

## **One of the Legacies of Print-Dominated Thinking: How Ayn Rand's Abstract Theory is Being Perpetuated in Current Republican Thinking**

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One would think that the thousands of deaths and misuse of the national wealth resulting from foreign wars justified on the grounds of spreading “freedom,” “democracy,” and “modernization,” would make people wary of the abstract language of politicians. Yet one of the most pervasive characteristics of today’s political discourse, particularly among Republicans and their extremist political base, is the use of context-free metaphors and phrases that do not connect with the diverse cultural realities of people’s lives. These metaphors—“freedom,” “religion,” “progress,” “free-markets,” “limited government,” “national security,” “individualism,” “terrorism,” “liberalism,” and so forth, are politically important in ways not understood by the politicians and members of the general public who use them. Unfortunately, the ritualistic and obfuscating functions of these context-free metaphors too often represent a reality to which people must submit. There are many reasons that formal education have left most people unable to recognize the dangers of basing political decisions on abstractions that preclude any possibility of being held accountable for facts, evidence, and the failures of social policies based on previous abstract thinking.

As the current debates about the future of the country grind on, it is evident that abstract ideas continue to energize people in ways that diminish their ability to think critically about whether the abstract ideas actually take account of the on-the-ground realities that are inescapable aspects of people’s lives. Perhaps if their public school and university education had introduced them to the fundamental differences between oral and print-based thinking and communication, as discussed in the writings of Walter Ong, Eric Havelock, and Jack Goody, they would have the conceptual basis necessary for recognizing the connections between how print-based storage and thinking leads only to surface knowledge that quickly becomes outdated and thus a misrepresentation of the ongoing flow of daily life. As students they might have also learned to recognize how the printed word marginalizes awareness of local contexts and tacit understandings—and

even more important, how the printed word always represents the writer's culturally influenced interpretative framework and, to borrow a phrase from Friedrich Nietzsche, the deep and generally hidden psychological forces that drive the writer's will to power. It is a myth that there can be an objective account of events, ideas, and data that does not involve someone's observations and interpretations, or a machine-based approach to obtaining evidence that does not involve the biases of the people who designed the machine. Print is only one of a culture's multiple uses of language that sustain what its members take to be reality. It also needs to be remembered that print and the spoken abstractions that result from the over-emphasis of print-based knowledge in the West also represent a particular cultural way of knowing and a particular stage in the development of the culture. Contrary to the thinking of many people, abstract words such as "freedom," "free-markets," "democracy," and so forth, do not refer to universal values or practices, but are culturally specific. Earlier examples of the political power of abstract words such as "primitive," "New World," and "Manifest Destiny" also reflected culturally-based misconceptions that were successfully used for colonizing purposes.

The West has a long history of privileging print-based accounts of reality over the face-to-face relationships within different cultures. For example, we have only to recall the abstract theories of western philosophers, from Plato to Dewey, as well as other theorists in the fields of economics, psychology, education to see how the tacitly understood and practiced daily cultural patterns, beliefs, and practices have been ignored. The mid-20<sup>th</sup> century thinking of Ayn Rand that now exerts such a powerful influence on today's political discourse simply continues the long history of privileging abstract thinking and theory over ways of thinking that take account of local cultural contexts. This tradition of thinking, which Ayn Rand now models for the current leaders of the Republican Party and its political base, and is still carried on in most areas of the public school and university curricula, continues the age-old silences in the West about the cultural roots of the ecological crisis. This crisis includes how oceans are undergoing chemical changes that threaten the basis of the food chain, global warming that is melting glaciers and thus threatening the sources of fresh water for billions of people, and the continued genetic disruptions within plants, animals, and humans introduced in the name of progress (another context-free metaphor) by generations of scientists who only

recently have learned to think of natural systems as ecologies. That all aspects of culture, from interpersonal interactions to the languaging processes that sustain people's taken for granted world, are also ecologies is still not understood by most scientists who continue to promote the agenda of the industrial/consumer dependent culture.

