Glimpses of the Mystical Dimension of Ayn Rand's Thought

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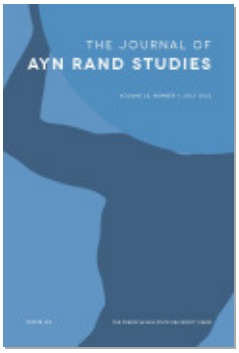

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ABSTRACT: This article presents ideas long considered to be almost exclusively Rand's, in connection to their expression in the literature of mysticism. The author argues that these ideas, far from being unique to Rand, are hallmarks of mysticism.

KEYWORDS: Objectivism, mysticism, self, individualism, self-abnegation, selfishness

> I Am That I Am.
>
> —Exodus 3:14

> Know Thyself—and You Will Know God.
>
> —Inscription on the Temple of Delphi

> I am the Way, the Truth and the Light.
>
> —Jesus (John 14:6)

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> This Self is nearer than all else; dearer than son, dearer than wealth, dearer than anything. If a man call anything dearer than Self, say that he will lose what is dear, of a certainty he will lose it; for Self is God. Therefore, one should worship Self as Love. Who worships Self as Love, his love never shall perish.
>
> —Brihadaranyaka-Upanishad (1987)

> If he loves a stone, he is a stone; if he loves a man, he is a man; if he loves God—I dare not say more, for if I said that he would then be God, ye might stone me.
>
> —Meister Eckhart (in McGinn 1986, 302)

> Man is placed above all creatures, and not beneath them, and he cannot be satisfied or content except in something greater than himself. Greater than himself there is nothing but Myself, the eternal God.
>
> —Saint Catherine of Sienna (1907, 203)

> Praise us for what we have taught you about Ourself: for you cannot know Us by any other than Us. Nothing leads to Us except Ourself!
>
> —Amir Abd al-Kader (1995, 78)

> The true self of every man is God, so we know what the soul is; it is the true self of every man. We know what the spirit is; it is the true self of every man. It is that which constitutes our true being, our true identity. And all of the way through *The Infinite Way* you find that our goal is seeking the awareness of our true identity. When you find it, you find it to be God. The true self of every man is God.
>
> —Joel Goldsmith (1962)

> And now I see the face of God. . . . This God, this one word, I.
>
> —Ayn Rand ([1938] 1999, 97)

The literature of mysticism is arguably the most influential of all the literatures produced by mankind. Yet it is at once ignored, attacked, and ridiculed in Objectivist circles. Indeed, for Objectivism, and to the extent that Objectivism continues to influence the outlook of libertarians, the very word "mysticism" is an epithet—the name of an enemy that must be systematically combated, yet never actually discovered.

Objectivist views on mysticism are so absolutely damning, that there would be no plausible reason for Objectivists to bother looking into the subject—and they practically have not. Those in Objectivist circles who would openly say

they are interested in studying mysticism could well be suspected of having "abandoned reason." Unlike Objectivist's other "archenemy," the philosopher Immanuel Kant, whose works Objectivists are encouraged to study (to learn how to defeat him),[1] no such similar encouragements, to my knowledge, have ever been made, and given Objectivist culture, would ever be made in favor of the serious study of mysticism.

This lacuna, combined with my knowledge of some of the epigrams cited above, aroused my curiosity. One of the best pieces of advice anyone can give a researcher studying a writer's ideas, is to detect and identify who they claim and target as their enemy—then proceed to investigate by going to the source. Not doing so is intellectual abdication. It is accepting on blind faith a crucial evaluation, a major key to the deepest aspects of the writer's thinking, the foil against which he has structured his thinking. We have many Objectivist articles on Kant, but, to my knowledge, not one on any bona fide mystic of world literature, of the kind we can actually find, for example, in an anthology of mysticism. Why is this so? Objectivists study Kant with the confidence of the fearless fighters who fought on the barricades, knowing the enemy is defeated in advance. Why the suspicious avoidance of mysticism, which is supposed to be an enemy even greater than Kant? By order of importance, Kant is only the second most important enemy of Objectivism. Mysticism is the first. The inference that should therefore have been drawn, is that the study of mysticism is more important than the study of Kant.

