

19

The Role of Galt's Speech in *Atlas Shrugged*

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Anyone who reads John Galt's radio broadcast and who has some familiarity with the ideas that have shaped and continue to shape Western culture, should recognize his speech as a statement overflowing with original ideas—the work of an enormously powerful mind, whether or not you happen to agree with the speech's content.

But as impressive as the speech is, many readers I think fail to appreciate the integral role the speech plays in the action and story of *Atlas Shrugged*. I've met more than a few readers who skipped over the speech on a first reading of the novel, treating it as an interruption in the action, impatient to see how Ayn Rand's dramatic story ends. The implicit premise of such fast-forwarding is that you can understand the story's ending without understanding the content of the speech. I don't think this is true.

Even many readers who don't skip the speech regard it as something of a digression or as a pause in the action, albeit a fascinating one. When I ask such readers why Galt gives his radio broadcast, they are almost always at a loss to answer. Often, their reply is that the speech is primarily a vehicle for Rand to disseminate her ideas and is only tenuously connected to the progression of the story. Again, I don't think this is true.

So, *why* does Galt give his speech? Who is he addressing? Why does he say what he says in his radio broadcast and why does he structure it the way that he does? Why does he give it when he does? What is he seeking to accomplish? How *is* his action of speaking to the world connected to the plot and its climax? More broadly, how does the speech contribute to the novel's theme?

There are I think interesting answers to all these questions, and in answering them we will see that Galt's Speech is crucial to the story and to the novel's characterization of its hero, John Galt.

The theme of *Atlas Shrugged*, it is important to keep in mind throughout this discussion, is (as Rand formulated it): “the role of the mind in man's existence—and, as corollary, the demonstration of a new moral philosophy: the morality of rational self-interest.”¹ Equally important, the novel's plot-theme—a literary term coined by Rand and which she defined as “the central conflict or ‘situation’ of a story—a conflict in terms of action, corresponding to the theme and complex enough to create a purposeful progression of events”—is: “the men of the mind going on strike against an altruist-collectivist society.”² *Atlas Shrugged* is a novel about a strike.

To understand the role that Galt's speech plays in the story, therefore, we must identify the speech's connection to the strike by the men of the mind. Considered as an action, I will argue, Galt's Speech is an aspect of the whole strike. Considered from the perspective of its content, Galt's Speech explains the precise nature of the strike and gives outward form to the

mind of its leader. His speech, in other words, is intimately tied to both the novel's plot and theme.

When Galt goes on the radio, the world is near collapse. Galt tells the world that it is he who has brought it to this state:

I am the man who has deprived you of victims and thus has destroyed your world Men do not live by the mind, you say? I have withdrawn those who do. The mind is impotent, you say? I have withdrawn those whose mind isn't. There are values higher than the mind, you say? I have withdrawn those for whom there aren't. . . . We are on strike, we, the men of the mind. (1009–10)

But he also tells the world that unlike any other strike, the men of the mind have no claim to press and no desire to negotiate.

There is a difference between our strike and all those you've practiced for centuries: our strike consists, not of making demands, but of granting them. We are evil, according to your morality. We have chosen not to harm you any longer. We are useless, according to your economics. We have chosen not to exploit you any longer. We are dangerous and to be shackled, according to your politics. We have chosen not to endanger you, nor to wear the shackles any longer. We are only an illusion, according to your philosophy. We have chosen not to blind you any longer and have left you free to face reality—the reality you wanted, the world as you see it now, a world without mind. . . .

We have no demands to present to you, no terms to bargain about, no compromise to reach. You have nothing to offer us. *We do not need you.* (1010–11)

But if the men of the mind have nothing to demand or to negotiate, why is Galt speaking on the radio?

It is primarily an issue of justice. Galt *has* stopped the motor of the world and hastened the world's destruction. He owes the world an explanation: to explain how he has done it and why he was *right* to do it. In the name of justice, he will demonstrate to the people of the world that they are not innocent victims: they are not suffering because of their virtues but, properly, paying for their sins. And particularly in the name of anything good and human remaining in them, Galt will explain to them the cause of their plight and the only path to a solution.