In order to recognize the parallels between Ayn Rand's core ideas and the political agenda now being articulated by the leaders of the Republican Party and taken for granted by the Republican base, it is necessary to summarize the nature of the Objectivist Ethic which she explains in *The Virtue of Selfishness* (1961). The lead chapter was the basis of the paper she presented at the University of Wisconsin Symposium on "Ethics in Our Times." It also summarizes the values and ideas that motivated the main characters in her widely read novels *The Fountainhead* (1943) and *Atlas Shrugged* (1957)—two books that had sold 25 million copies by 2007, and an additional 800,000 copies in 2008. She rejected both the labels of libertarianism and conservatism, but instead referred to her ideas as Objectivism. Nevertheless, her ideas are now considered foundational to the proponents of libertarianism and what has become mislabeled as conservatism. Indeed, her ideas are the basis of the Tea Party Movement, the economic policies promoted by Alan Greenspan, the rank and file Republican members of Congress, the majority of the Supreme Court, and the mix of political groups that make up the extreme right—including the right-wing media.

The widespread adoption of Rand's core ideas by libertarian and faux conservatives who have the support of a large segment of the American public is accelerating the polarization of American politics, and moving the country closer to what the German political theorist, Carl Schmitt, referred to as "friend/enemy" politics that precludes compromising with the enemy. In the following overview of Rand's core ideas of Objectivism, it is important to keep in mind that the focus is on how her language, and the language of her contemporary political followers, reflect a reliance upon abstractions that do not take account of the complex cultural and natural ecologies within which people live. To make this point in another way, the abstract thinking of Rand and her many followers represents a pseudo-reality, as it is not informed by the differences in cultural ecologies that characterize people's daily experience. And this pseudo-reality, like other print-based representations of reality such as the patriarchal God of the printed

Bible, have become a source of personal motivation that fails to recognize the contradictions between the abstract ideas and values and the everyday world of interdependencies that cannot be accounted for by the abstract language. The denial on the part of the person who takes for granted the existence of public services such as the police, the fire and police protection, roads, schools, and the enforcement of public safety standards, while steadfastly claiming that all aspects of life should be regulated by the free-enterprise system, is a typical example of the political schizophrenia that can in part be attributed to the willingness to follow the leadership of abstract thinkers, politicians, and media demagogues.

Rand's theory of Objectivism relies upon the same tradition of abstract thinking found in the writing of the major western philosophers ranging from Plato, Locke, Descartes, and Hegel, to such contemporary theorists as John Dewey and Richard Rorty. And like these earlier abstract theorists, she fails to consider the following questions: Does Rand consider the differences in cultural ways of knowing, and how these differences are ignored when relying about abstract representations of reality that provide only surface information? Do her abstract explanations of the ideas and values that should guide an individual's life take account of the interdependencies as well as the shaping influences of being born into a culture, as well as the individual's dependency on natural systems that are the sources of protein, water, oxygen, shelter, and the security that comes from knowing that these natural systems are now on the verge of collapse? Do her abstractions accurately represent the life-sustaining and enhancing, as well as the life-destructive, characteristics of the local cultural commons? Is *The Virtue of Selfishness* a guidebook on anti-democratic thinking? These questions bring into focus a fundamental fact of life: namely, that her abstractions misrepresent the complexity of how an individual's life is influenced by the cultural and natural ecologies into which she/he is born. More importantly, her silences on how her abstract representations of how life should be lived, as well as the role of economic and governmental policies that are consistent with her abstract representation of a rationally based Objectivist ethic have not become a concern to the followers of her ideas.

The title of her guide to how to live by the Objectivist ethic, *The Virtue of Selfishness*, can easily lead to misunderstandings, which she recognizes. Thus, she states

in the Introduction that the word selfishness refers to prioritizing the “concern with one’s own interests.” (vii) Selfishness is not to be associated with greed, a nihilistic pursuit of self interest, and behaviors motivated by naivety or romantic thinking. As she put it: “The Objectivist ethics holds that the actor must always be the beneficiary of his actions and that man must act for his own *rational* self-interest.” (x) The rational pursuit of self-interest, in turn, is justified on the grounds that the individual’s primary goal is to sustain her/his life. That which threatens the life of the individual is evil, while what furthers her/his life is the good.

