

FIRST PLACE



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In his courtroom speech, Howard Roark explains the nature, motivation and importance of those who create values (such as new artworks, technological inventions and innovations, and advances in theoretical knowledge). Why does he think that value-creation and what it requires of the creators is crucially important from a moral perspective? In your answer, consider what a character from another Ayn Rand novel, *Atlas Shrugged*, has to say about the process of value-creation, in the speech “[The Nature of an Artist](#).”

“Nothing is given to man on earth except a potential and the material on which to actualize it.” Though a quote from Rand’s philosophical essay on the objectivist ethics, this statement fully resonates with the central topic in her first monumental work of fiction as well. All ideas in the novel come together in one focal point along the narrative—in the courtroom during the trial, when Howard Roark, acting as his own defender, delivers a speech in which he displays his philosophy of life by examining the contrast and the conflict between the independent thinkers, dubbed “the Creators” and the parasites, the so-called second-handers.

In “The Objectivist Ethics” Ayn Rand also states that “the two essentials of the method of survival proper to a rational being are: thinking and productive work.” Howard Roark, her first fully developed representation of a moral ideal, completely embodies this principle. For the clear understanding of this fact it is crucial to outline the core concept of morality, associated with the Objectivist philosophy and manifested most clearly in Ayn Rand’s own protagonists.

The textbook definition of ethics is the moral principles that govern a person’s behaviour consequently determine their choices and, as a result, the course of their life. Ayn Rand’s philosophy defines ethics as an objective, metaphysical necessity for the fundamental issue in life—man’s survival. Survival in itself presupposes utilising every resource at one’s disposal that would further their chances of staying alive. That, in turn, demands that man conquer nature, and bend it to his will—and he cannot do this without the use of his creative, reasoning mind. Thus, reason is man’s basic means of survival. It is only through an objective evaluation of his surroundings that he can make the decisions, develop the process, take up the necessary actions and create the goods that would allow his continued existence.

As a result, productive work is the central goal of a rational man’s life, which establishes the need for his other virtues as it sustains his being. Productive work’s emanation is the creative achievement, which preserves and advances one’s life. Every deed of this kind is a stepping stone towards a world where the individual shapes his surroundings in the

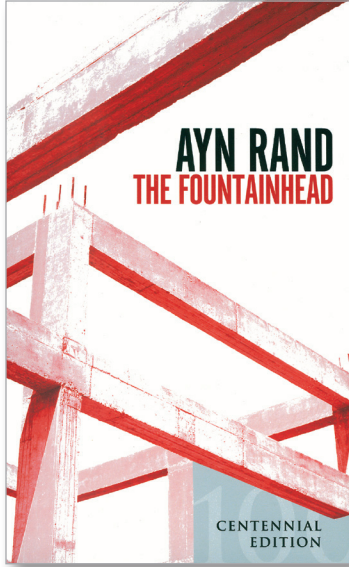


image of his own mind, as opposed to the primitive world of sub-humans, whose life is dominated by their immediate environment.

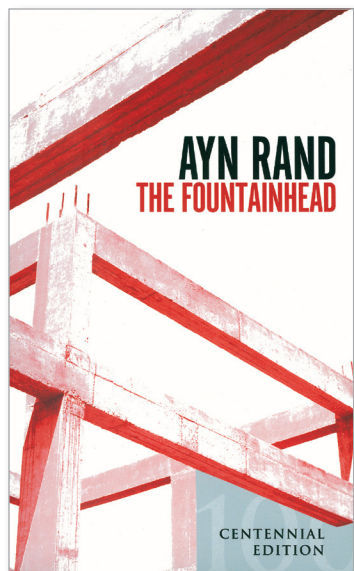
Consequently, the value-Creators are the foundation and the driving force of human society, its lifeblood, the crucial element for its survival. Yet they are neither tasked with such an objective by an outer factor (as Quentin Daniels notes in *Atlas Shrugged*: “Governmental scientific inquiry is a contradiction in terms”), nor prompted by a desire to serve their brothers who would condemn and disavow them. It is a product of their own mind and will and, therefore, a manifestation of their creative genius. “Their truth was the only motive behind it. The creation, not its users. The creation, not the benefits others derived from it. The creation which gave form to his truth.”

Another character of Ayn Rand’s novels offers a similar explanation for the process of value-creation and its crucial role for sustaining mankind. In *Atlas Shrugged*, the brilliant composer Richard Halley delivers an impassioned defence for the motivation behind his work. In a speech, labelled “The Nature of an Artist,” he distances himself from the commonly held belief that the creative process behind a work of art is an abstract spiritual enlightenment, akin to the spontaneous spurt of vomit, coming from a drunkard, but rather defines it as an achievement of the focused and purposeful human mind, aimed at giving a form to man’s own truth.