As Galt says near the end of his speech:

If in the chaos of the motives that have made you listen to the radio tonight, there was an honest, *rational* desire to learn what is wrong with the world, you are the man whom I wished to address. By the rules and terms of my code, one owes a rational statement to those whom it does concern and who're making an effort to know. Those who're making an effort to fail to understand me, are not a concern of mine. (1066)

It is illuminating to compare Galt's motivation here to that of a real-life case: that of America's Founding Fathers in the Declaration of Independence. The Founding Fathers' act of rebellion turned the political landscape of their world upside down. Against what seemed to the rest of the world like an equitable arrangement between crown and colony—and the American

colonies were certainly not severely oppressed when compared to many millions of people throughout the world then or since—the Founding Fathers declared that it would no longer be business as usual, that rule by the divine right of a king was illegitimate and tyrannical and would be brought to an end. The people of the world, confronted with this enormous upheaval in their way of life, had a right to an explanation. “When in the Course of human Events,” the Declaration begins,

it becomes necessary for one People to dissolve the Political Bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the Powers of the Earth, the separate and equal Station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God entitle them, a decent Respect to the Opinions of Mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the Separation.

The Declaration then goes on to name the political principles that guide the rebels and the reason for their rebellion: the outrages committed by Great Britain against the colonies.

As America’s Founding Fathers did, so John Galt does. He names to the world the principles—this time moral and philosophical—that govern the strikers and caused them to strike, and he names the opposite principles, accepted by most of the people in the world and responsible for all their vicious actions, against which the strikers had every right to rebel. Galt names the reasons which, in reason, every person should accept as valid: the people of the world should agree that the men of the mind had ample cause to strike and to let the world be consumed by its own irrationality.

And to all those individuals who see that he is right, Galt offers the knowledge and the course of action necessary for them to avoid their destruction and to speed the return of the strikers: he urges them to go on strike. This is Galt’s other purpose in announcing the strike and its justice.

I am speaking to those who desire to live and to recapture the honor of their soul. Now that you know the truth about your world, stop supporting your own destroyers. . . . Withdraw your sanction. Withdraw your support. . . . Go on strike—in the manner I did. Use your mind and skill in private, extend your knowledge, develop your ability, but do not share your achievements

If you find a chance to vanish into some wilderness out of their reach, do so, but not to exist as a bandit or to create a gang competing with their racket: build a productive life on your own with those who accept your moral code and are willing to struggle for a human existence. You have no chance to win on the Morality of Death. . . . When the looters’ state collapses, deprived of its best slaves . . . when the advocates of the morality of sacrifice perish with their final ideal—then and on that day we will return.

We will open the gates of our city to those who deserve to enter We will act as the rallying center for such hidden outposts as you’ll build. . . . Those who join us, will join us; those who don’t, will not have the power to stop us; hordes of savages have never been an obstacle to men who carried the banner of the mind. (1066–67)

In order to get the better people left in the world to choose the side of the strike, Galt has to convince them that there is no chance to win on the Morality of Death. He must show them, as he does in his radio broadcast, the true nature and consequences of the Morality of Death. He

must show them that there is another mode of existence: the Morality of Life. And he must show them that their choice is: either-or.

Given the basic purpose of his speech, I think it is clear who Galt is above all addressing in his radio broadcast. He is not addressing the looters—the advocates of the Morality of Death; throughout the speech he refers to them as “your teachers,” “the mystics,” “your moralists,” and so on. Galt has no reason to speak to them directly, as he makes clear during his capture (to speak to them directly would sanction their irrationality and evil by granting that they were actually struggling to understand and to live). Nor is Galt addressing Dagny or anyone else like her who may remain in the world: “The last of my words,” he says near the very end of his speech, “will be addressed to those heroes who might still be hidden in the world” (1068). The first of Galt’s words, in contrast, were addressed to the people of the world, the majority of whom Galt regards as part victims and part perpetrators of the looters’ creed. Near the start of his broadcast he says “if you wish to know why you are perishing—you who dread knowledge—I am the man who will now tell you” (1009)—and later: “Yes, you *are* bearing punishment for your evil. . . . And if you wish to go on living, what you now need is not to *return* to morality—you who have never known any—but to *discover* it” (1011)—and later: “Whoever you are, you who are hearing me now, I am speaking to whatever living remnant is left uncorrupted within you, to the remnant of the human, to your *mind*, and I say: There *is* a morality of reason” (1013–14)—and still later: “You, who are half-rational, half-coward, have been playing a con game with reality, but the victim you have conned is yourself” (1054).