In order to understand Rand’s other key ideas that relate to the role of the economic system, the legitimate role of government, and the rights of the individual, it is necessary to summarize the other values upheld by the Objectivist ethic. She identifies the three “values, which together, are the means to and the realization of one’s ultimate value, one’s own life—(which) are: Reason, Purpose, Self-Esteem, with their three corresponding virtues: Rationality, Productiveness, Pride.” (25) To understand the full implications of what she means by these three metaphors, it is important to avoid summaries that fall short of how she explains the responsibilities of the individual—if her/his rationality is to sustain a life of freedom. Living a life based on Rationality, she writes, “means the recognition and acceptance of reason as one’s *only* source of knowledge, one’s *only* judge of value and one’s *only* guide to action. It means one’s total commitment to a state of full, conscious awareness, to the maintenance of a full mental focus in all issues, in all choices, in all of one’s waking hours. It means a commitment to the fullest perception of reality within one’s power.” (25, italics added)

Her understanding of the individual’s productiveness also eliminates the tendency of individuals to claim that their lives have been limited by outside influences, such as the existence of technologies that reduce the need for workers or being born into an impoverished family that failed to instill the Objectivist ethic and thus the rational basis necessary for a life of self-direction and freedom. “The virtue of Productiveness,” she writes, “is the recognition of the fact that productive work is the process by which man’s mind sustains his life, the process that sets man free of the necessity to adjust himself to his background, as all animals do, and gives him the power to adjust his background to himself. Productive work,” she continues, “is the road to man’s unlimited achievement

and calls upon the highest attributes of his character” which she lists as “his refusal to bear uncontested disasters and his dedication to the goal of reshaping the earth in the image of his values.” (26)

The virtue of Pride further limits the possibility of making excuses for personal failings and for placing the blame on outside forces. As she put it in *Atlas Shrugged*, “as man must produce the physical values he needs to sustain his life, so he must acquire the values of character that make his life worth sustaining—that as man is a being of self-made wealth, so he is a being of self-made soul.” (27) And finally, the Objectivist ethic requires that “to live for his own sake means that the highest achievement of his own happiness is man’s highest moral purpose.” (27)

A key part of her theory, which now has become a central tenet of her followers, is that the life of the free and rational individual can only be achieved in a society where “pure” and unregulated capitalism exists. In order to attain the state of pure capitalism, she identifies another set of values and behaviors that a man of selfishness must meet. Again, she does not derive her list from a democratic process or a study of different cultural ways of understanding the moral values governing people’s economic relationships. Rather, she reproduces from her study of Plato and other western philosophers at Petrograd State University in the Bolshevik transformed Russia the same pattern of abstract thinking that she expects “men” to accept as guides for living their rationally directed lives. Again it is important to give close attention to her exact words as they have become an important influence on current thinking and policy objectives of the Republicans who are, and it’s not entirely clear here, either leading or following the libertarian, market-liberal voters. The principles guiding her view of economic man, which she identifies as a “trader” are equally straight forward and free of any complexities that most people encounter in everyday experience. As Rand puts it, “*The trader is a man who earns what he gets and does not give or take from the undeserved. He does not treat men as masters or as slaves, but as independent equals.... He does not switch to others the burden of his failures, and he does not mortgage his life into bondage to the failure of others.*” (31, italic added) This statement, more than any other, summarizes how most Republicans now justify the limited role of government in addressing social justice issues.

Rand makes no suggestions for how people are to be held accountable when they stray from the Darwinian implications implicit in the Objectivist ethic, such as Warren Buffett's suggestion that the super-rich should pay more in taxes than what their secretaries pay. Indeed, her abstract theory for organizing society and defining the nature of moral relations does not include a discussion of how people are to be held accountable when they exploit others, such as we now see in the new CEO of Apple Computer being paid \$378 million in his first year on the job. (R. Lowenstein, 2012) For Rand, there is no moral issue in the disparity between the salary of the Apple CEO and the economic and physical exploitation of the workers in China who assemble the Apple products. Not only is the CEO of Apple an "independent equal" of the Chinese assembly line workers, but according to Rand the government has no right to intrude into the relationship by taxing the Apple CEO as a way of redistributing wealth to the more vulnerable individuals. Again, her no-compromise with the possibility that social justice issues should be addressed by government can be seen in what she claims to be the only proper role of government—a view that is now shared by the anti-government Republicans who also want to return to the Founding Fathers' Constitution—which in their day did not include an awareness of the need for government to regulate corporate abuses.

