

non serviam #17

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Editor's Word

"Stirnerism" exists as a part of many intellectual movements; Anarchists have their Stirnerite fringe, there tend to be some who love Stirner in every libertarian circle, and Stirnerites often hang out with Objectivists, as they are the only other ones who do also speak warmly about selfishness.

Stirnerite thought is, though, a fringe minority view in these movements, and – while acknowledged– is seldom integrated into the dynamics of these movements' rhetoric. The lesson is recognized, but not learned.

When Chris M. Sciabarra told me a year ago about a book he was writing, "Ayn Rand: The Russian Radical", where he sought to establish Rand's intellectual and

philosophical roots in Russian dialectical thinking, that immediately struck me as both a profound insight, and an opening for an approach from Objectivism to "Stirnerism". Of particular interest I find his statement that the dialectical heritage, as taken up by Rand, is one where mere interpretation of the world is not enough. Philosophy must have as its end a praxis. Mapping this back to Germany of one and a half century ago, this fits better into the thoughts of the rebellious young Hegelians than into the "purer" dialectics of the old Hegelians.

So I invited Dr. Sciabarra to write a piece for Non Serviam about the central theses of his book, the results of which appear below. And well, as a little sales plug, I can mention that his book will be available this August from Penn State Press.

Dr. Sciabarra is a Visiting Scholar in the New York University Department of Politics, and has previously authored "Marx, Hayek, and Utopia".

Have an enjoying read and a good summer!

Ayn Rand

The Russian Radical

Chris Sciabarra

Ayn Rand is one of the most widely read philosophers of the twentieth century. Yet, despite the sale of nearly thirty million copies of her works, and their translation into many languages, there have been few book-length, scholarly examinations of her thought. My book provides the first analysis of Rand's Russian roots and of her place in intellectual history. Its central theme is captured most fully by the title: *Ayn Rand: The Russian Radical*. The book addresses two fundamental questions:

–In what sense can Rand's philosophy be understood as a response to her Russian past?; and

–In what sense can Rand's philosophy be understood as a contribution to twentieth century radical social thought?

By answering these questions, I provide a new interpretation of Rand's Objectivism with regard to its intellectual origins and its significance for the history of social theory. It is my belief that Rand achieved a unique synthesis that emerged from her rejection--and absorption--of key elements in the Russian tradition. What she rejected was the Marxist and religious content of Russian thought. What she accepted was the dialectical revolt against formal dualism. In her distinctive integration of a libertarian politics with a dialectical method, Rand forged a revolutionary link. She projected a dialectical sensibility while formulating a fundamentally non-Marxist, radical critique of statism.

Moreover, the book attempts to grasp Rand's Objectivism as a developing "text" over time. The existential conditions from which it emerged and to which it speaks are partially constitutive of its very significance. By grasping these conditions and factors, my book provides an enriched appreciation of Rand's contributions.

Rand was born and reared during a revolutionary period in Russian history. That context is the key to understanding the peculiar character of her philosophy, her essentially dialectical mode of inquiry, and her radical critique of power relations in contemporary statist society. By the time she graduated from the University of Leningrad in 1924, Rand had been exposed to a dialectical revolt against dualism that profoundly influenced her literary craft and philosophical project.

In the book, I explore Objectivism on three distinct levels: (1) its intellectual roots, (2) its formal structure, and (3) its radical social implications.

Rand's Russian nature was not reflected merely in her heavy foreign accent or in the mammoth size of her novels. She was Russian in more fundamental ways. In the sweeping character of her generalizations, and in her passionate commitment to the practical realization of her ideals, Rand was fully within the Russian literary and philosophic tradition. Like most of Russia's great literary figures, she was an artist, social critic, and non-academic philosopher who constructed a broad synthesis in her battle against the traditional antinomies in

Western thought: mind vs. body, fact vs. value, theory vs. practice, reason vs. emotion, rationalism vs. empiricism, idealism vs. materialism, etc. And like most of Russia's indigenous philosophers, she presented an exhaustive, all-encompassing theoretical totality. Her system is as much defined by what she accepted in Russian thought as by what she rejected. In her intellectual evolution, Rand both absorbed and abolished, preserved and transcended, the elements of her Russian past.

