toohey’s course could not be more plain. All of Toohey’s targets—aspiration, integrity, values, reverence, happiness—are selfish; they are expressions of individual thought and will and thus of individual identity. Toohey does not advocate integrity, contending simply that it should be directed into the service of altruistic ideals. Rather, he expressly seeks to “direct [integrity] toward a goal destructive of all integrity. Preach selflessness” (635). He recognizes, in other words, that integrity is incompatible with altruism and that altruism is a fraud. “Tell men that altruism is the ideal. Not a single one of them has ever achieved it and not a single one ever will” (635). In acknowledging this, Toohey is acknowledging that his aim is destruction. Altruism is only a means to the end of breaking men’s souls and men’s capacity for happiness.

Toohey’s methods *are* lethal, as Katie’s trajectory tragically illustrates. When we meet her, Katie is a bright-eyed idealist who wants to do what is right. (See p. 361 for her own later account of this.) Telling Keating about her uncle, she gushes with sincere admiration, describing Toohey as “really wonderful,” “amazing,” “so kind, so understanding” (58–59). She is utterly without pretense and candid about her feelings for Keating (so much so that he comments on her poor flirtation technique); she suggests no trace of second-handedness. Katie sets out to be an independent altruist; by the nature of altruism, however, she is steadily pulled into parasitism. The demand for self-sacrifice gradually crushes her independence and swallows her self.

Late in the story, when Katie encounters Keating for the first time in several years, she sounds eerily like her uncle in dismissing her pain at Keating’s earlier breach of their engagement (597–98). She is indifferent to Keating’s admission of his unhappiness and worse, seems beyond concern even with her own, treating her feelings as childish and inconsequential.³³ This is Toohey’s ideal. This is the model person he strives to make of everyone. (It is also noteworthy that by leading the life of an altruist, Katie’s initial benevolence is replaced by hatred and resentment. The Toohey-designed “humanitarian” berates a beneficiary who is not sufficiently appreciative of Katie’s sacrifices as “trash,” is “sore as hell” at someone who manages to solve a problem without her help, and discourages a boy from attending college out of envy for his pursuing the path that she had abandoned [363].)

To summarize this section, let me reiterate the two primary ways in which altruism is in conflict with independence. First, a policy that calls for sacrifice of the values that sustain one’s life and happiness is a policy of suicide. Since no one could rationally embrace such a policy (other than some of those who wish to commit suicide), rationality and the independent judgment it rests on are the enemy of altruism.³⁴ Altruism condemns independent judgment not only

because such judgment threatens to expose altruism's irrationality, however. Independent judgment is actually part and parcel of what altruism demands that individuals surrender. Altruism's command that a person act in defiance of his rational judgment by choosing lesser values over greater values is the command to abandon rationality. Altruism's dictate of self-sacrifice, as we have seen, is total. Anything that is yours—your thoughts, your values, your dreams, as much as your material possessions—is to be sacrificed to others. Altruism decrees it wrong to hold onto any element of *you*. Independence, therefore, which is the virtue of directing one's life by one's own judgment of reality, is anathema.

DOMINIQUE

At the other end of the spectrum from Katie, the figure who undergoes significant change for the better, thanks to the influence of Roark's philosophy, is Dominique. She is also the character who is most difficult to understand. Dominique recognizes creative achievement and reveres it, yet she acts to oppose it and seems to adopt, in many respects, the course of a second-hander. She casts the statue that she adores down the air shaft; she lobbies to thwart Roark's career; she writes bromidic pabulum, praising derivative architecture and smarmy planks of conventional morality, for a journalistic rag; she marries a social climber and then a power-luster who represent everything that she despises. What explains this behavior?

Dominique is rent by an inner conflict between idealism and pessimism.³⁵ Dominique is an idealist insofar as she prizes the very best that human beings can create. She recognizes the unique value in first-handed achievement and is unwilling to reconcile herself to the prevailing mediocrity (and worse) around her. Dominique wants perfection or nothing, she explains to Alvah Scarret; she cannot accept the halfway, she tells Roark (144, 375; also see 288). Alongside this idealism, however, uneasily rests a deep-seated belief that values cannot be achieved, long-term. The good is doomed to fail. To want something, Dominique believes, would be to make her happiness dependent on the "whole world"—a world too filled with second-handers to expect success (143). Dominique reflects the malevolent universe premise: the belief that the world is not fundamentally conducive to man's success and happiness; failure and frustration are the norm.