"The only proper, *moral* purpose of government is to protect man's rights, which means: to protect him from physical violence—to protect his right to his own life, to his own liberty, to his own *property* and to the pursuit of his own happiness. Without property rights, no other rights are possible. (33) That is, the government has no right to penalize the strong in order to reward or help the weak—a practice that current GOP presidential candidates view as leading Americans down the slippery slope of what they view as European totalitarian socialism. Rand's core ideas are in agreement with the libertarian CATO Institute's three-fold understanding of the role of government, as well as that of the other market-liberal think tanks such as the American Enterprise and Hoover Institutes. These mislabeled conservative think-tanks all claim that governments should be limited to promoting free-enterprise, individualism, and a strong national defense.

Rand's ideas have clearly influenced the ideas of Ron Paul as well as the majority of the Republican members of Congress—as well as the public that voted them into

office. While her ideas are stated in a categorical way that does not allow for compromise and extenuating circumstances, the current direction in which the Republicans and their populist base of support are attempting to move the country reflects an effort to achieve the fullest realization of her abstract ideas—which includes the following:

- (1) **On the universality of her Objectivist ethic:** Rand represents the rational capacity of “man” to live in accordance with the Objectivist ethic to be a universal of the human condition and thus unaffected by cultural differences. This leads, in turn, to legitimizing the right of the governmental and churches, and any other group that has a colonizing agenda, to promote American exceptionalism as the standard that other cultures are expected to emulate. Thus, when armed groups react to America’s colonizing agenda, they must be attacked as a threat to national security. This leads, in turn, to existing in a constant state of war that benefits both the military and the corporations. The Objectivist view of “man’s” universal quest to place his/her survival interest above all other values, including what Rand regards as the misguided and degenerate nature of altruistic values, means that the loss of the diversity of the world’s culture, as well as their language systems, represent the further elimination of old systems of beliefs that are not based on the Objectivist’s individually-centered rationalism.
- (2) **The Objectivist way of thinking about the role of education in perpetuating the freedom and survivability of the individual:** Rand and her Republican followers view public education as imposing the beliefs and practices of the larger hedonistic society, thus making it difficult for individuals to realize their own rational capacity for self-direction. The problem is that most parents have been indoctrinated by teachers who promote the common good over the pursuit of self-interest. The result is that parents are too willing, according to most Republicans, to surrender their responsibility for guiding their children in how to live in accordance with the principles of Objectivism. The parents’ proper role is to home-school their children, or to become supporters of charter schools whose guiding ideology can be more easily controlled by like-minded people.



- (3) **Rand's view of property:** Rand's understanding of the role of government is that it is to be severely limited, especially as it relates to taxing what people have earned. Her thinking is clearly represented in Grover Norquist's alliance with corporations and other powerful opponents of taxes. Again, her abstract and categorical way of thinking fails to consider how the infrastructure and public services ranging from police, fire protection, and road and bridge maintenance, which both individual citizens and businesses rely upon, need to be paid for by the people who use them. To recall her views on the moral purpose of government: "it is to protect man's rights, which means to protect him from physical violence—to protect his right to his own life, to his own liberty, to his own property and to his own happiness." Only then will rationally-directed men realize the fullest potential of laissez-faire capitalism. (33) The majority of members on the Supreme Court as well as Congressional Republicans agree with Rand that capitalism "is the system of the future—if mankind is to have a future." Rand's universalism supports another agenda of Republicans, as well as most Democrats who acquired the same assumption from their university education: namely, that capitalism should be globalized—even if it requires the exercise of military force.
- (4) **Rand's view of a life guided by reason:** She is explicit that this requires ignoring the opinions and evidence presented by others, especially those working for the state. She further claims that this is a precondition of men becoming "dedicated to the goal of reshaping the earth in the image of [their] values." (26) Rand was writing at a time when few scientists were aware of the extent of the ecological crisis, and were, instead, unknowingly following her injunction that the environment should be shaped in terms of man's values. The introduction of life-altering synthetic chemicals was viewed by the majority in the scientific community as bringing the environment under rational control. Among the majority of social scientists and professors in the humanities and professional schools, the cultural assumptions that were undermining the life-sustaining natural ecologies were largely ignored—which largely persist today. Over the last 50 years there has been a radical shift in the scientific understanding of the changes

occurring in natural systems, with the consensus research findings being reported in both scientific journals as well as in the public media not controlled by the major corporations. In spite of the scientific reports and visual evidence that now has become part of people's experience (such as increasing shortages of potable water, droughts, dying off of forests on a Biblical scale, changes in the growing seasons due to global warming, and the rapid decline in the world's fisheries, and so forth) the Republicans continue to view the environment as an exploitable resource. For them (and for Rand), this means the exploitation of the environment should be under the control of the free-market system. It also means that the Environmental Protection Agency must be eliminated—along with all the environmental regulations supported by Republicans during the presidency of Richard Nixon.

