



Ayn Rand [nee, Alisa Zinov'yevna Rosenbaum]
(1905 – 1982)

INTERVIEW WITH AYN RAND

Alvin Toffler

(Part 2 of 2)

TOFFLER: What is the place of compassion in your philosophical system?

RAND: I regard compassion as proper only toward those who are innocent victims, but not toward those who are morally guilty. If one feels compassion for the victims of a concentration camp, one cannot feel it for the torturers. If one does feel compassion for the torturers, it is an act of moral treason toward the victims.

TOFFLER: Would it be against the principles of Objectivism for anyone to sacrifice himself by stepping in front of a bullet to protect another person?

RAND: No. It depends on the circumstances. I would step in the way of a bullet if it were aimed at my husband. It is not self-sacrifice to die protecting that which you value: If the value is great enough, you do not care to exist without it. This applies to any alleged sacrifice for those one loves.

TOFFLER: Would you be willing to die for your cause, and should your followers be willing to die for it? And for the truly nonsacrificial Objectivist, is any cause worth dying for?

RAND: The answer to this is made plain in my book. In *Atlas Shrugged* I explain that a man has to live for, and when necessary, fight for, his values—because the whole process of living consists of the achievement of values. Man does not survive automatically. He must live like a rational being and accept nothing less. He cannot survive as a brute. Even the simplest value, such as food, has to be created by man, has to be planted, has to be produced. The same is true of his more interesting, more important achievements. All values have to be gained and kept by man, and, if they are threatened, he has to be willing to fight and die, if necessary, for his right to live like a rational being. You ask me, would I be willing to die for Objectivism? I would. But what is more important, I am willing to live for it—which is much more difficult.

TOFFLER: In your emphasis on reason, you are in philosophical conflict with contemporary writers, novelists and poets—many of whom are self-admitted mystics, or irrationalists, as they have been called. Why is this so?

RAND: Because art has a philosophical base, and the dominant philosophical trends of today are a form of neomysticism. Art is a projection of the artist's fundamental view of man and of existence. Since most artists do not develop an independent philosophy of their own, they absorb, consciously or subconsciously, the dominant philosophical influences of their time. Most of today's literature is a faithful reflection of today's philosophy—and look at it!

TOFFLER: But shouldn't a writer reflect his time?

RAND: No. A writer should be an active intellectual leader of his time, not a passive follower riding any current. A writer should shape the values of his culture, he should project and concretize the value goals of man's life. This is the essence of the Romantic school of literature, which has all but vanished from today's scene.

TOFFLER: Leaving us where, literarily speaking?

RAND: At the dead end of Naturalism. Naturalism holds that a writer must be a passive photographer or reporter who must transcribe uncritically whatever he happens to observe around him. Romanticism holds that a writer must present things, not as they are at any given moment, but, to quote Aristotle, “as they might be and ought to be.”

TOFFLER: Would you say that you are the last of the Romantics?

RAND: Or the first of their return—to quote one of my own characters in *Atlas Shrugged*.

TOFFLER: What is your appraisal of contemporary literature in general?

RAND: Philosophically, immoral. Aesthetically, it bores me to death. It is degenerating into a sewer, devoted exclusively to studies of depravity. And there’s nothing as boring as depravity.

TOFFLER: Are there any novelists whom you admire?

RAND: Yes. Victor Hugo.

TOFFLER: What about modern novelists?

RAND: No, there is no one that I could say I admire among the so-called serious writers. I prefer the popular literature of today, which is today’s remnant of Romanticism. My favorite is Mickey Spillane.

TOFFLER: Why do you like him?

RAND: Because he is primarily a moralist. In a primitive form, the form of a detective novel, he presents the conflict of good and evil, in terms of black and white. He does not present a nasty gray mixture of indistinguishable scoundrels on both sides. He presents an uncompromising conflict. As a writer, he is brilliantly expert at the aspect of literature which I consider most important: plot structure.

TOFFLER: What do you think of Faulkner?

RAND: Not very much. He is a good stylist, but practically unreadable in content—so I’ve read very little of him.

TOFFLER: What about Nabokov?

RAND: I have read only one book of his and a half—the half was *Lolita*, which I couldn't finish. He is a brilliant stylist, he writes beautifully, but his subjects, his sense of life, his view of man, are so evil that no amount of artistic skill can justify them.

TOFFLER: As a novelist, do you regard philosophy as the primary purpose of your writing?

RAND: No. My primary purpose is the projection of an ideal man, of man “as he might be and ought to be.” Philosophy is the necessary means to that end.

TOFFLER: In your early novel, *Anthem*, your protagonist declares, “It is my will which chooses, and the choice of my will is the only edict I respect.” Isn't this anarchism? Is one's own desire or will the only law one must respect?