Clearly her premises are in tension. It makes sense to aspire to ideals only if one believes that their realization is possible. To escape the contradiction, Dominique withdraws from the pursuit of values. Her attitude is essentially: why bother? "What is the use of building for a world that does not exist?" she asks in her Stoddard testimony (356). She has no desire to wage futile battles or to suffer the indignity of defeat by such unworthy opponents (see 375). The idealist in Dominique roots for Roark, believing—at least, hoping—that he will succeed. The pessimist in her works against Roark, to spare them both the greater pain of what she considers inevitable, eventual defeat.³⁶

Just as Dominique's deliberate deference during her marriage to Keating exposes Keating's lack of self, Dominique's marriage to Wynand (a man strikingly similar to her in certain respects) sheds an illuminating light on her. Wynand and Dominique both admire objective values intellectually, but neither pursues those values practically in a rational, healthy manner. Wynand seeks to protect his art collection (and later, Dominique herself) in a private sanctuary, secure from the gaze of others; Dominique longs to protect Roark from the rest of mankind, resenting passersby who so much as lay eyes on him. Dominique and Wynand share a bleak assessment of the prospects for men of integrity, agreeing that they cannot ultimately

succeed. In the face of this belief, each fights such men: he, any writer with a voice of his own; she, most conspicuously, Roark. Whereas Wynand tries to break men of integrity and hopes to win, however (since “the man I couldn’t break would destroy me” [497]), Dominique fights to “tear every chance” away from Roark and hopes that she will lose. “I’m going to pray that you can’t be destroyed,” she tells him (272). When Dominique first sees Wynand’s art gallery, she thinks the worse of him because his impeccable judgment shows what he is capable of and all that he has betrayed (442). Over the course of their marriage, Dominique comes to recognize her own analogous mistake. Wynand and she have committed the same treason, she realizes, against themselves, against the convictions of their independent judgment. And they are the losers, for it (491–94).

It would be inaccurate to describe Dominique as a second-hander. Her beliefs and values are not hand-me-downs from others. While many of her actions could lead one to think otherwise, what is crucial is that her course does not stem from doubts about her own judgment or worth. (Contrast Keating in this regard.) Why does she work for the *Banner*? It is the quintessential embodiment of the second-handed culture that she believes cannot be defeated, so she immerses herself in its dreck to dull its power to hurt her. Why does she marry Keating? To punish herself, she says (apparently, for the “foolish” idealism of valuing things [181]). Why does she marry Wynand? As a means of self-destruction (448). His career makes a mockery of all true values; by becoming “Mrs. Wynand Papers” (449), Dominique thinks she can kill her own capacity to value. Why does she fight Roark? The answer here is more complex. Dominique’s overarching desire is to protect the good from desecration. (She destroys her statue of Helios, for instance, to save it from the worse fate of degradation at the hands of others.) Her crusade against Roark is but the most dramatic example of this. Believing that he cannot succeed in the long run, Dominique thinks that she can hasten his defeat by deflecting commissions and thereby spare him greater suffering (310, 375). At one level, Dominique is attempting to convince herself that her idealism is not viable; Roark’s failure would reinforce her malevolent universe premise. At the same time, however, the part of Dominique that prays that he cannot be destroyed seeks to be proven wrong and to have her idealism vindicated.

What is salient is that Dominique at no point concedes the propriety of the second-handers’ ways. Others’ views do not shake her certainty about what is real or what is valuable one inch. She simply miscalculates the power of false ideas. Through first-handed methods, she reaches a false conclusion about the efficacy of those methods. This is a serious mistake, carrying significant consequences, but it is not a reflection of second-handedness.