As pointed out earlier, the privileging of print-based storage and thinking (that is, abstract thinking) did not originate with Rand. Indeed, its roots go back much further in the history of the West when the printing press and the spread of literacy began to marginalize the importance of face-to-face communication, along with personal memory and the physical senses that are more attuned to acquiring a deeper understanding of local contexts and tacit understandings. Indeed, one can make the case that the oral traditions of the early Judeo/Christian world were transformed when they were transformed into printed texts by men who represented different cultural ways of knowing. It is also worth considering that the certainties that many people associate with the printed word and the increased pressure on Republican politicians to adopt even more extreme abstract policies can be traced to the powerful consciousness shaping experience of relying upon how the printed word in the Bible creates a sense of reading universal truths and the actual words of God.

As students move from the elementary grades through the advanced stages of formal education, a greater emphasis is placed on the authority of the printed word, and on even more abstract symbol systems. What can be more abstract than the numbers that underlie statistics—or “objective data”? With recent innovations in digital technologies there has been a slight recovery of visual and auditory representations of reality. Nevertheless, the complexity of local contexts, which include the ongoing micro and

macro changes in both the cultural and natural ecologies, are largely sacrificed in achieving the supposed efficiencies and certainties of abstract thinking. The point to be made in understanding Rand's influence is that her own education, as it did for most authors and nearly all academics and public school teachers who unconsciously reproduce the taken for granted patterns of thinking of their mentors, is that she was guided by deeply and widely held assumptions of the elites who established the abstract nature of high status knowledge—which meant treating knowledge obtained in face-to-face relationships as having low-status. Ironically, the basis of her unyielding commitment to a life guided by the rationality of the autonomous individual can be located in culturally-specific historical processes and assumptions of which she was unaware.

**Other Myths and Silences in the Thinking of Ayn Rand, and People Whose Lives and Politics are Based on Similar Abstractions:**

In order to avoid relying upon another either/or cultural pattern of thinking, which perpetuates its own reductionism, it must be stated that print is not the problem. Rather, it is how it is used. That is, print is highly useful when informed by the actual evidence of events, the complexities and contexts that influence people's ideas and behaviors, and an effort to bring to the attention of the reader the inherent limitations of what is represented in print. The latter, as both Walter Ong and Jack Goody have pointed out, is that what appears in print cannot replicate the ongoing flow of experience. Once in print, the reality it represents is fixed. Readers then bring their largely taken for granted interpretative frameworks to the printed text, which too often reduces further the accuracy of the printed word. This pattern can easily be seen in how commentaries on a book fails to take account of further changes in the author's ideas. The other inherent characteristic of print, which has been mentioned earlier, is that it cannot fully reproduce the complexity of local contexts, inner states of mind, tacit understandings, and what both the author and the people take for granted. To reiterate, print is a powerful and highly useful when its limitations are understood. The problem is that the various educational processes in western cultures fail to clarify its inherent limitations, and when it is being used in ways that are highly useful. To reiterate another point: Ayn Rand and the people

who share many of her ideas about individual autonomy, the rational process, and how government must not interfere with the free markets, fail to understand how relying upon abstract metaphors leads to policies that are exacerbating the plight of millions of people through no fault of their own, and are further undermining the life-sustaining capacity of natural systems. The social justice issues that are marginalized by the abstract vocabulary of the Republicans and other right-wing groups will soon lead to levels of desperation where people will take to the streets in protest. This will lead to the full apparatus of a police state being relied upon by those who are using government and the media to further their own political and economic interests.

The focus from here on will be on the misconceptions that underlie Rand's key metaphors of "rationality," "individualism," "free markets," "altruism," and "limited government," —as well as what she and her Republican and right-wing populist fellow-travelers ignore.