RAND: Not one's own will. This is, more or less, a poetic expression made clear by the total context of the story in *Anthem*. One's own rational judgment. You see, I use the term free will in a totally different sense from the one usually attached to it. Free will consists of man's ability to think or not to think. The act of thinking is man's primary act of choice. A rational man will never be guided by desires or whims, only by values based on his rational judgment. That is the only authority he can recognize. This does not mean anarchy, because, if a man wants to live in a free, civilized society, he would, in reason, have to choose to observe the laws, when those laws are objective, rational and valid. I have written an article on this subject for The Objectivist Newsletter—on the need and proper function of a government.

TOFFLER: What, in your view, is the proper function of a government?

RAND: Basically, there is really only one proper function: the protection of individual rights. Since rights can be violated only by physical force, and by certain derivatives of physical force, the proper function of government is to protect men from those who initiate the use of physical force: from those who are criminals. Force, in a free society, may be used only in retaliation and only against those who initiate its use. This is the proper task of government: to serve as a policeman who protects men from the use of force.

TOFFLER: If force may be used only in retaliation against force, does the government have the right to use force to collect taxes, for example, or to draft soldiers?

RAND: In principle, I believe that taxation should be voluntary, like everything else. But how one would implement this is a very complex question. I can only suggest certain methods, but I would not attempt to insist on them as a definitive answer. A government lottery, for instance, used in many countries in Europe, is one good method of voluntary taxation. There are others. Taxes should be voluntary contributions for the proper governmental services which people do need and therefore would be and should be willing to pay for—as they pay for insurance. But, of course, this is a problem for a distant future, for the time when men will establish a fully free social system. It would be the last, not the first, reform to advocate. As to the draft, it is improper and unconstitutional. It is a violation of fundamental rights, of a man's right to his own life. No man has the right to send another man to fight and die for his, the sender's, cause. A country has no right to force men into involuntary servitude. Armies should be strictly voluntary; and, as military authorities will tell you, volunteer armies are the best armies.

TOFFLER: What about other public needs? Do you consider the post office, for example, a legitimate function of government?

RAND: Now let's get this straight. My position is fully consistent. Not only the post office, but streets, roads, and above all, schools, should all be privately owned and privately run. I advocate the separation of state and economics. The government should be concerned only with those issues which involve the use of force. This means: the police, the armed services, and the law courts to settle disputes among men. Nothing else. Everything else should be privately run and would be much better run.

TOFFLER: Would you create any new government departments or agencies?

RAND: No, and I truly cannot discuss things that way. I am not a government planner nor do I spend my time inventing Utopias. I'm talking about principles whose practical applications are clear. If I have said that I am opposed to the initiation of force, what else has to be discussed?

TOFFLER: What about force in foreign policy? You have said that any free nation had the right to invade Nazi Germany during World War II . . .

RAND: Certainly.

TOFFLER: . . . And that any free nation today has the moral right—though not the duty—to invade Soviet Russia, Cuba, or any other “slave pen.” Correct?

RAND: Correct. A dictatorship—a country that violates the rights of its own citizens—is an outlaw and can claim no rights.

TOFFLER: Would you actively advocate that the United States invade Cuba or the Soviet Union?

RAND: Not at present. I don’t think it’s necessary. I would advocate that which the Soviet Union fears above all else: economic boycott. I would advocate a blockade of Cuba and an economic boycott of Soviet Russia; and you would see both those regimes collapse without the loss of a single American life.

TOFFLER: Would you favor U.S. withdrawal from the United Nations?

RAND: Yes. I do not sanction the grotesque pretense of an organization allegedly devoted to world peace and human rights, which includes Soviet Russia, the worst aggressor and bloodiest butcher in history, as one of its members. The notion of protecting rights, with Soviet Russia among the protectors, is an insult to the concept of rights and to the intelligence of any man who is asked to endorse or sanction such an organization. I do not believe that an individual should cooperate with criminals, and, for all the same reasons, I do not believe that free countries should cooperate with dictatorships.

TOFFLER: Would you advocate severing diplomatic relations with Russia?

RAND: Yes.

TOFFLER: How do you feel about the test-ban treaty which was recently signed?

RAND: I agree with Barry Goldwater’s speech on this subject on the Senate floor. The best military authorities, and above all, the

best scientific authority, Dr. Teller, the author of the hydrogen bomb, have stated that this treaty is not merely meaningless but positively dangerous to America's defense.

TOFFLER: If Senator Goldwater is nominated as the Republican presidential candidate this July, would you vote for him?

RAND: At present, yes. When I say "at present," I mean the date when this interview is being recorded. I disagree with him on a great many things, but I do agree, predominantly, with his foreign policy. Of any candidates available today, I regard Barry Goldwater as the best. I would vote for him, if he offers us a plausible, or at least semiconsistent, platform.