Dominique’s admission that to want something would make her dependent on other people (143) reveals her central mistake. In fact, by denying herself *for that reason*, she unwittingly gives others power and makes herself dependent on them. She thinks that she attains “freedom” by wanting nothing (144), yet this abandonment of her values only shackles her course to the parameters set by others. Unlike Keating, who credits others’ opinions as the definitive standard of value, Dominique openly loathes them. The intensity of her distress at others’ attitudes, however, reveals that she accords undue significance to their views. Dominique’s Stoddard testimony, condemning Roark for “casting pearls without getting even a pork chop in return,” implies that creators need something from second-handers (356). They do not. She may be right that most men are not worthy of Roark’s building, but he does not build *for* them, at root. Their worthiness is beside the point.

Roark, of course, realizes this from the outset. Eventually, Dominique learns it as well. “You must learn not to be afraid of the world,” he tells her when she informs him of her marriage

to Keating. “Not to be held by it as you are now” (376). When she visits Roark at his worksite in Ohio, she likens it to his exile in the quarry (462). Whereas she cannot bear to watch him reduced to such pedestrian projects, he accepts them without resentment, for he simply loves the work, the designing and building. He realizes in this encounter that Dominique is not ready to be with him because, having inquired closely about his most incidental contact with strangers, she remains consumed with others’ response; she is “still afraid of lunch wagons and windows” (463). They cannot be together, he explains, gesturing to indicate the streets, “Until you stop hating all this, stop being afraid of it, learn not to notice it” (483). When Dominique asks, “What are you waiting for?” Roark replies simply that he is not waiting (466). The reader observes that he is quietly but persistently doing all he can, every day, to shape the world to his liking. The real question is: what is Dominique waiting for? She is the one who has postponed pursuing her values (including Roark) and thereby prevents her own happiness.

Though Dominique tries for a long time to adopt some of the methods of second-handers, suppressing her own judgment to accede to others’ standards, this course does not numb her pain and does not bring her happiness.³⁷ Her marriages do not extinguish her capacity to value. Try as she might to resist it, her idealism is undiminished. Moreover, Dominique observes Roark succeeding—flourishing despite tremendous external obstacles: indifference, hostility, even organized campaigns mounted to defeat him. He is as uncompromising an idealist as one could imagine, yet he is happy, succeeding *on his terms*. Roark is a walking refutation of the malevolent universe premise.

Dominique learns, from her own experience and from Roark, that she is the one who has miscalculated. Happiness does not depend on the world’s endorsement, and the independent person *can* succeed. The action that signals her liberation is her complicity in carrying out the Cortlandt explosion. Here, she unequivocally allies herself with Roark against the standards of society and takes action in pursuit of *her* values. While in the past, Dominique was afraid of sharing Roark with others, she now advertises their relationship to the press (668–69). Even her anger at Wynand for yielding to the strikers reflects her finally full and unqualified recognition that integrity *is* possible and should be demanded.

Dominique learns that happiness does not require the surrender of one’s ideals and that no good can come from such surrender. What Roark’s independence and integrity and success demonstrate is that idealism and reality are not in conflict.

* * *

When the boy on the bike sees Monadnock Valley, he gains the “courage to face a lifetime” (506). Roark does not seek to inspire anyone.³⁸ He simply leads his life. By doing so in a first-hand, fully human way, however, he confirms the spirit of youth (which is what Ayn Rand once identified as the source of her novel’s enduring appeal).³⁹ This spirit is “a sense of enormous expectation, the sense that one’s life is important, that great achievements are within one’s capacity, and that great things lie ahead” (xi). Through his unwavering independence, Roark shows that all great things are possible. Indeed, for Roark himself, the riches of happiness are not merely possible; they are realized. It *is* a benevolent universe. And independence is essential to reap its boundless rewards.⁴⁰

