Rand, Ayn

Ayn Rand (1905–1982) was a Russian-born American novelist and philosopher who founded the philosophic system of objectivism. She defended metaphysical realism (that reality is what it is independent of what human beings think or feel) as the only valid means of human knowledge, ethical egoism (or rational self-interest) as the only proper morality, and laissez-faire capitalism as the only moral social system. Her works of fiction, including *The Fountainhead* (1943) and *Atlas Shrugged* (1957), and her works of nonfiction, including *The Virtue of Selfishness* (1964) and *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal* (1966), inspired a generation of readers who embraced her romantic, heroic conception of human achievement and her political individualism.

Ayn Rand promoted the philosphy of objectivism and strongly opposed communism and fascism.

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Though her political thought was broadly libertarian insofar as it entailed a defense of voluntary social relations and the individual rights to life, liberty, private property, and the pursuit of happiness, Rand was notably critical of libertarian intellectuals who, she argued, disconnected their political commitment to freedom from the wider philosophical and cultural context that it required. As an advocate of limited government—albeit one that, under ideal conditions, would finance its operations through voluntary contributions—Rand also was opposed to social theorists such as the libertarian Murray Rothbard, who had embraced a version of anarchist ideology.

Rand challenged the conventional left-right political spectrum. She had emigrated from the Soviet Union to the United States in 1926 and became a fierce critic of communism. Her first novel, *We the Living* (1936), was semiautobiographical; it detailed the horrors of communist rule. But Rand was equally opposed to fascism and to all variations of statism, including the redistributive welfare state advocated by modern-day liberals. She was firmly committed to laissez-faire capitalism and free markets and opposed all government intervention in the economy. Influenced by the Austrian economics of Ludwig von Mises, Rand argued that government intervention was the root cause of business cycles, monopolies, and social crises. The emergence of a mixed economy, in Rand's view, guaranteed the rule of pressure groups, with each group vying for some special privilege at the expense of others. However, she felt government had no right to dispense privileges to any individual or groups of individuals. For Rand, government's only proper role was in the retaliatory use of force to protect individual rights through such agencies as the police, the armed forces, and the legal courts.

Though Rand's support for capitalism seemed to place her on the right wing of the political spectrum, she was adamantly opposed to modern-day conservatism. An advocate of reason, she was an atheist who criticized attempts to link the defense of capitalism to religion. Moreover, a limited government, Rand maintained, should have no power to regulate peoples' personal life choices. In stipulating that no individual or institution had a right to initiate force against others, Rand defended the right of the individual to engage in all adult consensual activities.

Championing free minds and free markets, Rand saw an inextricable connection between intellectual, political, and economic freedom.

See also *Capitalism and Democracy; Individual and Society; Individualism; Libertarianism.*

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