This article is an entry point into this avoided subject. In the end, but also at the very beginning of my research, what I found and kept finding, was the opposite of what I thought I would find. I had expected to easily find material supporting Rand's views on mysticism and write to present evidence showing how exactly on point she was. Completely unexpectedly, I had to conclude definitively that when key Objectivist and mystic ideas are compared, the similarities between Objectivism and mysticism become so striking that it becomes necessary and proper to reconceive and reclassify Objectivism as an important form of contemporary mysticism.

Let me say immediately though, that the explanations I will advance do not cast Objectivism in a negative light, on the grounds that it shares the very flaws it denounces in mysticism—that it is irrational and based on faith. Nor will I discuss whether Objectivism is or was a "cult," whether Rand was a "cult" leader, and whether her personal behavior and the behavior of those in her inner circle—the love triangles, power plays, and bitter divides, and so forth—constitutes evidence of this. These arguments have been made, for example, by Murray Rothbard (1987). I view them, however, as uninformed. The same type of shallow accusations can casually be launched against just about any tightly knit group of people engaged in any activity under any banner. The explanations

I will make, in my view, are positive and complimentary to Rand, since, as we shall see, mystics tend to confirm her values. These explanations are based on a very simple approach, an unbiased study of seminal books on mysticism, in order to discover the exact positioning of Objectivism, and of the writer who wrought it, relative to this larger, but ignored, tradition of thought. It was Rand, not I, who insisted, insisted and demanded the positioning, the positioning of Objectivism relative to mysticism as diametrical opposites. I sought to verify whether this counter-positioning was true or false.

The major difficulty I faced was that the subject "mysticism" involves a vast number of writers working in all known civilizations, in all languages, over millennia. The subject of Kant, in comparison, is about one single author. This meant that I had to find an analytical framework to get a grasp on mysticism and make it manageable. I decided to adopt the same analytical framework proposed by Rand herself, that is, her famous diametrically opposed "axes": *mysticism—altruism—collectivism* versus *reason—individualism—capitalism*.[2] They have proved to be efficient in framing the problems, and the solutions I will propose. To narrow the field further, I especially focused on mystics who were more or less contemporaries of Rand, and even known to Rand, who were writing for the same cultured public, in the same historical context.[3] I was looking for evidence that her theory of the battling "axes" corresponded to what mystics actually taught and practiced. For example, what did mystics, confronted with the spectacle of fascism and the dominance of the Soviet Union, say about free societies, socialism, and collectivism; or about selfishness and the importance or unimportance of self; about altruism and self-abnegation? Was it true they went by faith as opposed to reason? Did their biographies show that they had lost their minds and ability for great achievement objectively beneficial to mankind?

In the following pages, I will offer answers to some of these questions; glimpses of the connections and similarities between Rand's ideas and those of the mystics. I say "glimpses" because a complete presentation would require at least another full-length article. This article had to be cut by half because of space restrictions, so all the questions raised cannot be fully answered here: I will focus mainly on individualism and mysticism. Since individualism is fundamental to Rand, this should be sufficient to demonstrate how mysticism is compatible with Objectivism. At minimum, I hope to show the most skeptical reader that something is definitively amiss with Objectivism's conception of mysticism. That *something* is amiss has already been pointed out by other writers in this journal (see, for example, Hardin 2020). I intend to go much more deeply into what this something is.