In Part One, I discuss the process by which this assimilation may have taken place. Though Rand used genuinely inductive and deductive techniques to fashion her unique synthesis, she also responded to real, concrete circumstances. Abstracting Rand's philosophy from this context damages our understanding of its historical importance. Living in Russia during its celebrated Silver Age, Rand witnessed a burst of Nietzschean and neo-Hegelian thought: the Symbolist movement, Russian Religious Renaissance, and Russian Marxism each attempted to resolve various manifestations of dualism. Rand's most memorable philosophy professor at Leningrad University was N. O. Lossky, the distinguished Hegelian neo-Idealist. My book examines the motif of synthesis in Russian culture, and in Lossky's thought, and, by relying on new historical evidence, it documents the means by which Rand may have absorbed such themes.

I contend that Rand's revolt against dualism was the central animating force of her project. Hence, in Part Two, my focus switches from the historical to the synchronic. I examine the formal structure and content of Rand's system. Part Two reconstructs Rand's project in each of the major branches of philosophy: ontology, epistemology, philosophical psychology, aesthetics, ethics, and politics. I argue that

Objectivism is inherently dialectical and non-dualistic.

In Part Three, I examine Rand's radical assessment of the nature of power as manifested in all social practices and institutions. I scrutinize Rand's attempt to trace the internal relations between culture, education, sex, race, and the neo-fascist welfare-warfare state.

DIALECTICS IN RAND'S PHILOSOPHY

To claim that Rand is a "dialectical" thinker requires some elucidation. The best way in which to understand the dialectical impulse, is to view it as a technique to overcome formal dualism and monistic reductionism. Dualism attempts to distinguish two mutually exclusive spheres, though it often leads theorists to emphasize one sphere to the detriment of another. In this regard, one can differentiate between genuine philosophical dualists who see two, co-equal principles at work, and philosophical monists, who accept the dichotomies defined by dualists, and reduce one polarity to an epiphenomenon of the other. Wolf Heydebrand explains that these dualistic forms can be found in nearly every branch of philosophy: in ontology, in the radical separation of body and mind, or matter and consciousness; in epistemology, in the radical separation of the real object and the datum present to the knowing mind; in ethics, in the radical distinction between good and evil.

Dialectical method is neither dualistic nor monistic. A thinker who employs a dialectical method does not embrace either pole of a duality, nor the middle of two polar extremes. Rather, the dialectical method anchors the thinker to both camps. The dialectical thinker refuses to recognize these camps as mutually exclusive or exhaustive. He or she strives to uncover

the common roots of apparent opposites. He or she presents an integrated alternative that examines the premises at the base of an opposition as a means to its transcendence. In some cases, the transcendence of opposing points of view provides a justification for rejecting both alternatives as false. In other cases, the dialectical thinker attempts to clarify the genuinely integral relationship between spheres that are ordinarily kept separate and distinct.

In Rand's work, this transcendence of opposites is manifest in every branch of philosophy. Rand's revolt against formal dualism is illustrated in her rejection of such "false alternatives" as materialism and idealism, intrinsicism (or old-style, classical "objectivism") and subjectivism, rationalism and empiricism. Rand was fond of using, what Thorslev has called, a "Both-And" formulation in her critique of dualism. Typically, Rand argues that Both X And Y share a common premise, Z. Her characteristic expression is: "Just as X depends upon Z, so too does Y depend upon Z." Moreover, Rand always views the polarities as "mutually" or "reciprocally reinforcing," "two sides of the same coin." This is not merely an expository technique. Rand was the first to admit that a writer's style is a product of his or her "psycho-epistemology" or method of awareness. By her own suggestion, one can infer that such an expository style reflects a genuinely dialectical methodology.

Rand's resolution aims to transcend the limitations that, she believes, traditional dichotomies embody. In some instances, Rand sees each of the opposing points of view as being half-right and half-wrong. Her dialectical approach also recognizes the integral relationships of mind and body, reason and emotion, fact and value, theory and practice. For Rand, these factors are distinctions within an organic unity.

Neither can be fully understood in the absence of the other since each is an inseparable aspect of a wider totality.

It is this emphasis on the totality that is essential to the dialectical mode of inquiry. Dialectics is not merely a repudiation of formal dualism. It is a method that preserves the analytical integrity of the whole. While it recommends study of the whole from the vantage point of any part, it eschews reification, that is, it avoids the abstraction of a part from the whole and its illegitimate conceptualization as a whole unto itself. The dialectical method recognizes that what is separable in thought is not separable in reality.