As to the question of why Galt chooses to address the world at the moment he does, observe that it would undermine the strike to announce it any earlier. Part of what the Morality of Death teaches the world, Galt knows, is to ignore the existence of the men of the mind, even as the world exploits these men. When Galt quits the Twentieth Century Motor Company, he realizes no one will yet care that the men of the mind are beginning to strike. But when Galt chooses to announce the existence of the strike, people care. The world is disintegrating and its people have a nameless sense, which they often try to evade, that there are no minds left in their world. All around them, whether at work or walking the streets of their cities, they sense that competent men are being replaced by the responsibility avoiders. They now worry when another industrialist deserts. They see the looters trying to chain men like Hank Rearden to their jobs, and yet these men still vanish. They’ve seen Francisco dynamite his business empire—and have sensed the reason why. The people of the nation—at least the better of them—are now ready to listen to a report on the world crisis. “That,” says Galt at the beginning of his broadcast, “is what you are going to hear” (1009).

Galt knows, moreover, that the looters and all those sympathetic to them will try to find, chain, and kill the men of the mind. He can only address the world when the strikers are out of reach, which they aren’t earlier in the strike; the valley becomes self-supporting only years after being established by Midas Mulligan. At earlier stages in the strike, too many strikers and soon-to-be strikers remained in the world, in danger if the strike were made public. Galt addresses the nation only after he gets his last and greatest catch: Hank Rearden. At that point, only Dagny remains in the looters’ world, but she has chosen to remain.

Once we understand the basic purpose and intended audience of Galt’s broadcast, we can see that those factors dictate its structure. The strike, as I’ve said, represents a complete break with the existing order of society. Galt and the other strikers are not demanding, say, that some of their taxes be lowered or that some of the regulations strangling them be loosened. The men of the mind have rejected the entire terms of their society and have no interest in discussion,

negotiation, or compromise with its leaders. This is what Galt explains in what I term the introduction of the speech, which I locate from the paragraph beginning with Galt's sentence: "'Ladies and gentlemen,' said a voice that came from the radio receiver—a man's clear, calm, implacable voice, the kind of voice that had not been heard on the airwaves for years—'Mr. Thompson will not speak to you tonight'"—to the paragraph beginning with the sentence: "Whatever else they fought about, it was against man's mind that all your moralists have stood united" and ending with the sentence: "Now choose to perish or to learn that the anti-mind is the anti-life" (1009–12).

After Galt discloses to the world the strike and its radical nature—namely, that the misery the world is experiencing is the consequence of its moral ideal brought into full reality for the first time, and that this has happened because the men of the mind have consciously rejected that ideal and are no longer willing to be sacrificed in its name—the rest of Galt's radio broadcast then divides into three major sections. First, to the world's people he explains in the name of what new moral ideal the strikers have broken with existing society. Second, he explains the exact nature and source of the ideal the men of the mind have broken with—and why no alternative action and no compromise on their part would have been proper. Third, he explains to the world's better people why their choices have reduced to one: either choose the Morality of Life and therefore a chance at life—or choose the Morality of Death and therefore imminent destruction.

In the first section of his speech, Galt begins with the positive. The strike is a rejection of the mystics' whole view of existence and the corrupt moral code it requires, in favor of the strikers' view of existence and the moral code it demands. Galt begins by presenting to the world his new Morality of Life and, crucially, explains the view of existence, the metaphysics, which generates it: the universe as an absolute, governed by the law of identity; man's life as conditional, requiring a definite course if it is to endure; man's reasoning mind as his only key to unlocking the identity of the universe; and therefore, as a corollary in the field of morality, the essence of virtue as the embrace of existence through the use of your mind and its power of logical thought. When he declares to the world that "We, the men of the mind, are now on strike against you in the name of a single axiom, which is the root of our moral code, just as the root of yours is the wish to escape it: the axiom that existence exists"—Galt means it (1015).

