

FIRST PLACE



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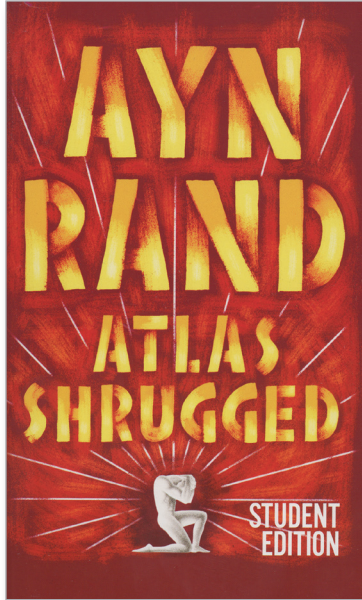
Among the many advocates of the “morality of death” he targets in his radio speech, John Galt reserves special criticism for the “mystics” who declare that man’s duty is “to crawl through years of penance, atoning for the guilt of his existence to any stray collector of unintelligible debts.” Name and describe at least two of the doctrines about human nature that Galt says these mystics use to encourage this moral outlook. Then illustrate their impact by choosing a character from *Atlas Shrugged* who struggles with these doctrines. (If one character struggles with both doctrines, you need only discuss one character.) What types of behavior do the doctrines encourage? What are the consequences for the character(s) in question? How is this struggle resolved?

The enemies of reason and the mind are motivated by more than just incorrect premises or faulty reasoning. They are not pursuers of happiness who simply got the wrong answer about how to find it. Rather, the philosophies that govern an age of decay are driven by a contempt for life and joy; they actually venerate pain and death. They then justify the anti-life orientation by supplying premises that reinforce it. John Galt appropriately calls this system of premises “The Morality of Death.”

Unfortunately, men of the mind living in a decaying society may unwittingly be plagued by such anti-life beliefs. This is the case with Hank Rearden. He has a great mind, an enterprising spirit, and a will to fight onward for his values. However, he spends much of *Atlas Shrugged* torn in two, for part of him is firmly planted in his reason and will, but he also carries beliefs that stem from the Morality of Death. He suffers from these beliefs until he becomes conscious of them—but the moment he sees any premise of the Morality of Death for what it truly is, he revolts against it and achieves a greater measure of freedom.

The first doctrine of death Rearden struggles with is that his body and mind are enemies. Galt summarizes the doctrine succinctly: “They have cut man in two, setting one half against the other. They have taught him that his body and his consciousness are two enemies engaged in deadly conflict . . . such is their image of man’s nature: the battleground of a struggle between a corpse and a ghost.” Rearden lives for years with the values of his mind cut off from the desires of his body rather than integrating them as one whole.

Hank’s marriage to Lillian is a dead thing long before it officially reaches a crisis, but he struggles to understand why. She does not embody any of his values—in fact she is an enemy to them. Lillian is a full practitioner of the Morality of Death, whose true wishes are to punish him for his virtues and drag him down to her level of vice. That he feels no desire for her follows naturally, yet he allows himself to suffer from guilt for it. He condemns himself for not loving something that he cannot love.



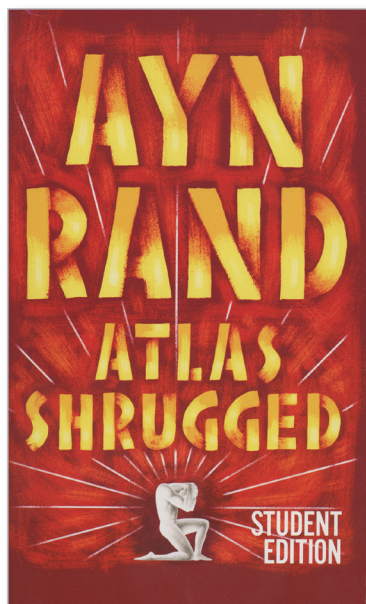
While condemning his lack of desire for Lillian, Rearden also drinks deeply the guilt of physically desiring Dagny. The way he castigates his own body reveals how the Morality of Death has a foothold in his mind. He lets himself believe the premise of his enemies: that the body and its desires are wicked, that his physical appetites are cut off from his spiritual values.

