

MAJOR CONSERVATIVE AND LIBERTARIAN THINKERS

Edited by John Meadowcroft

AYN RAND



MIMI R. GLADSTEIN

VOLUME 10

B L O O M S B U R Y

Ayn Rand

Series Introduction

The *Major Conservative and Libertarian Thinkers* series aims to show that there is a rigorous, scholarly tradition of social and political thought that may be broadly described as ‘conservative’, ‘libertarian’ or some combination of the two.

The series aims to show that conservatism is not simply a reaction against contemporary events, nor a privileging of intuitive thought over deductive reasoning; libertarianism is not simply an apology for unfettered capitalism or an attempt to justify a misguided atomistic concept of the individual. Rather, the thinkers in this series have developed coherent intellectual positions that are grounded in empirical reality and also founded upon serious philosophical reflection on the relationship between the individual and society, how the social institutions necessary for a free society are to be established and maintained, and the implications of the limits to human knowledge and certainty.

Each volume in the series presents a thinker’s ideas in an accessible and cogent manner to provide an indispensable work for both students with varying degrees of familiarity with the topic as well as more advanced scholars.

The following twenty volumes that make up the entire *Major Conservative and Libertarian Thinkers* series are written by international scholars and experts.

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Of course, in any series of this nature, choices have to be made as to which thinkers to include and which to leave out. Two of the thinkers in the series – F. A. Hayek and James M. Buchanan – have written explicit statements rejecting the label ‘conservative’. Similarly, other thinkers, such as David Hume and Karl Popper, may be more accurately described as classical liberals than either conservatives or libertarians. But these thinkers have been included because a full appreciation of this particular tradition of thought would be impossible without their inclusion; conservative and libertarian thought cannot be fully understood without some knowledge of the intellectual contributions of Hume, Hayek, Popper and Buchanan, among others. While no list of conservative and libertarian thinkers can be perfect, then, it is hoped that the volumes in this series come as close as possible to providing a comprehensive account of the key contributors to this particular tradition.

John Meadowcroft
King's College London

Ayn Rand

Mimi R. Gladstein

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Libertarian Thinkers

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Series Editor's Preface

The novelist and philosopher Ayn Rand was one of the most powerful and influential twentieth century advocates of free market capitalism: in all, Rand's novels have sold more than 20 million copies and her works of nonfiction more than 25 million; the philosophical movement her work inspired, Objectivism, flourished during her lifetime and continues to attract followers to this day; a host of leading public figures, such as former US Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan, cite Rand as a formative intellectual influence; her most famous novel, *Atlas Shrugged*, frequently appears high in lists of the American public's favorite books.

In this outstanding book, Professor Mimi Gladstein of the University of Texas at El Paso sets out the philosophy that Rand espoused in her work. At the heart of Rand's outlook was a belief in the moral supremacy of individualism over collectivism. For Rand, human progress was dependent on the ingenuity and creativity of individuals prepared to challenge received wisdom and accepted ways of doing things. The collectivist mindset, by contrast, punished people for their achievements, taking money from the most productive and giving it to the least productive via redistributist taxation. Rand argued that the morality of the collectivist state was no different to that of a burglar: Both believed they were entitled to appropriate other people's property because they needed it more.

Rand celebrated selfishness and rejected altruism. For Rand, altruism was a mask for collectivism; it undermined individual self-esteem and the desire to achieve and put in its place a negative attitude toward oneself (which was deemed worthy of sacrifice) and others (who were deemed in constant need of help). Selfishness, on the other hand, inspired people to productive activity that creates goods for people's wants and needs, and independence, the desire to take care of oneself, thereby not placing a burden on others. In Rand's view, altruism was the philosophy of a society of serfs, whereas selfishness was the mindset of a society of free men and women.

This valuable volume sets out Rand's thought in a lucid and cogent manner. It places Rand's ideas in the context of her life and times as an émigré from the Soviet Union to the United States and considers the initial reception and long-term influence of her work. Certainly no account of libertarian thought would be complete without a thorough treatment of the contribution made by Rand. This volume will prove indispensable to those unfamiliar with Rand's work as well as the more advanced scholars.

John Meadowcroft
King's College London

The Life

Ayn Rand was a polarizing and controversial person in life, and her personality and ideas are of such dynamism and force that even a quarter century after her death, she still provokes strong emotions and controversy. Those who reject her ideas are strident and derisive in their condemnation. Her adherents are just as passionately committed to the power of their convictions. However, even among those who accept the validity of many of her views, there is division and denunciation. The Ayn Rand Institute (ARI) in California maintains the archives of her possessions and approves publication of works about her life and writing. On the other coast of the United States, The Atlas Society: Center for Objectivism promotes her ideas through summer study courses, publications, and the occasional anniversary celebration of her works. The most recent was a one day seminar in Washington DC, cosponsored by the Cato Institute, for the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of *Atlas Shrugged*. The ARI conducted its celebration with a fiftieth anniversary exhibit and a series of discussion groups through the 2007 fall season at a regional library in Hollywood. Antipathy between these groups has been deep-seated, and even in a new era of leadership there are few signs of rapprochement.