This first section on the Morality of Life I locate from the paragraph beginning with Galt's sentence: "Man's mind is his basic tool of survival"—to the paragraph beginning with the sentence: "You seek escape from pain" and ending with the sentence: "It is not death that we wish to avoid, but life that we wish to live" (1012–24).

In the second section, Galt shows the people of the world the full and exact nature of the code they have been taught and have (partially) accepted—a code that begins by damning man's nature as evil, that proclaims as virtue the sacrifice of your values, and that declares the passkey to the moral elite to be a lack of intelligence, of ability, and of mind—a code that, in actual fact, holds emptiness—the zero—death—as its standard. And Galt shows the people of the world the view of existence that has spawned the Morality of Death: the view held by the world's teachers, the mystics of spirit and the mystics of muscle. The universe of these mystics' dreams is a nightmare universe in which a zero is superior to a something, the causeless is superior to the caused, the unearned is superior to the earned, and their wishes can supersede the basic law of existence, the law of identity.

This second section on the Morality of Death I place from the paragraph beginning with Galt's sentence: "You, who have lost the concept of the difference, you who claim that fear and

joy are incentives of equal power—and secretly add that fear is the more ‘practical’—you do not wish to live, and only fear of death still holds you to the existence you have damned”—to the paragraph beginning with the sentence: “It is a conspiracy of all those who seek, not to live, but to *get away with living*, those who seek to cut just one small corner of reality and are drawn, by feeling, to all the others who are busy cutting other corners—a conspiracy that unites by links of evasion all those who pursue a *zero* as a value . . .” and ending with the sentence: “*Death* is the premise at the root of their theories, *death* is the goal of their actions in practice—and *you* are the last of their victims” (1024–47).

In the speech’s third and final section, Galt tells the world’s people that they must now choose. Either choose the strikers’ view of existence, the morality of life that this view entails and, armed with the new philosophical knowledge Galt has taught them, the joy and happiness that they could achieve. Or continue to choose their teachers’ view of existence, the Morality of Death it requires, and the destruction that can no longer be postponed. “We, who were the living buffers between you and the nature of your creed,” Galt tells them at the beginning of this section, “are no longer there to save you from the effects of your chosen beliefs. We are no longer willing to pay with our lives for the debts you incurred in yours or the moral deficit piled up by all the generations behind you. You had been living on borrowed time—and I am the man who has called in the loan” (1047).

But even those people of the world who have retained some good element within their souls, and who have now heard Galt’s identification of the Morality of Life and the Morality of Death, are afraid to take sides. So in this third section, Galt explains to them the sources of their fear, why their fear is misplaced, and what they must gather the courage to do: to embrace the Morality of Life and join the strike. It is the Morality of Death, Galt shows them, that has made them look at morality—*any* morality—as a necessary evil, that has made them avoid every extreme and seek the middle of any road, that has turned their own need of morality and of self-esteem into their enemy, and that has made them regard any man of the mind as their exploiter.

This third and final section I place from the paragraph beginning with Galt’s sentence: “We, who were the living buffers between you and the nature of your creed, are no longer there to save you from the effects of your chosen beliefs”—to the paragraph beginning with the sentence: “Such is the future you are capable of winning” and ending with the sentence: “Let your mind and your love of existence decide” (1047–68).³

You could, therefore, summarize the speech’s structure as follows: (1) We, the men of the mind, are on strike against your moral ideal and in the name of ours. (2) Our ideal is the Morality of Life. (3) Your ideal is the Morality of Death. (4) You must now choose: it is either-or.⁴

And when you understand the purpose, intended audience, and basic structure of Galt’s Speech, I think you can see that his radio broadcast is a logical and crucial element in the story’s action. Galt *must* deliver his speech. He, the most rational and objective of men, would be acting non-objectively if he did not present his stand to the world and the reasons behind it.