Regarding the research material: I have made every effort so that the books and articles cited, are of the very best reputation. I also spent many years

studying comparative mysticism in pursuit of an MA in religious studies undertaken specifically for the purposes of verifying the argument presented here. I even joined two "cults," over many years, so that my book knowledge (always insufficient) would be rounded out by joining living students of mysticism engaged in mystical pursuits within a mystical school of thought. This ethnographic field work was conducted under the guidance of an experienced ethnographer, Professor Albert Wuaku. I have been scrupulous in not twisting quotations to make them say the opposite of what they meant in the context from which they were drawn.

Defining Mysticism

This article is intended for those who have been especially interested in Rand but who, because of her influence, may never have read anything about mysticism written from an academic nonhostile point of view. Therefore, I will begin by defining and describing mysticism using the language and expressions familiar to Rand's readers. The major theme and preoccupation of mysticism is the individual's quest to discover his Self and develop his awareness, his own life purpose, his conscience, his consciousness. Mysticism is about the search, by means of developing awareness, for the deepest and highest possible forms of self-knowledge, for the purpose of understanding (and communicating with or uniting with) one's most authentic "I." Using the poetic language of Rand, we can define mysticism as the art or science of attaining the highest within.[4]

In connection to these abstract definitions of mysticism, the following definitions are offered as contextual complements. A mystic-teacher is one who claims to be able to help others, by his own teachings or his own example, or teachings that he has learned from another mystic—how to attain a higher level of awareness or consciousness, a higher development of the faculties of the mind and of the emotions, leading to self-understanding. A mystic-student is one who searches or struggles to understand himself, to actualize his own higher level of being, or awareness, or consciousness, or control his intellectual and emotional faculties. Usually, but not necessarily, the student does this by following the teachings of a mystic. A school of mysticism is one that purports to help students to understand themselves and realize their full potential being qua man, to find happiness, to flourish, and so forth. A mystic tout court is one who has made remarkable strides toward self-understanding, and the development of his full potential qua man. The result of this effort should be reflected in some kind of remarkable creative achievement, in any domain, any art or science. Though this may fit the description of any woman or man of achievement, in the mystic, reflexivity or awareness about his own psychological obstacles, failures he had to overcome to reach his success, along with his willingness to

describe these specifically in his writings or teachings for the benefit of others, is the distinguishing characteristic.[5]

Though these definitions are formulated to be immediately comprehensible to those working within the context of Objectivist terminology, they are in alignment with seminal definitions of mysticism as found in academic books on the subject and in the writings of mystics.[6] Yet, as we know, they contradict the definition of mysticism according to Objectivism. So, which is correct? If we turn to standard dictionaries for answers, we quickly run into a dead end. It is a similar experience to consulting the dictionary to see if Rand was right about the word "selfishness." Both views of mysticism, Rand's, and the ones I presented, at once seem to be correct, since dictionaries give opposed and contradictory definitions. For example, in *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* we find mysticism defined as:

> 1: the experience of *mystical* union or direct communion with ultimate reality reported by *mystics*. 2: the belief that direct knowledge of God, spiritual truth, or ultimate reality can be attained through subjective experience (such as intuition or insight). 3a: vague speculation: a belief without sound basis. 3b: a theory postulating the possibility of direct and intuitive acquisition of ineffable knowledge or power. ("Mysticism" n.d.)

Now when we go deeper than general dictionaries to find the point of view of scholars of mysticism, we quickly find that, *without any exceptions*, the negative definitions of mysticism (as a synonym for vague speculation without a sound basis, or irrationalism) were always regarded by them as being categorically fallacious, biased, and in violation of the rules of neutrality in formulating definitions. Needless to say, in any conflict of definitions, those accepted and formulated by those who have studied and written about mysticism, should be given due consideration and preference. The uniformed negative view and negative definitions of mysticism have been discredited and rejected by scholars of mysticism at least since William James (1902) published his seminal *Varieties of Religious Experience*, even though, much to their chagrin, this negativity still prevails outside the scholarship. Yale professor of philosophy John E. Smith (1983) writes:

> In the end, there is no doubt that James was "for" mysticism and opposed to its most unsympathetic critics, yet he retained a critical attitude in that he regarded the authority of mysticism as limited. His positive attitude is revealed at the outset when he complains about those who use the terms "mysticism" and "mystical" as terms of reproach against any view thought to be "vague, vast and sentimental." Nothing unfortunately has

> changed in this regard over the past seventy-five years; one still finds this irresponsible and uninformed abuse of these terms by those who want to cast suspicion on any doctrine of which they disapprove. (250)

Now a caveat. There would perhaps be no particular harm in using the word "mysticism" as the dictionary also accepts, as a synonym for irrationalism, if—and only if—scholars of mysticism and therefore all librarians also used the term in the same manner. As it stands, however, they never did. This has resulted in serious consequences. The tragic result is that an ever-growing yet ancient body of literature concerning itself with themes of freedom, self-development, and individualism, and having the highest of influences on all fields of study, is classified in libraries and bookstores under a name that mechanically arouses blind, unthinking, irrational hostility in many of the best libertarian and Objectivist minds. This has in turn isolated Objectivism almost hermetically from thinkers who have extensively developed themes and upheld values compatible with it.

Mysticism versus Faith

One of the objections commonly voiced by atheists against mystics is expressed by the following question: Of what interest can this be to me, since I do not have any faith, and I do not believe in God? This objection is based on a fallacy. On the contrary, mysticism is not based on faith at all. Not content with faith, the quest of the mystic is to himself personally witness—to directly sense and experience—the "self," the "highest within," "reality," or "God." These four terms are synonyms for many mystics. The mystic is a doubting-Thomas type. This fact, ironically, is the very reason religionists (by which I mean all who defend faith in God), attack mysticism.[7] This is what the religionists object to precisely, that mystics refuse to have any faith at all. Mystics are caught in a crossfire, under attack from leftist atheists—and Ayn Rand—who reproach them for having the faith of the religionists, and from religionists on the right, who are even more merciless in reproaching mystics for their stubborn refusal to go by faith. The religionists actually attack the mystics on a true premise, given that mystics refuse to go by blind faith. The atheistic tendency of mysticism is so strong that "theistic mysticism" is held by some scholars of mysticism to be a contradiction in terms—or at best a compromised variety of mysticism. John B. Carman (1983) writes:

> "Theistic mysticism" is a more restricted term, which some students of mysticism would consider a contradiction in terms, since for them theism implies a distinction between creator and creature which mysticism denies or overcomes. At most they would view theistic

> mysticism as a practical compromise concealing a metaphysical contradiction. (191)

The phrase "practical compromise" refers to the long history of mystics being forced to profess faith against their will for fear of literally being killed. Interestingly, Catholicism, with more maturity than many Evangelicals for example, recognizes and accepts (reluctantly perhaps) that mysticism is not based on faith. For example, Thomism views mysticism as being based on *experience and investigation*. Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa* bases his definition of mysticism on the Psalmist who says, "Oh taste and see that the Lord is good." Aquinas thus establishes, as a common denominator of the mystical experience, the *evidence of the senses* (tasting and seeing) for knowing God, and proceeds to define mysticism as "Cognitio Dei experimentalis"—the experimental knowledge of God (in Ford 2017, 59).

Self as Both the Object and Subject of Mysticism

Though mysticism directs to self-study, to greater awareness, via meditation and contemplation for example, it does not universally uphold or deny any specific methodology or formal epistemology toward these ends.[8] Each mystic tradition develops its own theories and practical exercises dealing with these issues (how to meditate, what to read, and so forth). Therefore, since we cannot say that mystics universally or predominantly tend to affirm or deny the existence of God or any specific methodology, such as the use or disuse of the mind, this indicates that terms such as rationalism, irrationalism, theism, and atheism cannot be used as either the genus or differentia of a proper universal definition of mysticism.

