

FIRST PLACE



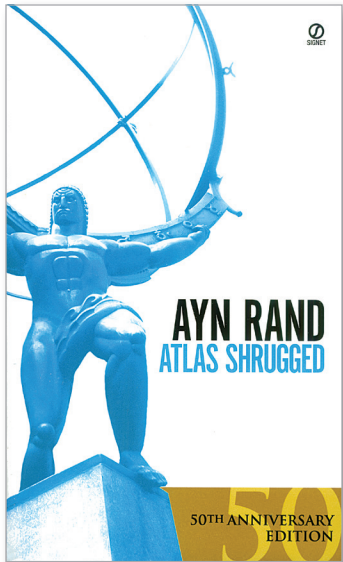
Christina Jeong, El Paso, TX – University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN

Francisco d’Anconia says that the “words ‘to make money’ hold the essence of human morality.” What does he mean? What are today’s prevalent moral attitudes toward money? Do you agree with Francisco’s view? Explain why or why not.

Today’s moral attitudes toward money are an embodiment of contradictions, and after consideration, can be represented by these three statements: “You are so lucky,” “Learn to love yourself” and “Money can’t buy happiness.” In this light, I wholeheartedly agree with Francisco d’Anconia that the “words ‘to make money’ hold the essence of human morality.”

A fitting example that is both personal and analogous to this discussion is over the topic of what many call “luck.” I despise that term, or rather I despise under what conditions and context people use it for. It seems as though for every achievement I have ever accomplished, for any award I have ever won, it has never failed that someone would use that word to undermine my achievements, as if rather than having earned anything with my own effort, I was simply in the right place, at the right time, in life’s favor. When I am told that I am lucky for achieving something, I narrow my eyes and want to ask exactly what it is that I am lucky for? I am a first-generation American, first-generation college student, who received a full ride to a top-tier university. My scholarship was given to well-rounded first-generation college students, who not only excelled academically and demonstrated great leadership potential, but overcame dire socioeconomic hardship. To tell a student like myself that the sum of my achievements were based on luck is to scoff at every ounce of energy I have ever spent scrapping for what I have, and every drop of blood, sweat and tears I have ever shed working for my future—studying when my friends were out having fun, working extra hours to help support my family, etc. What am I lucky for? Am I lucky to have experienced hardship? “Luck” is a term people use in self-defense for their own lack of achievement. To say that one has luck is to imply that others do not, which is a way for those who do not achieve to undermine the achievements of those who do. What others call “luck” is what I call grit, what I call will-power, sacrifice, perseverance, and my own ability. It is what I call “earned.”

“To earn” is one of the things I believe d’Anconia is referring to when he lectures on what it means “to make money” (384). By “earn,” I mean to have invested energy, effort and time into owning an achievement, to claim a personal victory and be able to say that “I did this,” “I made this,” “I earned this,” whether it refers to money, intellectual or tangible property, or any personal achievement you have ever accomplished. To love what you have earned is the greatest homage to man one could ever make, because it is a reflection of human ability, or as d’Anconia puts it, “To love money is to know and love the fact that money is the creation of the best power within you” (382). To love your own ability is to love yourself. Thus derives one of the greatest contradictions in today’s society: the concept of loving one’s self. We are constantly bombarded with commercial campaigns and self-righteous social justice posts



on Facebook about “learning how to love ourselves,” but the irony is that once you do, then they call you “selfish” and “conceited,” because to love yourself is to own yourself, and to own yourself is to relinquish society’s ownership of you. When people empty tell you to love yourself, this how to do it: own it—own your beauty, own your ability, own your intellect, own your achievements. When you can own yourself, you know you do not need to apologize for owning your money, because your money is a product of that love for yourself, of your ability and achievements. As d’Anconia puts it, do not let the looters’ credo regard your proudest achievements as a hallmark of shame, your prosperity as guilt (385).