He likens the art he produces to others’ achievements in seemingly unrelated fields of work—to the triumphs of the oil magnate Ellis Wyatt and of the owner of coal mines Ken Danagger. What unites them is not the subject matter, but rather the driving force behind their deeds, which is always the same, regardless of their chosen occupation—be it composing a symphony, developing an oil well or working a coal mine. Halley himself defines it as a “shining vision,” a “burning fire” that he, musicians and poets, businessmen and inventors, all possess. And that is the capacity to see and do what has never been done before, the rare and unique ability to fully accept “an intransigent devotion to the pursuit of truth.” His speech demonstrates that the need to create values is seen and expressed in a variety of ways, but it is always there, never surrendering its role as the driving force of society’s development, of its mere existence even.

Therefore, the creation of values is especially crucial from a moral perspective because it requires of man to be his best self, to act according to the best of his ability, to stand alone in mind and in body, to conquer nature using the driving force and the condition of his existence—his reasoning mind. It is the ingredient that sustains life as we know it, and even more—enables it to evolve and progress; and the value-Creator is its moral epitome.

The protagonist of the novel, Howard Roark, is a fictional representation of these convictions—he is a philosophical idea, turned into a physical character, the manifestation of the independent, purposeful individual, whose only goal in life is his happiness. He is the creator, whose concern is conquering nature. He is the one who realises that he is the maker of his own destiny, the one who does not require others to live for his sake, and does not live for the sake of others. He is every individual who has been shamed for his achievement and later had it taken away from him; every mind, which has ever been enslaved to the degrading idea of serving “the common good” at the expense of sacrificing his own truth. He is the breaker of chains.



Neither history, nor society have been kind to individuals like him—over the course of millennia they have been victimised, shunned, damned—the first martyrs of the human mind. Such a predicament was caused by their extreme capabilities. At every step, individuals, suspected of being better than their peers, were doomed to be the scapegoats of society, to be smeared for their abilities—from scientists, to industrialists, to businessmen. In this sense, Rand’s dystopian novella “Anthem” brilliantly illustrates the journey of the value-Creator, fighting throughout history against every restriction, every attempt to shackle and curb the mind, consequently breaking the chains of god, of kings, of birth, of kin, of race “for his is the right of man, and there is no right on earth above this right.” For he shapes the world in his vision—and his vision is the form he gives to his truth.

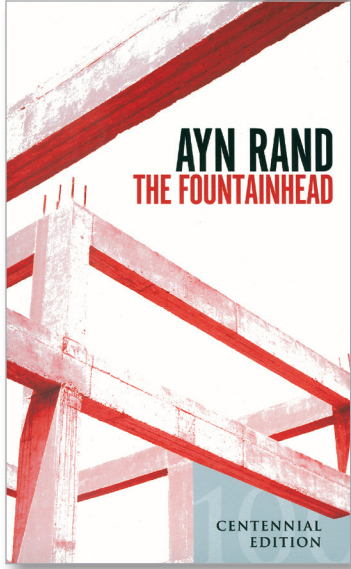
In his argument, Roark points out that survival is not guaranteed—it is made possible only by the products of man’s own effort. And because of that, man faces a constant alternative—to depend on his own mind and abilities or to exist as a leech, feeding on the productive work of his moral superiors. “The creator originates. The parasite borrows.”

Value-Creators are the independents—men and women who are not afraid to stand on their own mind and act on their own volition; who create and do not plunder; who, acting on the basis of their own rational self-interest, sustain humankind and preserve it from the hands of the thugs, the moochers, the collectivists.

On the contrary, the second-hander’s existence is entirely social—he believes that man exists only as a tool for other men. His concern is conquering men of abilities and chaining them to his own sub-human way of being. His is the parasitic living where his own life does not belong to him, but is merely a sequence of futile attempts to enslave the human mind and take credit for the achievements which are its products. He is the one who abdicates the responsibility of independent judgment for the shameful existence as a cognitive puppet of society, ruled by the dominating ideas in his cultural surroundings. In the never-ending battle between the individualist and the collectivist, the second-hander is every king, every god, every religion and philosophy of life that has individuals stripped of their basic means of survival and condemned for recognising it. He is the forger of the chains that ought to be broken.

By pointing out these two groups’ opposing views for the nature of existence, Howard Roark offers a moral sanction for the decision which has made him held in contempt and presented before a court of law. His enemies believe they have shamed him. He wears this shame as the banner of his existence. He is attacked for being true to his beliefs and maintaining his integrity—irrefutable pillars of his philosophy of life and of his highest moral ideal—the pursuit of his own happiness, achievable only by acting and living according to the objective principles of reality and being true to his own principles.

Roark’s triumph marks a victory in the struggle of the human mind against every obstacle which limits it. Roark embodies a set of principles, founded on the idea of progress, development and the improvement of humankind’s existence. His philosophy of life celebrates value-creation and achievement, which are shown as crucially important from a moral perspective because they are the products of man’s reasoning mind, applied not only to tackle the fundamental issue of man’s existence—survival, but also to ensure humanity’s continued evolution.



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