NOTES

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1. See Ayn Rand, "Introduction," *The Virtue of Selfishness* (New York: Signet, 1964), vii-xii, and "The Objectivist Ethics," *The Virtue of Selfishness*, 13–39.
 2. Rand, "The Objectivist Ethics," 28.
 3. For more on the nature and various types of second-handedness, see Leonard Peikoff, *Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand* (New York: Dutton, 1991), 253 and 258. Also see Tara Smith, *Ayn Rand's Normative Ethics: The Virtuous Egoist* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), chapter 5.
 4. Rand, "The Argument from Intimidation," *The Virtue of Selfishness*, 165.
 5. See Rand, "The Argument from Intimidation," 165, and David Harriman, ed., *Journals of Ayn Rand* (New York: Dutton, 1997), 678.
 6. Rand, "Introduction," *The Virtue of Selfishness*, xi, emphasis in original.
 7. For more on the independent person's proper relationships with others, see Smith, *Ayn Rand's Normative Ethics*, chapter 5.
 8. Peikoff, *Objectivism*, 251.
 9. In his final courtroom defense speech, Roark says a good deal that clarifies Rand's view, 677–85. For discussion of the ballyhooed notion of man's interdependence, see Peikoff, *Objectivism*, 257–58, and Smith, *Ayn Rand's Normative Ethics*, chapter 5.
 10. See Rand, "The Objectivist Ethics," Peikoff, *Objectivism*, 206–49, and Tara Smith, *Viable Values: A Study of Life as the Root and Reward of Morality* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 83–151.
 11. Strictly, a thing does need to be recognized by a person as a value in order to be a value, for him. See Peikoff, *Objectivism*, 241–43. For discussion of the optional values that can objectively vary for different individuals, see Smith, *Viable Values*, 99–101, 127–28.
 12. For more on the basic nature of rationality, see Peikoff, *Objectivism*, 116–21, 152–63, and Smith, *Ayn Rand's Normative Ethics*, chapter 3.
 13. The necessary first-hand confirmations do not require that a person attempt to become a jack of all trades and eschew the knowledge of experts. For more on this aspect of independence, see Peikoff, *Objectivism*, 257–58, and Smith, *Ayn Rand's Normative Ethics*, chapter 5.
 14. For discussion of this principle, see Peikoff, *Objectivism*, 342–43. Rand uses this term in journal entries pertaining to *Atlas Shrugged*. See Harriman, *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 425, 555–56. The benevolent universe premise is reflected, among many places in *Atlas Shrugged*, in Ragnar's response to Dagny's question about the risks he takes, in Galt's explanation of his attitude toward pain, and in Dagny's realization that "we never had to take any of it seriously." *Atlas Shrugged* (originally published 1957), 35th anniversary edition (New York: Dutton, 1992), 759, 959, 702.
 15. Independence and integrity are both major virtues, in Rand's moral theory. Along with honesty, justice, productiveness, and pride, they are reflections of the fundamental virtue of rationality; each, to be fully practiced, requires each of the others. See discussion of all the virtues in Peikoff, *Objectivism*, 250–324, and Smith, *Ayn Rand's Normative Ethics*.
 16. Rand, "The Ethics of Emergencies," *The Virtue of Selfishness*, 50. Also see Galt's speech in *Atlas Shrugged*, 1028.
 17. For explanation of how an egoist can be willing to die for another person, see Rand, "The Ethics of Emergencies." Related discussion is also in Smith, *Viable Values*, 143–45. On friendship more generally, see Smith, "Egoistic Friendship," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 42, no. 4 (October 2005): 263–77.
 18. *Atlas Shrugged* includes several passages that emphasize the necessity of seeing for oneself. See especially the exchanges between Dagny and Akston and between Dagny and Mulligan, concerning her decision about whether to remain in the valley, 735, 802.
 19. His view is akin to the philosopher Thomas Hobbes' brand of egoism.

20. It is because conventional notions of selfishness do not truly advance a person's self-interest that Rand titles one of her books *The Virtue of Selfishness*, rather than adopting some more palatable label for her view and surrendering the term "selfishness" to those who do not understand its true nature and requirements. She unqualifiedly advocates each person's pursuit of his happiness and she argues that only true selfishness—the rational selfishness of the independent individual—actually advances that end.

21. A full defense of this last claim is beyond the scope of this paper. Since altruism is not the only alternative to egoism (sacrifice for its own sake or for the sake of God, for instance, are also possible), the fact that altruism destroys independence does not by itself entail the stronger claim that independence requires egoism. Any call for sacrifice is equally incompatible with independence, however, as should become clear as we focus on the conflict between independence and altruism.