When Francisco so passionately defends the phrase “to make money,” he is at the same time both praising the man with ability, and defending his right to own it. He is referring to “the self-made man” (384), “the man who would make his own fortune no matter where he started” (382), and is unapologetic about being rich, unapologetic about owning and loving what he has earned. As he puts it, “The lovers of money are willing to work for it. They know they are able to deserve it” (383). He specifically solos out America as a “country of money” precisely for the same reasons that draw millions of immigrants into this country every year—the American Dream, the opportunity to make money and become a self-made man. When he tells Hank Rearden, “If you want to see an abstract principle, such as moral action, in material form, there it is” (418), in reference to Rearden Steel, I think “America” could arguably be interchanged, because America is the country where things are created, the country where people go to create, the country where people understand that “wealth has to be created” (384).

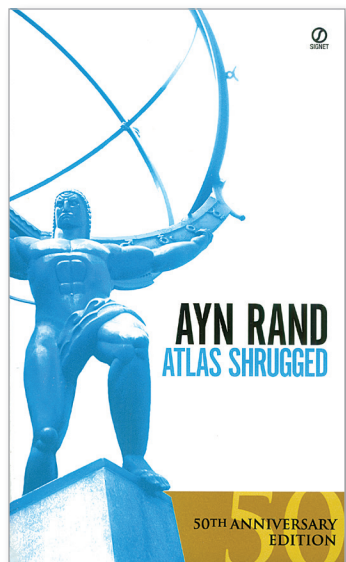
To make money is a celebration of human ability. In spite of this, today’s attitudes toward money seem to claim otherwise. Their philosophy is that “Money can’t buy happiness.” Per contra, Aristotle claims that happiness is the exercise of virtue, and Francisco d’Anconia claims that “Money is the product of virtue” (382). In that logic, is money not the product of happiness? If you can derive happiness from your ability to create, and money is the product of that ability, then when you purchase another man’s product which is made from his ability, are you not purchasing happiness? Indubitably, as d’Anconia says:

Money will not purchase happiness for the man who has no concept of what he wants; money will not give him a code of values, if he’s evaded the knowledge of what to value, and it will not provide him with a purpose, if he’s evaded the choice of what to seek. Money will not buy intelligence for the fool, or admiration for the coward, or respect for the incompetent. (382)

Money cannot satisfy the man who craves, but knows not what for. It cannot help the man who seeks blindly. For all intents and purposes, the happiness society seems to be referring to is an abject happiness that is unobtainable by any means other than creating it yourself, which ironically is what I believe Francisco means when he says “to make money.” It means the ability to create your own happiness.

Everything that money represents is an acknowledgment of man’s ability to create and to produce, because “Wealth is the product of man’s capacity to think” (381). It is an exchange of effort. This is the essence of human morality: to be able to trust and rely on another man’s best efforts, and the knowledge that you, too, will have given your own best in that exchange. Money is the physical manifestation of that exchange of effort, or better put:

2017 ATLAS SHRUGGED WINNING ESSAY



Money is the material shape of the principle that men who wish to deal with one another must deal by trade and give value for value. [. . .] To trade by means of money is the code of the men of good will. Money rests on the axiom that every man is the owner of his mind and his effort (380).

Francisco d'Anconia asks, in regards to the heir who is destroyed by his wealth because he is not equal to it, did the money corrupt the heir, “Or did he corrupt his money” (382)? By this I believe he means that when you do not give your best, but still expect the best of others, is when money becomes corrupted. To this end, to claim that one’s achievements are simply a matter of luck, inadvertently means that those who did not achieve, did not have luck. The conversation becomes no longer one about an exchange of efforts, but one of luck. You cannot own luck, and you cannot produce it—even those who win card games by counting cards win by effort, because they have found a way to make it not about luck, but about ability. To disown money is to disown yourself, to deny and deprive yourself of self-love, of happiness, and to leave your life to a game of chance. Heeding the words of Hank Rearden in which he states, “I refuse to apologize for my own ability—I refuse to apologize for my success—I refuse to apologize for my money” (445), despite the social pressures and expectations of today’s society, I too, refuse to be apologetic for my own ability.