

Abstract

Through a personal encounter with Ayn Rand's "The Fountainhead," this paper critically examines the enigmatic nature of Randian objectivist feminist philosophy. My journey begins with the perplexing character of Dominique Francon, whose simultaneous strength and submission sparked my investigation into the contradictions within Rand's feminist perspective. While Rand's objectivism champions individualism and rational capability, I uncover significant contradictions in her concept of "hero-worship" and her insistence that women remain intellectually subordinate to men. I analyze these tensions alongside Camille Paglia's response to Randian philosophy, exploring how both thinkers, despite their "antifeminist" reputations, advocate for female independence while problematically dismissing systemic oppression. Though Paglia criticizes Rand's elitism, I demonstrate how both philosophers overlook the structural barriers that historically marginalized women face. While I find value in their emphasis on viewing women as rational beings capable of independence, I argue that Rand's requirement for male intellectual superiority fundamentally undermines her objectivist principles. I conclude that relationships should be viewed as supplementary to one's life rather than hierarchical, with individual strengths being valued regardless of gender, in true alignment with objectivist principles.

A Personal Encounter with Ayn Rand's Objectivist Feminist Philosophy

Feminist Philosophy is a discourse that continues to present significant contributors advocating for female empowerment that designate women as capable and independent from men. There are many feminist philosophers who are perceived as highly reputable, and their philosophies highly endorsed in the discussion. Some philosophers, such as Ayn Rand, contest the ideals of what I would consider mainstream feminist philosophy. Ayn Rand explicitly claims she is a “male chauvinist”.¹ Through this paper, I will critically examine Ayn Rand's objectivist feminist philosophy, in light of Camille Paglia's response, a philosopher known for her notoriously radical ideas, to uncover the rationale behind these outcasted philosophies and the resistance that feminist objectivism faces. I will emphasize my own personal journey pursuing Ayn Rand and how this plays a significant role in my idea of feminist philosophy.

My first encounter with Ayn Rand's work occurred when my father, a libertarian thinker, handed me her novel, *The Fountainhead*, proclaiming this would be the most life-altering read of my life. Half-way through I met a female journalist, Dominique Francon, who portrayed herself to me as a strong, independent, career-driven feminist. I couldn't help but to be inspired by her dedication to hard work and intellectual pride, until I watched her fall into the hands of Roark, a struggling architect who treated her with violence and what I would consider: inhumanity. I was appalled, closing the book. I never finished reading, yet my perplexity in Ayn Rand's enigmatic feminist philosophy persisted. I was perplexed by the conflicting nature of Francon's powerfulness and acquiescence. I have never confronted my father about the

¹ “Feminism and Objectivism, the Atlas Society | Ayn Rand, Objectivism, Atlas Shrugged”

disappointing nature of Dominique's submission yet, when we do discuss Randian philosophy, we only discuss Roark's success as an ingenious architect. Ayn Rand has transformed the way I view feminism. I once viewed feminism as a means to dismantle systems of oppression often expressed in contemporary feminism such as Elinor Mason, to viewing feminism as an avenue of empowerment for the individualism of women yet I remain confused on where Rand's view on feminism contends.²

As I uncover the myriad of elements of Ayn Rand, it is important to understand the foundation that establishes her philosophy. Randian philosophy endorses a branch of individualism that Rand coins as objectivism. Her objectivist philosophy is classified on four premises:

- (1) Reason exists as an objective absolute.
- (2) Reason is man's only means of perceiving reality.
- (3) Man – every man – is an end in himself.
- (4) The ideal political economic system is *laissez-faire* capitalism³

My initial interpretation of Rand's objectivism⁴ was that all individuals, regardless of gender, are responsible for their own decisions and are both capable and should work their way up in social ranks. Rand's characterization demonstrates that she encourages women to seek opportunities to enhance her intelligence, not because they're women but because they are

² Mason 125

³ Binswanger

⁴ It is important to note that Randian objectivism varies greatly from that of mainstream objectivism. Randian objectivism is enhanced by libertarian freedom and individual responsibility. The widespread idea of objectivism exists as the idea that there cannot exist morality without some objective truth.

rational beings. While this may seemingly be the case, Rand's objectivism raises a plethora of contradictions that challenge whether or not women should have complete autonomy. She demonstrates a metaphysical admiration that women should have on men, which directly contradicts egoism and individuality. Directly in her conversations regarding objectivism, she addresses the entity being spoken about as "him" creating confusion regarding whether or not she is addressing human nature as a whole.

As I dove deeper into Ayn Rand's works, I realized that her perspective does not necessarily display women as entirely deserving of self-governance. In an interview, she was asked whether or not she would vote a woman into presidency if they were more qualified than a man, in which she responded, "If we have fallen that low, I might".⁵ She follows her argument by saying that it would torture a woman to be considered at such high status. It is also important to note that Ayn Rand does not express that a woman is incapable of being a high-status leader, but rather that it would break her metaphysically. Once a woman has become president, they have reached "the highest" level of achievement and are therefore unable to fulfill their physiological needs and desires of wanting a man who is of higher status and intelligence than them. There seems to be a flaw in Rand's reasoning in that she encourages strength and autonomy yet expects women to ensure they are inherently lower than a man. Doesn't this oblige women to rely on the intellect of another person thus no longer meeting Rand's egoistic objectivism?