TOFFLER: How about Richard Nixon?

RAND: I'm opposed to him. I'm opposed to any compromiser or me-tooer, and Mr. Nixon is probably the champion in this regard.

TOFFLER: What about President Johnson?

RAND: I have no particular opinion about him.

TOFFLER: You are a declared anticommunist, antisocialist and antiliberal. Yet you reject the notion that you are a conservative. In fact, you have reserved some of your angriest criticism for conservatives. Where do you stand politically?

RAND: Correction. I never describe my position in terms of negatives. I am an advocate of laissez-faire capitalism, of individual rights—there are no others—of individual freedom. It is on this ground that I oppose any doctrine which proposes the sacrifice of the individual to the collective, such as communism, socialism, the welfare state, fascism, Nazism and modern liberalism. I oppose the conservatives on the same ground. The conservatives are advocates of a mixed economy and of a welfare state. Their difference from the liberals is only one of degree, not of principle.

TOFFLER: You have charged that America suffers from intellectual bankruptcy. Do you include in this condemnation such right-wing publications as the *National Review*? Isn't that magazine a powerful voice against all the things you regard as "statism"?

RAND: I consider *National Review* the worst and most dangerous magazine in America. The kind of defense that it offers to capital-

ism results in nothing except the discrediting and destruction of capitalism. Do you want me to tell you why?

TOFFLER: Yes, please.

RAND: Because it ties capitalism to religion. The ideological position of *National Review* amounts, in effect, to the following: In order to accept freedom and capitalism, one has to believe in God or in some form of religion, some form of supernatural mysticism. Which means that there are no rational grounds on which one can defend capitalism. Which amounts to an admission that reason is on the side of capitalism's enemies, that a slave society or a dictatorship is a rational system, and that only on the ground of mystic faith can one believe in freedom. Nothing more derogatory to capitalism could ever be alleged, and the exact opposite is true. Capitalism is the only system that can be defended and validated by reason.

TOFFLER: You have attacked Governor Nelson Rockefeller for "lumping all opponents of the welfare state with actual crackpots." It was clear from his remarks that among others, he was aiming his criticism at the John Birch Society. Do you resent being lumped with the John Birchers? Do you consider them "crackpots" or a force for good?

RAND: I resent being lumped with anyone. I resent the modern method of never defining ideas, and lumping totally different people into a collective by means of smears and derogatory terms. I resent Governor Rockefeller's smear tactics: his refusal to identify specifically whom and what he meant. As far as I'm concerned, I repeat, I don't want to be lumped with anyone, and certainly not with the John Birch Society. Do I consider them crackpots? No, not necessarily. What is wrong with them is that they don't seem to have any specific, clearly defined political philosophy. Therefore, some of them may be crackpots, others may be very well-meaning citizens. I consider the Birch Society futile, because they are not for capitalism, but merely against communism. I gather they believe that the disastrous state of today's world is caused by a communist conspiracy. This is childishly naive and superficial. No country can be destroyed by a mere conspiracy, it can be destroyed only by ideas. The Birchers seem to be either nonintellectual or anti-intellectual. They do not attach importance to ideas. They do not realize that the great battle in the world today is a philosophical, ideological conflict.

TOFFLER: Are there any political groups in the United States today of which you approve?

RAND: Political groups, as such—no. Is there any political group today which is fully consistent? Such groups today are guided by or advocate blatant contradictions.

TOFFLER: Do you have any personal political aspirations yourself? Have you ever considered running for office?

RAND: Certainly not. And I trust that you don't hate me enough to wish such a thing on me.

TOFFLER: But you are interested in politics, or at least in political theory, aren't you?

RAND: Let me answer you this way: When I came here from Soviet Russia, I was interested in politics for only one reason—to reach the day when I would not have to be interested in politics. I wanted to secure a society in which I would be free to pursue my own concerns and goals, knowing that the government would not interfere to wreck them, knowing that my life, my work, my future were not at the mercy of the state or of a dictator's whim. This is still my attitude today. Only today I know that such a society is an ideal not yet achieved, that I cannot expect others to achieve it for me, and that I, like every other responsible citizen, must do everything possible to achieve it. In other words, I am interested in politics only in order to secure and protect freedom.

TOFFLER: Throughout your work you argue that the way in which the contemporary world is organized, even in the capitalist countries, submerges the individual and stifles initiative. In *Atlas Shrugged*, John Galt leads a strike of the men of the mind—which results in the collapse of the collectivist society around them. Do you think the time has come for the artists, intellectuals and creative businessmen of today to withdraw their talents from society in this way?