The source of these towering passions was born Alisa Zinovievna Rosenbaum in 1905 in St. Petersburg, Russia.¹ Raised in a largely secular household of Jewish descent, Rand rejected religion at a relatively young age, declaring herself an atheist in her early teens. Her youth was both privileged and precarious. Before World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution the Rosenbaums traveled abroad and took vacations at seaside resorts; after Zinovy Zacharovich Rosenbaum's pharmacy was nationalized and their comfortable living quarters appropriated by the state, their standard of living deteriorated considerably.

Rand's intellectual powers and strong will were evident from an early age. Her recollections of self are of a girl who was the opposite of her mother, a graceful, social person, not very interested in ideas. "I was antisocial. I was insufficiently interested in other children" (quoted in Branden 1986, *Passion*, 5). One friend she does recall, a relationship based on the sharing of ideas, politics specifically, is the sister of Vladimir Nabakov. Chris Sciabarra, who made an extensive study of Rand's Russian roots, theorizes that the girls must have attended the Stoiunin Gymnasium, an avant-garde school designed to prepare girls for the university (69).² Evidence of Rand's precocious intellect is her enrollment in the University at age 16 and graduation three years later. From her early years, Rand's abiding interest was the world of the mind. She always insisted that to know her, the most important thing was to know her ideas, not her family history. In her earliest public autobiographical musings, she recalls that intelligence was the quality in others that she cared the most about.

Rand's interest in literature was also stimulated in her childhood. Her archetypal image of a hero was shaped

when at age nine she fell in love with Cyrus Paltons, the heroic protagonist of a boy's magazine serialization of *The Mysterious Valley* by Maurice Champagne. Both the hero's exploits and the illustrations depicting him as tall, lean, and long-legged suggest a pattern Rand's heroes would embody. The plots she was most drawn to were those that centralized the battle between good and evil. "I believe there is only one story in the world" wrote John Steinbeck in *East of Eden*. "We have only one story. All novels, all poetry, are built on the never-ending contest in ourselves of good and evil" (475, 477).³ For Ayn Rand the contest was not so much within the self as against the forces of evil in the world, although some of her most interesting characters must struggle first with the battle within. As the girl Alisa matured, the novels of Victor Hugo enthralled her and she came early to "the idea that writing would be the defining passion of her life and the career she would pursue as an adult" (Britting 2004, 8).

Two other artistic media were, after reading, the main sources of Rand's aesthetic pleasures. Rand credits the discovery of operettas with saving her life. Their presentation of what she called "a benevolent-universe shot in the arm" (quoted in B. Branden 1986, 46) brought much-needed respite in the throes of the dank and dismal Russian collectivist state. Among her favorites were Millocher's *The Beggar Student*, Offenbach's *Grand Duchess*, and Lehar's *The Song of the Lark*. Her other great joy came from going to the movies—a pastime that would lead her far from the drab existence of a tour guide in the Peter and Paul fortress, across an ocean and a continent to Hollywood and the launching of her writing career.

Rand's high school years were spent in the Crimea where a pre-Soviet system of education still maintained. This was

during the period of the Russian Revolution (1918–1921), and the Rosenbaums still had hopes that their situation might be restored to some normalcy. In high school, Rand studied Aristotle and the American political system of individual rights, two topics that left indelible impressions on her. When the Red army finally defeated the White in the Crimea, the Rosenbaum family returned to St. Petersburg, now Petrograd.

The location of the Rosenbaum home afforded the young Alisa a ringside seat to the early machinations that led from a revolution for freedom to the establishment of a totalitarian state. Alexandr Fedorovich Kerenski, who headed a provisional government, became her first real life hero. However, his struggles to create a viable democratic state were undermined by the Bolsheviks who attacked Petrograd and took power. Kerenski escaped to the west, a direction his hero-worshiper would follow. When they met many years later in New York, her illusions about him had evaporated.

The early years of the establishment of the Soviet Union were times of privation and purges. Food was scarce; the Rosenbaum family savings were quickly depleted. Although he tried to practice his profession, Zinovy Zacharovich, who had once owned a pharmacy, became a clerk in one far from his home. Anna Rosenbaum became a teacher of languages in high school. At one point, because of her family's bourgeois status, Alisa and many of her friends were to be expelled from the university. A quirk of fate caused them to be reinstated when a visiting delegation of British scientists heard about the impending purge. Because of the desire of the new regime to impress them, some of the students, Rand among them, were allowed to complete their degrees.