Notice how crucial the speech is to the climax of the story. The looters torture Galt to force him to become Economic Dictator of the nation. They know their lives depend on him starting to produce—and they visit *pain* on him for the privilege of sustaining them. They must resort to physically torturing him, because he “refuses to play his historical part” (1104): he will not voluntarily hand his mind to them. “It is not your wealth that they’re after,” Galt said in his speech. “Theirs is a conspiracy against the mind” (1046–47)—and now the full nature of this deeper conspiracy is being exposed.

It *must* be Galt, the preeminent man of the mind, whom the looters want to tell them what to do. And when Galt refuses to play his part, the full futility and evil of the mystics' course of action is exposed. It is the futility of the mindless, who must resort to force to try to extract ideas from Galt's mind—ideas which he himself knows and has told them to be impossible. But to them the realm of thought is a magical domain: *somehow*, Galt could generate the ideas to save their system, if only he would choose to do so. "We want you to rule," Ferris declares to the naked, shackled figure of John Galt. "Understand? We want you to give orders and to figure out the right orders to give. . . . Speeches, logic, arguments or passive obedience won't save you now. We want ideas—or else" (1140). A few moments later Ferris shouts to Mouch: "I want him to *believe!* To accept! To *want* to accept! We've got to have him work for us *voluntarily!*" (1142). Their impotence is such, however, that they cannot even torture Galt without his aid—it is he who must tell them how to fix the generator.

By his knowingly being a pawn in a demonstration to win Dagny, Galt reveals to her—and to the looters—the full meaning of the mystics' cult of zero-worship: the looters want to kill Galt, knowing that their own deaths will follow.

But why is it *Galt* on the looters' torture rack? The looters had been desperately trying to chain industrialists like Hank Rearden to their jobs and to punish deserters, but they didn't even know of John Galt's existence—until the speech. It is his radio broadcast that announces the strike and the fact that Galt is its leader. And more: Galt is not just the leader of the strike, he is the preeminent man of the mind, a fact which the looters, in their habitual way, half evade—"It wasn't real, was it?" are Mr. Thompson's first words after hearing Galt's broadcast (1070)—and half grasp: they want to find Galt because, as Mr. Thompson says just a few moments later, "He knows what to do" (1074). How do the looters know that Galt is the preeminent man of the mind? They've heard his speech. Without this fact, the climax doesn't make sense. But with this fact, the looters' public pleas for Galt to contact Washington, to negotiate and join the leaders of the nation in this time of crisis, alongside their secretive attempts to capture him, are to be expected.⁵

Galt's Speech, therefore, is crucial to the characterization of John Galt: of establishing who he is and why he is the leader of the strike. He is the foremost man of ability, of intelligence, of mind, of genius. Certainly part of this fact about Galt is conveyed by Galt's actions and words in the valley when Dagny crash-lands there. Part of it is conveyed by the respect, admiration, and loyalty that Francisco and the other strikers show Galt. And part of it is conveyed by Galt being the inventor of the motor. But the motor, obviously, is science fiction; we as readers can project the kind of thought its invention would require, but not its specifics. But we can do precisely this for Galt's Speech. The speech *is* a work of genius. This I think is an incredible literary achievement on Rand's part: her plot requires that Galt be a man of genius, and she then proceeds to put in her novel, as his actual statement, a product that could only come from the mind of a genius. And not only does this product make vivid and real Galt's genius, it also contributes crucially to the plot: when the looters hear Galt's radio broadcast, they set out to find and to torture him—as given the logic of their premises, they must.

Since Galt's Speech is indispensable to the story's climax, it also serves, unsurprisingly, as a powerful way of conveying the theme of the novel: the role of the mind in man's existence. What enables the men of the mind to free themselves from their society's shackles? Only an act of the mind—Galt's mind.