Many people suffer from this syndrome in the real world. The results for real people parallel the results for Rearden, including dysfunctional relationships and contempt for sexuality. Such contempt leads to either ascetic negation of sexuality or mindless indulgence of it. Generally, the morality of death causes descent into one of two pathologies: either dissociation from and neglect of the body, or thoughtless collapse into its immediate wishes rather than attention to its true well-being.

Rearden escapes from the trap when his enemies try to use his guilt to manipulate him. He looks their worldview in the eye and renounces it, leading him to the truth: “my mind and body were a unit, and that my body responded to the values of my mind. . . . [M]y body was not a weight of inanimate muscles, but an instrument able to give me an experience of superlative joy to unite my flesh and my spirit.” The body is not evil nor an enemy of the mind. The body is complementary to the mind, and an instrument of joy when it is used in expression of the mind’s highest values. Hank Rearden learns that sexuality is the physical container for one’s capacity to feel the joy of existence and enthusiasm for life. If man has anything that can be called a soul, it must mean the magnificent energy of a body and mind together, fully aligned in pursuit of the joy of living.

Rearden’s second struggle is with an inversion of morality taught by the mystics of death. They teach that “the degree of your virtue is used as the measure of your penalty; the degree of your faults is used as the measure of your gain.” The lie is that man must pay for his virtues but be rewarded for his faults; the Morality of Death thus reverses good and evil. Rearden is leached by a brother who would claim a right to a job by virtue of his incompetence; he is disdained by a wife who would make him guilty because of his integrity; he is oppressed by a government that would rob him because of his ability and undermined by competitors that would destroy him because he alone can create.

For too long, Rearden accepts the yoke of their moral judgments. He lets his family manipulate him with their pain, and he accepts the guilt society gives him for his extraordinary ability. Francisco d’Anconia attempts to explain it to him: “All your life, you have heard yourself denounced, not for your faults, but for your greatest virtues. . . . You have been called arrogant for your independent mind. You have been called cruel for your unyielding integrity. You have been called anti-social for the vision that made you venture upon undiscovered roads. You have been called ruthless for the strength and self-discipline of your drive to your purpose. You have been called greedy for the magnificence of your power to create wealth. . . . You bowed to their code and you never upheld your own. . . . You let them brand you as immoral.”



The enemies of the mind need Rearden to accept their inversion of morality. Without his sanction, they couldn't control him. As Dr. Ferris explains, "there is no way to disarm any man, except through guilt." By accepting the weaponized guilt of the Morality of Death, Rearden not only robs himself of dignity and joy but also empowers the people who seek his destruction.

Francisco introduced him to the idea that he is being punished for his virtues to pay others for their faults. He is unable to complete the idea at that time, but Rearden begins to see the rest of the truth on his own and act on it. He becomes suddenly indifferent to Lillian's attempts to shame him when he realizes: "She wanted to wrest from him an acknowledgement of his moral depravity—but only his own moral rectitude could attach significance to such a verdict." She was using his virtues against him, transforming his goodness into guilt. But only his own acquiescence could make it be so. He sees her agenda for what it is and withdraws his assent—and in an instant she loses moral power over him. Now with clarity he only accepts judgment by his own values; never again will he willingly bear shame for his virtues. He likewise withdraws his sanction from the looters. They may still expropriate his creations, but they can no longer make him believe they have a moral right to do it. He knows that in morality, too, A is A—virtue is virtue.

These two struggles that Rearden deals with are interconnected. Both are battles against lies about what it is to be human; both center on how a man will respond to what is best and most beautiful about his nature. The purveyors of the Morality of Death want a man to hate his body and be ashamed of his strength. This inevitably leads to pain and that is exactly their moral goal: "unhappiness is the hallmark of virtue. If a man is unhappy, really, truly unhappy, it means that he is a superior sort of person." To the contrary, the lovers of life know what a human is and are willing to honor his highest virtues. By turning away from the morality of his enemies and living by his own values instead, Hank Rearden emerges from pain into an unfettered celebration of his own life and will.