- (1) **Rationality:** Rand's thinking about the power of rational thought to lead to a life of individual autonomy centered upon self-interest fails to take account of the influence of language on how rationality is understood and exercised. As Rand demonstrates, her supposedly culturally uninfluenced explanations about the nature and role of rationality are dependent upon the use of words—words that are metaphors that have a cultural history in terms of carrying forward the analogs that frame the meaning of the words (metaphors) she takes for granted. What Gregory Bateson refers to as the "recursive epistemologies" and which I call root metaphors, are the tacit background culturally derived conceptual frameworks that Rand relies upon in making the argument that the individual's rationality should determine what contributes to the "*maintenance of the organism's life.*" In short, the root metaphors that are part of the ecology of language she takes for granted, and which are fundamental to her misunderstanding of a rational process that is free of cultural influences, include the root metaphors of patriarchy, individualism, progress, anthropocentrism, economism, and a Social Darwinism spin on evolution. Her misconceptions about the nature of the rational process can be traced to her lack of awareness of how language carries forward many of the misconceptions and silences of earlier western thinkers, as well as their hubris.

(2) **Individualism:** Rand's views on the autonomy of individual thought, where she urges the individual to live "by the work of one's own mind," and to never place any value or consideration whatsoever above one's perception of reality," reflects another widely held myth in the West. Namely, that there is such a thing as an autonomous individual who is free of all outside influences. Indeed, this myth is still the basis of thinking of many educators who urge students to construct their own ideas. Even Paulo Freire argued that individuals can only achieve their fullest human potential as they question the thinking and achievements of previous generations, and rename the world for themselves.

A point that Gregory Bateson makes is that individuals cannot understand themselves, nor be understood by others, without taking into consideration their relationships within the cultural and natural ecologies. That is, all forms of life from the micro level of genes to the macro level of cultural and global natural systems exist in relationships. Without these relationships, which are also sources of interdependencies, the individual would cease to exist. If the individual's relationship with other members of the language community she/he is born into did not exist, the individual would be unable to think, be understood by others, or have a self-identity. And if the ecosystems collapse, which Rand urges being exploited by individuals who are only interested in pursuing their own self-interest and who promote a totally unrestrained capitalism, the individual would die of starvation. It's important to note how Rand viewed as a liberal hoax the scientific warnings about smoking, yet died of lung cancer—after using the name of Ann O'Connor in order to have her treatment paid by Medicare. Today, her followers, as well as people who derived their anti-science thinking from other sources, promote the idea that all governmental restraints on exploiting the earth's natural resources should be eliminated. Individualism and pure, unrestrained capitalism are necessary "if humankind is to have a future," as she put it. (33)

(3) **Altruism:** According to Rand, the values and behaviors associated with altruism are sources of deception and a strategy for undermining the rational self-direction of the individual. "Today," she wrote, "the world is facing a choice: if civilization is to survive, it is the altruistic morality that men have to reject." All

acts intended to help others, according to Rand's rationalistic ethic of selfishness, are really intended to take control of other people's lives. The moral ethic that is in accord with pure, unregulated capitalism is the ethic of selfishness; that is, relying upon one's own rational capacity for self-direction. Like Rand's other context-free metaphors, she does not consider the various cultural contexts in which altruism plays an important role in improving the quality of daily life that otherwise may become nasty, brutish, and short—to recall Thomas Hobbe's observation that applies to a world where caring for the well-being of others is absent.

It is important to note yet another convergence between the ideas of Rand and those held by Republicans in Congress and their populist right-wing base. That is, they view taxing the successful in order to provide a safety net for the unemployed, medically destitute, and people who started life below the poverty line, as a form of theft—and if any government assistance is to be given it must be paid for by reducing other governmental services. Acts of altruism are thus not consistent with the political economy of the market system, which the already rich control through their army of lobbyists

It's particularly interesting that many Christians who supposedly are committed to the Social Gospel of the New Testament, and thus to the tradition of helping those in need, are among the loudest supporters of the Republicans who want to use government to further advance the interests of the already wealthy. Just as in the examples of Rand's abstract understanding of rationality, individualism, and altruism, she ignores that these metaphors have different meanings in other cultures, and when related to local contexts, referred to earlier as the cultural and natural ecologies, they take on a complexity that is hidden when they are represented in print. To reiterate a point made earlier, the printed word provides only a surface and thus abstract knowledge that allows the writer to hide her/his ignorance of the tacit and contextual nature of everyday life.