The content of Galt's Speech conveys what Galt has come to grasp about the men of the mind and their enemies. Galt has *identified* the view of existence and the code of morality that

his fellow strikers had been acting on, but had been unable to put into words and therefore consistently practice. “They were men who had lived by my code, but had not known how great a virtue it represented. I made them see it. I brought them, not a re-evaluation, but only an identification of their values” (1015). He also has *identified* the opposite code, the code of their enemies, a code whose nature and origins are so monstrously evil that the strikers were too clean to understand them. And Galt has *identified* why, despite their power, the men of the mind have been continuously losing to the zero-worshippers: the sanction of the victim. This sanction, Galt grasps, is much more than a political sanction of the looters’ laws: it is a moral, and deeper, a metaphysical sanction. The men of the mind—and this is what Hank and Dagny must each learn (and do learn)—have sanctioned the looters’ entire view of existence, the view of existence on which the looters’ corrupt morality and political system are built. The men of the mind have sanctioned the *metaphysical* idea that wishes trump facts and that the irrational supersedes the rational. (For this reason, Galt’s Speech deals heavily with metaphysics.)

This new knowledge, discovered by Galt’s mind, drives the entire story.

It explains why Galt quits the Twentieth Century Motor Company and tells all those who voted for the Starnes plan that he will stop the motor of the world. It explains why, when Francisco and Ragnar learn what Galt has discovered, Francisco takes the disguise of a playboy and destroys his copper empire and Ragnar becomes a pirate. It explains why, when Akston and Mulligan and Wyatt and Halley learn what Galt has discovered, they quit and vanish. It explains, as a result, why America is disintegrating. It explains why Dagny senses there is a destroyer loose in the world, whom she must stop. It explains why she found an abandoned motor. It explains why there is someone in Dannager’s office before Dagny gets there and why she has to chase a plane across the skies of Colorado, hoping not to lose Quentin Daniels forever.

The content that is Galt’s Speech drives all the essential action of the story. This content had to be made explicit somewhere in the novel, because learning this content is what causes the men of the mind to strike. The story would be unsatisfying and the novel’s theme unconvincing without Galt’s Speech; as readers, we would know *that* the men of the mind go on strike but not *why* they do.

Given that the story is a mystery, it is natural that this content would be revealed only near the end. As Dagny observes, a mind has to reach a certain point to be ready to hear what the “destroyer” has to say. The two minds—the two potential strikers—whose inner thoughts we as readers are privilege to, namely Hank and Dagny, are for most of the story not yet at that point. Hank reaches that point first, at the looters’ conference where they propose to him their Steel Unification Plan. And it is immediately after Hank quits—and Francisco has come to tell him the rest of what he has to learn, and he then meets Galt—that the full content of what Galt has been teaching the strikers is revealed in *Atlas Shrugged*.

Observe too that Galt’s subsequent actions are explained by the fact that his *mind* fully understands what he has said in his speech. It’s not just that the looters’ desperate attempt to find and coerce Galt would be inexplicable without them having heard his radio broadcast. Galt’s actions when captured would not be entirely convincing either.

Why is Galt immune to the looters’ pleas—when all the other men of the mind had in one way or another swallowed some aspect of the looters’ creed? Because Galt’s mind knows what it knows. Galt knows fully where he stands *and* where they stand.

Here’s a flavor of Galt’s exchanges with the looters in the Wayne-Falkland hotel room; in reading them, think how different they are from Dagny and Hank’s interactions with the looters

earlier in the book, prior to these two learning from Galt and Francisco some of the principles that Galt has discovered.

“I can’t argue, Mr. Galt,” Chick Morrison tells him. “I’m just begging for your pity. . . . I’m begging you to pity those who suffer. I’m . . . Mr. Galt . . . what’s the matter? What are you thinking of?” “Hank Rearden,” Galt answers. “Uh . . . why?” Galt’s reply: “Did they feel any pity for Hank Rearden?” (1114).

“How can you be so sure you’re right?” Jim Taggart cries to Galt. “How can you take it upon yourself, at a terrible time like this, to stick to your own ideas at the risk of destroying the whole world?” Galt replies: “Whose ideas should I consider it safer to follow?” “How can you be sure you’re right?” Taggart continues. “How can you *know*? Nobody can be sure of his knowledge! You’re no better than anyone else!” “Then why do you want me?” Galt replies (1112).