RAND: No, not yet. But before I explain, I must correct one part of your question. What we have today is not a capitalist society, but a mixed economy—that is, a mixture of freedom and controls, which, by the presently dominant trend, is moving toward dictatorship. The action in *Atlas Shrugged* takes place at a time when society has reached the stage of dictatorship. When and if this happens, that will be the time to go on strike, but not until then.

TOFFLER: What do you mean by dictatorship? How would you define it?

RAND: A dictatorship is a country that does not recognize individual rights, whose government holds total, unlimited power over men.

TOFFLER: What is the dividing line, by your definition, between a mixed economy and a dictatorship?

RAND: A dictatorship has four characteristics: one-party rule, executions without trial for political offenses, expropriation or nationalization of private property, and censorship. Above all, this last. So long as men can speak and write freely, so long as there is no censorship, they still have a chance to reform their society or to put it on a better road. When censorship is imposed, that is the sign that men should go on strike intellectually, by which I mean, should not cooperate with the social system in any way whatever.

TOFFLER: Short of such a strike, what do you believe ought to be done to bring about the societal changes you deem desirable?

RAND: It is ideas that determine social trends, that create or destroy social systems. Therefore, the right ideas, the right philosophy, should be advocated and spread. The disasters of the modern world, including the destruction of capitalism, were caused by the altruist-collectivist philosophy. It is altruism that men should reject.

TOFFLER: And how would you define altruism?

RAND: It is a moral system which holds that man has no right to exist for his own sake, that service to others is the sole justification of his existence, and that self-sacrifice is his highest moral duty, value and virtue. This is the moral base of collectivism, of all dictatorships. In order to seek freedom and capitalism, men need a nonmystical, nonaltruistic, rational code of ethics—a morality which holds that man is not a sacrificial animal, that he has the right to exist for his own sake, neither sacrificing himself to others, nor others to himself. In other words, what is desperately needed today is the ethics of Objectivism.

TOFFLER: Then what you are saying is that to achieve these changes one must use essentially educational or propagandistic methods?

RAND: Yes, of course.

TOFFLER: What do you think of your antagonists' contention that the moral and political principles of Objectivism place you outside the mainstream of American thought?

RAND: I don't acknowledge or recognize such a concept as a "mainstream of thought." That might be appropriate to a dictatorship, to a collectivist society in which thought is controlled and in which there exists a collective mainstream—of slogans, not of thought. There is no such thing in America. There never was. However, I have heard that expression used for the purpose of barring from public communication any innovator, any non-conformist, anyone who has anything original to offer. I am an innovator. This is a term of distinction, a term of honor, rather than something to hide or apologize for. Anyone who has new or valuable ideas to offer stands outside the intellectual status quo. But the status quo is not a stream, let alone a "mainstream." It is a stagnant swamp. It is the innovators who carry mankind forward.


TOFFLER: Do you believe that Objectivism as a philosophy will eventually sweep the world?

RAND: Nobody can answer a question of that kind. Men have free will. There is no guarantee that they will choose to be rational, at any one time or in any one generation. Nor is it necessary for a philosophy to "sweep the world." If you ask the question in a somewhat different form, if you say, do I think that Objectivism will be the philosophy of the future, I would say yes, but with this qualification: If men turn to reason, if they are not destroyed by dictatorship and precipitated into another Dark Ages, if men remain free long enough to have time to think, then Objectivism is the philosophy they will accept.

TOFFLER: Why?

RAND: In any historical period when men were free, it has always been the most rational philosophy that won. It is from this perspective that I would say, yes, Objectivism will win. But there is no guarantee, no predetermined necessity about it.

TOFFLER: You are sharply critical of the world as you see it today, and your books offer radical proposals for changing not merely the shape of society, but the very way in which most men work, think and love. Are you optimistic about man's future?

RAND: Yes, I am optimistic. Collectivism, as an intellectual power and a moral ideal, is dead. But freedom and individualism, and their political expression, capitalism, have not yet been discovered. I think men will have time to discover them. It is significant that the dying collectivist philosophy of today has produced nothing but a cult of depravity, impotence and despair. Look at modern art and literature with their image of man as a helpless, mindless creature doomed to failure, frustration and destruction. This may be the collectivists' psychological confession, but it is not an image of man. If it were, we would never have risen from the cave. But we did. Look around you and look at history. You will see the achievements of man's mind. You will see man's unlimited potentiality for greatness, and the faculty that makes it possible. You will see that man is not a helpless monster by nature, but he becomes one when he discards that faculty: his mind. And if you ask me, what is greatness?—I will answer, it is the capacity to live by the three fundamental values of John Galt: reason, purpose, self esteem. 

EDITOR'S NOTE

For the "Lost" Parts of Ayn Rand's Playboy Interview, go here:

<http://www.objectivistcenter.org/showcontent.aspx?ct=836&h=53>

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