- (4) **Limited Government:** This is a mantra in both the thinking of Rand as well as today's Republican politicians and their populist base of supporters. Promoting the idea that government has to be limited to what the framers of the Constitution

had in mind, which in their time did not include an awareness that the logic of capitalism requires the incessant drive to increase profits by exploiting workers, consumers, and the natural environment, serves to hide a dominant aspect of capitalism that Rand ignores. Without governmental regulation we would still have the exploitation of child labor, and workers in general. Women and other marginalized groups would still be subjected without legal recourse to the prejudices of the employers, And companies would be free to sell products without regard for health and other safety issues. This idea of shrinking government, which goes deeper in the history of the West than the current efforts of Grover Norquist and his corporate supporters, is rooted in the internal logic of a capitalistic economic system. Contrary to Rand's defense of capitalism, unregulated capitalism will ensure that the earth's natural systems become so degraded that humans and other species will not have a future.

This logic has now reached the point where the drive to reduce the cost of production in order to increase profits leads to adopting labor saving technologies that, in turn, lead to massive unemployment and thus to a reduction in the ability of people to consume on the scale required by the industrial system. This leads to the spiral downward we are now witnessing where the threat of reduced profits leads to the further automation of the production process, which leads to the further reduction in the need for workers. The massive unemployment, which in some countries is nearly 50 percent, is leading to levels of social chaos that, in turn, threaten to overthrow the governments—which then leads to the use of police and the army to suppress the unrest. The Republicans and their populist and right-wing supporters seem unable to recognize the global scale of unrest resulting, in part, from the way in which the digital phase of the industrial revolution is making workers redundant, and how the current tax policies of the American government support this downward spiral into social chaos. On the other hand, the leadership, which draws support from corporations, the military and surveillance agencies, and the leadership of religious fundamentalists who want more influence in government in exchange for their support, may have recognized that democracy is the problem, and that policies that increase social

unrest provide the opportunity to follow the Chinese model of a capitalist economy that operates under the centralized control of the state. Whatever frees capitalism from government regulation and the threats from street protesters would meet with the approval of Rand.

### **The Role of Public School and Universities in Promoting Print-Based Abstract Thinking:**

There are many ways in which the patterns of thinking and communication become abstract and thus disconnected from the contexts of lived experiences that are best exemplified in the immediacy of face-to-face exchanges and patterns of mutual support. The spoken word, when passed from person to person, and over many generations, also becomes increasingly abstracted from the original event and from cultural/environmental ecologies in which the event occurred. The spoken exchanges quickly lose accuracy in terms of accounting for all the tacit and culturally implicit messages exchanged in face-to-face interactions. As the spoken word is retold by others there is a progressive loss of information which Bateson refers to as the differences which make a difference in human and nature relationships. Over time, the spoken word may also become a source of abstract thinking and communication. As the spoken word is repeated by others who are unaware of the original context, there is a greater likelihood that the taken for granted interpretative frameworks of the speakers and listeners will further distort how the original events occurred. The key point is that the spoken word, which includes narratives and the ceremonies they are based upon, can also become as divorced from the complexities of experience and events as is the case with the printed word.

However, there is a basic difference in the power relationship between speakers and writers, and thus between the listener and the reader. In terms of spoken relationships, there is a greater possibility of a shared background of cultural memory, as well as history of personal relationships—which may lead to an awareness that the speaker has a history of dishonesty, or being unable to remember accurately. Awareness of class, gender, and ethnic differences may lead to a more questioning attitude. In short, in terms of the immediate context of speaking and listening, which may move to the level of dialogue, there is often the possibility of questioning the speaker in ways that hold



her/him to be accountable for what is spoken. In effect, spoken exchanges involve a different power relationship than is present in the relationship between the writer and the reader. To stay with Rand's relationship to her readers, the power relationship is asymmetrical. There is no possibility of an ongoing exchange between the reader and the development of the abstract arguments she commits to print. Thus, there is no way to challenge her ideas, and thus no immediate way to hold her accountable for basic misconception and silences. Nor can suggestions be made about where she might strengthen her arguments before she writes them down.

While memory and personal judgments enter into oral exchanges, the reader will generally lack an in-depth knowledge of the writer's background which may be important to understanding her/his biases and silences. It may be useful for readers to know that while Rand argues that all decisions must be arrived at through a rational process that preserves the individual's life and happiness, she was dependent upon amphetamines and smoked two packs of cigarettes a day—which eventually led to her dying of lung cancer. The deep and often unconscious forces within the ecology of the physical, psychological, emotional energies, and impulses that circulate within the individual, as we often observe, make the life of self-centered rationality far more difficult and less pure than Rand acknowledges in her writings.