22. In her journals, Rand describes Toohey as having an "insane will to power." Harriman, *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 102.

23. The word's French and Latin roots are given in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).

24. Rand, "Faith and Force: The Destroyers of the Modern World," *Philosophy: Who Needs It* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1982), 74. Also see "The Objectivist Ethics," 37–38. This characterization is hardly peculiar to Rand. See, for instance, among contemporary academic ethicists, Thomas Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism* (Oxford: Glarendon Press, 1970), 79; E.J. Bond, "Theories of the Good," *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, ed. Lawrence C. Becker (New York: Garland, 1992), vol. 1, 410; Burton F. Porter, *The Good Life* (New York: Ardley House, 1995), 283; Lawrence Blum, "Altruism," *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, ed. Becker, vol. 1, 35.

25. This way of couching Toohey's attitude was suggested to me by Allan Gotthelf.

26. Toohey bears an obvious resemblance, in his deepest motivation, to James Taggart in *Atlas Shrugged*. In essays, Rand observes that "The advocates of altruism are motivated not by compassion for suffering, but by hatred for man's life" and that "Altruism holds *death* as its ultimate goal and standard of value." "An Untitled Letter," *Philosophy: Who Needs It*, 123; "The Objectivist Ethics," 38, emphasis in original.

27. An egoist can sometimes choose, consistently with his self-interest, to do things for others. Kindness and charity, for instance, do not contradict rational egoism so long as they do not involve self-sacrifice. See Rand, "The Ethics of Emergencies," Smith, *Ayn Rand's Normative Ethics*, chapter 10, and "Virtues or Vices? Kindness, Generosity, and Charity," lecture, audio available from Ayn Rand Bookstore (www.aynrandbookstore.com).

28. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 1031.

29. For discussion of the threat that independent judgment poses to collectivist political ideals, see Onkar Ghate, "Breaking the Metaphysical Chains of Dictatorship: Free Will and Determinism in *Anthem*," in Robert Mayhew, ed., *Essays on Ayn Rand's "Anthem"* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 225–54.

30. This paragraph is indebted to Darryl Wright's lecture on "Reason and Selfishness," audio available from Ayn Rand Bookstore.

31. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 1030. Because human action is volitional and because a person's mind and body are an integrated, indivisible whole, no moral code could call for the performance of certain physical actions (such as giving money to the poor) without correlatively (at least implicitly) calling for the performance of certain kinds of mental actions (such as putting one's faith in god, dispensing with logical priorities, etc.).

32. Rand observes elsewhere that "Guilt is altruism's stock in trade, and the inducing of guilt is its only means of self-perpetuation." "Moral Inflation," Part II, *Ayn Rand Letter III*, 13, 2.

33. Rand identifies, among the principal consequences of altruism, lack of self-esteem and lack of respect for others. "The Ethics of Emergencies," 49.

34. This is not to say that anyone who chooses to commit suicide is altruistic or has reason to be altruistic. In certain circumstances, suicide can be a rational, egoistic choice. The point is simply that for a person who truly does not value his life, the suicidal nature of altruism would not render altruism

irrational. For further discussion of the status of suicide in the Objectivist ethics, see Smith, *Viable Values*, pp. 143–45.

35. For a brief discussion of this, see Peikoff, “The Art of Thinking,” lecture #3, audio available from Ayn Rand Bookstore. (This topic occupies only a portion of that lecture.)

36. I employ “pessimism” here only as a convenient shorthand; strictly, pessimism is not the equivalent of the malevolent universe premise. See Peikoff, *Objectivism*, 343.

37. We should note, however, that her suppression of judgment is different from that of the typical second-hander, who has no independent judgment *to* suppress. Dominique judges continually, if often silently. Thanks to Greg Salmieri for pointing this out.

38. At one point, he remarks that he does not wish “to be the symbol of anything” (602).

39. Rand, “Introduction” to 1968 edition (xiii).

40. Thanks to Harry Binswanger, Allan Gotthelf, and Robert Mayhew for helpful discussions of my early ideas for this essay, and to Robert Mayhew, Greg Salmieri, and Ann Ciccolella for helpful comments on a draft of it.