At the University, Alisa chose, over her father's objections, to major in history. He wanted her to have a profession such as medicine or engineering. The one professor Rand would mention by name when she recalled her university education was N. O. Lossky, with whom she studied ancient philosophy. In her recollections for a series of interviews prior to the writing of the biographical essay, "Who Is Ayn Rand?" Rand remembers that Lossky was a Platonist who did not think highly of female students. Nonetheless, he gave her a "Perfect" on her final exam.⁴ Rand's intellect developed as she sharpened her mental teeth, both rejecting and interpolating the works of Plato, Aristotle, and Nietzsche.

After the university, Alisa enrolled in the State Institute for Cinematography: her purpose, to learn screenwriting. After only one year in the program, she received permission to visit relatives in America and thus never studied screenwriting, as it was part of the second year of the program. Many years after Rand's death, the Ayn Rand Institute published translations and copies of her Russian writings on Hollywood.⁵ In effect, although she did not list these works on her vitae, they are interesting as her earliest publications.

The person, who was to be known as Ayn Rand, celebrated her twenty-first birthday in transit to a new life and a new identity. Anna Borisovna, the mother with whom she shared so little sensibility, was perceptive and caring enough to arrange for an invitation from relatives in Chicago and to pay for the transit by selling her jewelry. Both Alisa and her mother were aware that a person of Rand's beliefs would not fare well in Soviet Russia. Again, fortuitous timing worked in Rand's favor. Travel restrictions on students had been temporarily eased in

the transition from Lenin's to a new economic policy. As Rand's relatives owned a silent film theatre, it could be convincingly argued that Rand was going to the United States to study film. The actual birthday occurred in Berlin where she visited with her cousin Vera Guzarchik, a medical student.

Alice Rosenbaum, the name on her liner ticket stub, arrived in New York harbor on February 19, 1926. She was never to return to her birthplace, a country she was to characterize as "the ugliest and incidentally, the most mystical country on earth."⁶ As a student in Leningrad, she expressed strong anti-Soviet sentiments until such time as she feared that her remarks might endanger her family. Once she had left Russia, she was to devote much of her life to revealing the tyranny, drudgery, and soul-destroying evil of the Soviet state. In her first novel and in subsequent nonfiction writing, she argued effectively about the disastrous consequences of collectivism, inveighing against the rationalizations by socialists and their liberal sympathizers of Soviet atrocities and rule of terror. "Complete loathing" is the expression she chose to describe how she felt about Russia.

Rand's sojourn with her Chicago relatives was brief. Although she credits them with providing a lifeline for her, once she left Chicago she did not maintain strong family ties. Barbara Branden theorizes that because the Portnoy/Satrin/Goldberg families were deeply steeped in living within their religious traditions—attending synagogue, maintaining strong family ties—they were not people with whom Rand felt she had much in common. Their values were not her values (*Passion*, 72). However, even though her visitor's visa had expired, her Chicago relatives provided a letter of introduction to someone in

the Cecil B. DeMille Studio, bought her a train ticket, and gave Rand money for a new start in California.

It was at this juncture in her life that Alisa Rosenbaum became Ayn Rand. According to most sources, the name Ayn was chosen even before she reached America. Its derivation is Finnish. A Chicago cousin, Fern Brown, a successful writer herself, remembers an old Remington-Rand typewriter as inspiring the choice for a last name. According to Brown, Rand wanted to maintain her initials AR and preferred Ayn Rand to Ayn Remington. *Impact*, the ARI newsletter, cites letters from family in Russia that refer to the name “Rand” even before they heard from her in America. They cite a *New York Evening Post* article that quotes Rand to that effect. In the Cyrillic spelling of her name are resemblances to both the names “Ayn” and “Rand.” After leaving Chicago and starting a new life in California, only a few of her closest friends in the early days knew her birth name. During the zenith of her career it was not referred to, even by her inner coterie. It was only in 1983, during research for her book-length biography, that Barbara Branden discovered it. It had not been included in the early “official” biographical essay.

Rand was remarkably confident in herself for a young immigrant woman whose security in a new country was tenuous at best. One of her mother’s early letters recounts the departure scene and Alisa assuring her family that when she would return, she would be famous. Ann Borisovna writes that her father Zinovy concurred, remarking after the train departed that he was sure his daughter would show the world. By the time she left Chicago for Hollywood, Rand had written four screenplays in English, a language she had not quite mastered.