A crucial point lost on modern thinkers, including Rand, who relate human progress to a further expansion of capital markets is that the new digital technologies contribute to a massive loss of information. With the globalization of the printed word, this process of colonizing other cultures to adopt the idea that equates abstract knowledge with high-status knowledge is a particularly serious problem—one that is having its greatest impact on the youth who are increasingly dependent upon digitized communication. This is the point made by Wes Jackson in *Alters of Unhewn Stone: Science and the Earth* (1987). The information exchanged at the local level, from genes responding to the information circulating in the hierarchy of ecologies they are dependent upon, to the intergenerational knowledge and skills that sustain daily life in the cultural commons, to the information exchanges that occur as oceans become warmer and the melting of glaciers accelerates, are all examples of the connections between local

contexts and the information to which the other participants in the cultural and natural ecologies respond.

As Jackson points out, the continual quest for new discoveries, ways of thinking, and technologies (including the accelerated speed at which abstract information can be spread) has led to ignoring the information vital to the self-renewing capacity of natural systems—including the intergenerational renewing of cultural traditions that have improved the quality, safety, patterns of mutual support, and social justice achievements that are too often taken for granted in society. (13-14) The massiveness of this loss of information can be assessed by considering how the growing dependence of youth and adults upon communicating through the digital technologies are major contributors to cultural amnesia, which involves the loss of awareness of the traditions we will most need in the future as we become even more dependent upon automation and existence in a surveillance society. Cultural amnesia, which most modern educators view as necessary for the emancipation of the individual, and which Rand and her fellow-travelers promote as contributing to a world of pure capitalism, is now viewed in a positive light. That is, it is thought to contribute to more freedom of the individual. What is not recognized is that given the rapid changes occurring in this century—with ecosystems being rapidly degraded, with the greater concentration of wealth and political power, with computer-driven automation making workers increasingly redundant, and with what remains of the cultural commons being rapidly integrated into the market systems—the cultural amnesia of the individual ensures that her/his civil liberties will become increasingly vulnerable to the forces of the corporate state.

The questions that people should be asking are about the losses and gains associated with the uses of various technologies, especially the new digital technologies that allow for the faster transfer of information abstracted from local cultural and environmental ecologies. While something as complex and pervasive as the connections between different technologies and the different ways in which they contribute to abstract and thus surface knowledge of local contexts, it would be wrong to place the blame on a single institution. Yet it is difficult to ignore the fact that public schools and universities, which represent sites where questions can be asked and historical forces examined, have failed in a number of ways. These include the failure to engage students in an

examination of the cultural mediating characteristics of different technologies—including the mediating effects (gains and losses) of technologies that promote greater reliance upon print. Few students learn that technologies are not culturally neutral, and even fewer learn about the differences in how orality and literacy alter consciousness and social relationships. Nor are students encouraged to consider how print-based cultural storage and thinking foster a subjective form of individualism, as well as the cultural proclivity to ignore that everything ranging across all aspects of the cultural and natural ecologies in which we live out our lives involve relationships. The supposed autonomous individual, as pointed out earlier, is always a participant in an ecology of relationship—as plants animals, corporations, technologies, the built culture, languaging processes, and so forth—do not exist in a state of isolation. Everything is connected, and the nature of the behaviors of the participants in these ecologies need to be understood in terms of whether they are life enhancing or destroying.

Ayn Rand's world is a fiction that can only be taken as an accurate representation of the prospects of a life based on the rational pursuit of self-interest if readers do not understand that no degree of rational thinking can enable people to escape their responsibility for how their values and behaviors affect the well-being of others—including the environment. This understanding, which involves being aware of one's local context and patterns of interactions with others, will only come to those who begin to think in terms of the interdependencies between cultural and natural ecologies. The current emphasis on computer-mediated learning, where even the visual representations present only a surface and time-restricted understanding of contexts, and the spoken words (lectures) that have been largely influenced by what the professor has read, simply makes more difficult the transition to a greater reliance upon ecological intelligence—which is the exact opposite of what Rand has presented to her millions of readers.

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