Moreover, dialectics requires the examination of the whole both systemically and historically. From a systemic perspective, it grasps the parts as structurally interrelated, or "internally related," both constituting the whole, while being constituted by it. For example, Rand, as a dialectical thinker, would not disconnect any single theoretical issue, such as the problem of free will, from its broader philosophic context. She necessarily examines a host of connected issues, including the efficacy of consciousness, the nature of causality, and the reciprocal relationships between epistemology, ethics, and politics.

From a historical perspective, dialectics grasps that any system emerges over time, that it has a past, a present, and a future. Frequently, the dialectical thinker examines the dynamic tensions within a system, the internal conflicts or "contradictions" which require resolution. He or she refuses to disconnect factors, events, problems, and issues from each other or from the system which they jointly constitute. He or she views social problems not discretely, but in terms of the root systemic conditions which they both reflect and sustain.

The dialectical thinker seeks not merely to understand the system, but to alter it fundamentally. Hence, a dialectical analysis is both critical and revolutionary in its implications. Thus, Rand, as a dialectical thinker, does not analyze a specific racial conflict, for example, without examining a host of historically-constituted epistemic, ethical, psychological, cultural, political, and economic factors that both generate racism--and perpetuate it. In Rand's view, racism--like all vestiges of statism--must be transcended systemically.

The dialectical sensibility then, is readily apparent in every aspect of Rand's project, in her literary credo, philosophic approach, and social analysis.

From a literary standpoint, Rand recognized her own novels as organic wholes in which every event and character was expressive of the central theme. Moreover, her fiction was integral to the evolution of her grand philosophic synthesis.

Philosophically, Rand recognized Objectivism as a coherent, integrated system of thought, such that each branch could not be taken in isolation from the others. Her theories provide a basis for both critical analysis and revolutionary social transformation.

And from the perspective of social theory, Rand's analysis of contemporary society was multi-dimensional and fully integrative. Rand focused on relationships of power, examining their historical genesis and their long-term deleterious effects on the stability and cohesiveness of the social order. She refused to view societal problems as separate from one another, and proposed a resolution which was comprehensive and fundamentally radical in its implications. In Rand's view, every

aspect of the totality was both a precondition and effect of every other aspect, and their joint constitution as a totality.

Thus, Rand's dialectical method was dynamic, relational, and contextual. It was dynamic because it viewed specific factors in terms of their movement over time. It was relational because it traced the inter-relationships between and among factors. It was contextual because it related these factors to their wider, systemic context.

THEORY AND PRACTICE

One area that is of particular interest to dialectical thinking is the synthesis of theory and practice. Their unity was one of the most significant themes in the history of Russian thought. Nearly every great Russian writer embraced a critical praxis as the central, motivating task of philosophy. Theoretical contemplation was considered incomplete and one-dimensional; it required consummation in the quest for truth-justice (*iskaniye pravdy*). This cultural predisposition toward political criticism and action provided fertile ground for the implantation of Marx's revolutionary doctrine, encapsulated in the credo: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it."

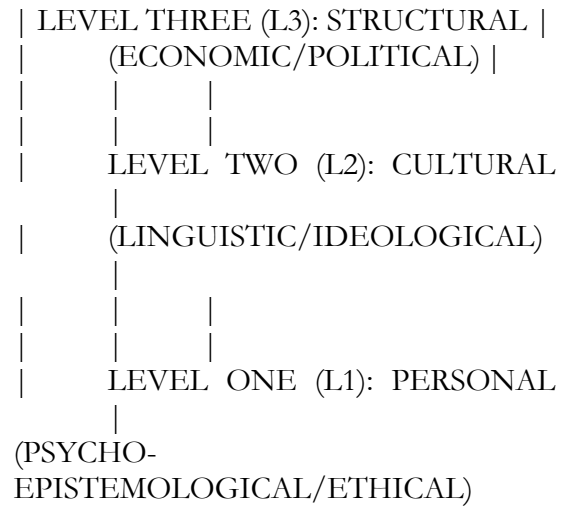
Ayn Rand gives full expression to this radical, dialectical impulse in Russian thought. She recognized that philosophical contemplation was insufficient. Her initial theoretical musings emerged as a response to the dualities she confronted in the Russia of her youth. Her positive formulations constituted a critical revolt against Russian religious mysticism and communist politics. Just as Marx's dialectical method was "in its essence critical and revolutionary," so Rand's dialectical sensibility led her toward a

comparable, radical resolution. But Rand's project was neither theocratic nor communist in its political implications; it was profoundly secular, humanistic, and libertarian.