She argues that a woman should find the capacity to look up to the man she loves as someone that she herself is morally and intellectually worthy of having in her life.⁶ She calls this

⁵ Mimi Riesel Gladstein and Sciabarra, page 308

⁶ Ibid.

idea “hero-worship”. While Ayn Rand clearly expresses that this does not mean dependence, women need men to be able to admire and should never be the smarter one in a relationship. Hero-worship is only defining for the heterosexual woman as she deems homosexuality as immoral.⁷ Ayn Rand’s own personal relationship should be emphasized in relation to this discussion. She was married to Frank O’Connor, a painter who acquired fame only because of Ayn Rand’s prominence as a female philosopher and speaker.⁸ In their relationship, Ayn Rand was clearly, by her definition, the leader and the more accomplished, thus failing to live to her own metaphysical definition of what a woman “should” be. Because of this, I interpret hero worship to be a projection of what she wishes she had in her relationship. Robert Shaeffer defines the relationship between achievement and feminist heterosexuality to be “antithetical” as there is merely no way for a woman to successfully achieve both.⁹ The disconnect in Rand’s advocacy for individuality and hero worship is apparent. In the case of her argument that a human is a means to their own end she contradicts herself because in this case, man is expressed the means to a woman’s end. If her individualist perspective holds that “the mind is an attribute of the individual”, then it should not be in the responsibility of femininity to choose between career achievement and “proper” attunement to heterosexuality.¹⁰ I cannot find myself agreeing that women should be required to intellectually look up to a man.

Camille Paglia would offer support towards Rand’s conceptualization of hero worship responding to my disagreement by defining it as man-hate. She argues that men are the target for the current age of feminism because she believes women have achieved autonomy and are

⁷ Moskowitz

⁸ Grossman.

⁹ Mimi Riesel Gladstein and Sciabarra, page 308

¹⁰ Ibid

therefore looking for reasons to victimize themselves through the hatred of men.¹¹ In her individualist philosophy, she argues that women have the ability and responsibility to make decisions on what they will tolerate.¹² Paglia remarks that a woman would be brawling with nature if they choose to reach higher career ranks than men.¹³ Although Paglia encourages women to take the risk of “brawling with nature”, she demonstrates the existence of subordination in the ability for women to exist in a patriarchal society. Rather than necessarily “worshiping men”, Paglia’s idea on feminism is that women should stop victimizing themselves against men, and rather focus on developing disconformity and individuality. Paglia’s philosophy being classified as “antifeminist” confuses me in that she never actually demeans the capacity of women but rather challenges *her* idea on what feminism is.

It is important to note that Camille Paglia criticizes Ayn Rand’s individualistic perspective as unapologetically elitist. She argues that there is a sense of “snobbish elitism” that fails to consider the working class. Randian philosophy demonstrates a high level of appreciation for those that are high achieving but what she fails to recognize is that high achievement is often times a result of privilege that has been in place. To expect that the quasi woman develop intelligence is presuming that women have the resources necessary to develop what Rand considers as achievement. This is demeaning and narrow-minded to the possibility that one’s idea of achievement is different. Both Rand and Paglia advocate for the idea that women should be responsible for making their own decisions and protecting themselves; however, this claim fails to acknowledge the encumbrances women face when advocating for themselves in regard to men. Feminism is a discipline that has been developed to dismantle the oppression that has been

¹¹ “Camille Paglia on Her Controversial Feminism”; 2:06

¹² “Camille Paglia on Her Controversial Feminism”; 3:38

¹³ Mimi Riesel Gladstein and Sciabarra , page 312

faced against women for many generations. Both Rand and Paglia have demonstrated rejection of the idea that women face oppression. Paglia expresses in her interview with CBS that women are capable of fending themselves against men who take sexual advantage of them and that assault is not occurring because “girls are just confused about what they want” completely disregarding the fact that oppression exists.¹⁴ While I want to agree with Paglia’s “free women, free men” philosophy, in that it advocates for individuality I can’t help but to recognize, it does not take into consideration the needs of those who have been systematically and historically oppressed.

While I understand the flaws in Randian feminist philosophy, I do find great value in the fundamental principles of what both Rand and Paglia are advocating for. Promoting women to view feminism as a means of solely developing independence on the premise of existing as a rational being is extremely empowering and should be embraced in feminist discourse; however, Rand mistakes herself in the conversation of male dominance and relationships. One should not be bound to the idea that they must find a man who is smarter than them but rather that a relationship be seen as a supplement to one’s life. There will inevitably be differences in a relationship such that each party will have their specific strengths. Thus, being said, based on the principles of objectivism, the values of all people should be utilized regardless of gender.

¹⁴ “Camille Paglia on her controversial feminism” 5:02

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