“It’s the question of moral responsibility that you might not have studied sufficiently, Mr. Galt,” Ferris tells him. “To fail to save a life is as immoral as to murder. The consequences are the same—and since we must judge actions by their consequences, the moral responsibility is the same. . . . For instance, in view of the desperate shortage of food, it has been suggested that it might become necessary to issue a directive ordering that every third one of all children under the age of ten and of all adults over the age of sixty be put to death, to secure the survival of the rest. You wouldn’t want this to happen, would you?” “Don’t believe him!” cries Mr. Thompson. “He doesn’t mean it!” “Oh yes, he does,” Galt answers. “Tell the bastard to look at me, then look in the mirror, then ask himself whether I would ever think that *my* moral stature is at the mercy of *his* actions” (1114).

“What I’ve got to offer you is your life,” Mr. Thompson tells Galt. Galt answers, softly: “It’s not yours to offer.” Galt continues: “Now . . . do you see what I meant when I said [on the radio] that a zero can’t hold a mortgage over life? It’s I who would have to grant you that kind of mortgage—and I don’t. The removal of a threat is not a payment . . . the offer not to murder me is not a value. . . . I’ll tell you more: I know that I want to live much more intensely than you do. I know that that’s what you’re counting on. I know that you, in fact, do not want to live at all. I want it. And because I want it so much, I will accept no substitute” (1102).

Galt is immovable because of the knowledge *he* has discovered and possesses. He can even withstand physical torture at the looters’ hands, because he is serene in the knowledge that he is in the right and has stayed true to his love of existence.

In contrast—but in further support of the novel’s theme—Dagny has not yet fully learned what Galt says in his speech, particularly about the Morality of Death and the life-hating view of existence which generates it. And because of this error of knowledge—the failure of her mind to see fully the metaphysical evil she faces—she is the one who delivers Galt, the man she loves, to the looters. She gives them the idea to search for Galt and she then leads them to his apartment. The mind is the source of all the values of man’s existence; but when it is placed in service of the mindless, whether through deliberate choice or through error, it becomes, as Dagny learns, the destroyer of all man’s values.

Galt’s radio broadcast and the subsequent action that builds to the novel’s climax are indispensable in conveying the novel’s theme.

Thus the overall conclusion is clear. What an analysis of Galt’s Speech reveals—an analysis of its purpose, its content, its structure, its role in the story, and its contribution to the novel’s theme—is that far from being “propaganda,” a digression in the story’s plot or even

simply a pause in its action, the speech is integral to the novel. Without Galt's Speech, John Galt would not be John Galt—and *Atlas Shrugged* would not be *Atlas Shrugged*.

NOTES

1. Ayn Rand, *For the New Intellectual* (New York: Signet, 1963), 88.

2. Ayn Rand, “Basic Principles of Literature,” in *The Romantic Manifesto: A Philosophy of Literature*, revised edition (New York: Signet, 1975), 85.

3. Or, if you want to include within the last section also the choice that confronts individuals like Dagny, then the third section would include the last five paragraphs of the speech and thus would end with the following: “You will win when you are ready to pronounce the oath I have taken at the start of my battle—and for those who wish to know the day of my return, I shall now repeat it to the hearing of the world: ‘I swear—by my life and my love of it—that I will never live for the sake of another man, nor ask another man to live for mine.’” (1069)

4. I discuss the speech’s structure at more length in a series of lectures entitled “A Study of Galt’s Speech,” the recording of which is freely accessible online at <https://courses.aynrand.org/campus-courses/a-study-of-galts-speech/>. Although there are some elements in those lectures that I now think are inaccurate, I still agree with the essence of what I said there; that earlier material formed the basis for this essay.

5. Turning his face away, Francisco says to Galt, thinking of Galt’s torture at the hands of the looters, “‘It’s only that it was you . . .’ he whispered, ‘you . . . if it were anyone but you . . .’” Galt replies: “‘it had to be me, if they were to try their last, and they’ve tried, and’—he moved his hand, sweeping the room—and the meaning of those who had made it—into the wastelands of the past—‘and that’s that’” (1155).