Like her dialectical forebears, Rand refused to disconnect any part from the totality which gave it meaning. Rand's critical method recognized the fundamental relatedness of all social phenomena. She adamantly opposed reification in social inquiry. Where some attempted to universalize a historically specific concrete, Rand saw "frozen abstractions." Where others asserted certain premises as true and without need of proof, Rand saw "frozen absolutes" and "false axioms." Where still others sought to combine two or more issues which needed to be analyzed and considered separately, Rand saw "package-dealing." She rejected the modern tendency to "think in a square," the contemporary disposition to accept a constricted, narrow definition of a social problem, without understanding the principles underlying the issue, or the various links between issues. Everywhere that she looked, Rand attempted to identify the principles which united seemingly separate and fragmented spheres of human existence. She observed facts, identified the essential issues, integrated the data from diverse areas of inquiry, and articulated the basic principles at work. Her dialectical methods uncovered startling connections between economics, psychology, sex, art, politics, and ideology.

Rand's dialectical assault on contemporary statist relations of power is a case in point. This analysis can be comprehended on three distinct levels. While it is possible to abstract and isolate these various aspects, it must be understood that they are interrelated constituents of a single totality. Below is a diagram of how Rand conceptualized such power relations.

RAND'S MULTI-LEVEL ANALYSIS OF POWER RELATIONS



On L1, Rand examines relations of power between persons. She focuses on the psycho-epistemological and ethical principles at work in exploitative interpersonal relations. The psycho-epistemic and normative aspects are two, coextensive vantage points on the same phenomenon. These aspects are so closely related that they constitute a double-edged sword. On this first level of analysis, Rand comprehends the significance of the master-slave duality (how each presupposes and requires the other), the "sanction of the victim," and human alienation.

On L2, Rand considers many of these distortions in social interaction as by-products and reflections of cultural practices. She argues that modern intellectuals have mounted an assault on the integrity of concepts and language which has the effect of ideologically legitimating social, political, and economic exploitation. She traces the impact of such conceptual (or "anti-conceptual") and linguistic subversions on every area of culture, including art, literature, music, education, religion, sex, and race.

On L3, Rand views exploitative social relations within the structural context of statist interventionism. The relations of power at this level are mediated through a variety of economic and political structures and institutional processes. Rand examines the essential role of the predatory state in creating conditions of economic dislocation, class (both inter-group and intra-group) struggle, social fragmentation, and brutality.

Each of these three levels of analysis seeks to uncover another facet of modern statist power relations. Each is internally related to and implicit in the others. Each level incorporates personal, cultural, and structural dimensions. Each level is a relation between real people. Thus:

–The codependent relationship of master and slave (L1) is reproduced on a cultural level (L2), and on a structural level (L3);

–The distortion of concepts and language (L2) provides ideological legitimation for the codependency relationship (L1) and for the structural context within which it occurs (L3);

–The sustenance of the predatory state (L3) requires individuals whose autonomy has been fundamentally thwarted (L1) and

whose conceptual and linguistic practices have been distorted (L2).

For every problem that Rand analyzes, one can see these three levels at work. In my book, I document many examples, the most prominent of which is the issue of racism.

What must be emphasized is that for Rand, the goal of all social analysis is emancipatory. In each aspect of her developed critique, change and transcendence beckon. Rand proudly declared that she was a philosophical "innovator" and a "radical" for capitalism, with everything that this implied. She wore these labels as terms "of distinction . . . of honor, rather than something to hide or apologize for." In keeping with her revolutionary fervor, she sought to uncover the "fundamental" roots of contemporary social problems, "boldly proclaiming a full, consistent, and radical alternative" to the status quo.

All endnotes have been deleted for the purposes of this abridged introduction. All material: Copyright 1995 by Chris M. Sciabarra

*The self must become concrete, and this it becomes through the process of action. [...]
[T]he abstract man, as only general self, is abstract as long as he is not yet a proprietor.
Only as proprietor is man a particular and real man.*

–August von Cieszkowski
In "Teleology of world history",
ch.3, "Prolegomena to Historiosophie"