What are we then left with? There is a common denominator of all forms of mysticism, always and everywhere: the relentless search for the self—the I, consciousness, reality, and truth. Accordingly, a proper definition of mysticism, should refer to this common denominator: the self, and the goal that the study (and work) on the self aims to understand and attain, or to be in tune with: "the highest within." To the Objectivist epistemological question: What facts of reality give rise to the concept of mysticism? The answer is: man's possibility of understanding and attaining his individual highest within. Note that it is not the existence of the self per se that gives rise to the concept of mysticism, because if the self were incapable of greater self-understanding and self-evolution, it would be futile to attempt to aim for one's "highest within." Only the unguaranteed, nonautomatic possibility of man's gaining greater and greater self-understanding gives rise to the concept. Only the fact that man is a "being of self-made soul," as Rand ([1957] 2005, 1020) would say.

The Study of Self as Not Self-evident

Self-knowledge—like all knowledge and self-evolution, like any potential—is not assumed by mystics to be developed by innate or self-evident means. They view self-development, the greater and greater understanding of oneself, as requiring assiduous work. Mystics justify the importance of their teachings, the existence of their schools, on the premise that man is not born with self-understanding of his life, his body, his emotions, his mind, his soul, his "I" or higher self. The literature of mysticism produces this coaching or guiding material. Though many other types of thinkers, such as moralists, hold similar views, mysticism is characterized and distinguished from these by going very much beyond morality and into psychology and what is now called consciousness studies. Their primary object of constant concern is with the very deepest aspects of the self: the life purposes and orientation of the individual, the emergence and flourishing of individual creativity, and the capacity for greater awareness of the highest within, of the I. Though mystics view the individual as ultimately called to do this *for* himself, they also hold that the individual does not have to do it completely *by* himself, without even having the guidance of a book, such as *The Fountainhead*, or going to lectures such as those offered in New York in the 1960s by followers of George Gurdjieff, Joel Goldsmith, and Ayn Rand. Incidentally, there is evidence that some of the same people seeking self-understanding attended lectures or studied the books of at least two out of these three authors, viewing their teachings as complementary, not contradictory, to each other. Frank Lloyd Wright would be one such example.[9]

Charlatanism

It will always be a fact that charlatans and immoral people exist in important and even alarming numbers in every profession, every art, and every science. Every activity of man, every school of thought is touched by charlatanism. If charlatanism and its crimes were sufficient to discredit a whole profession or teaching, there would be no profession or teaching left on earth. Mysticism is ancient, its written history is indeed full of the most colorful and unimaginable scandals and crimes. But this in no way discredits mysticism or any other fields. On the contrary, if mysticism has persisted in so many forms, in all languages and on all inhabited lands, despite the accumulated scandals of the millennia, there must be something valuable in it. Objectivism is also kept alive, despite its sordid history of purges and scandals (and it is not a blip old in comparison), because of its lasting value.

Translation, Contextual Issues, and Neologisms

Following terminology consistent with both Objectivism and many schools of mysticism, the term "self" or rather "Self" with a capital S, refers to the subject matter (and goal) of mysticism. The word "Self" is used by mystics of all ages and cultures in this way, reminiscent of Rand's usage, as the citations at the beginning of this paper indicate. But it is also the case that the idea of Self may be expressed in mysticism using different words, such as the word God or the word Reality, often to hide the idea of Self in order escape persecution. Like each important school of philosophy or economics, each school of mysticism fashions and introduces its own technical vocabulary for all the high-level abstractions most important to it.

In view of this, in any comparative approach to the study of different mystics from different continents, cultures, and eras, great care and patience are required to untangle meanings in context, just as is done for example in comparative philosophy. Accusations against mysticism usually arise either from some kind of prejudice or context-dropping. To give an idea of the enormity of the misunderstandings that can result from this, here is an excerpt from *Origins of Scientific Thought*, by Harvard professor, Giorgio de Santillana (1961):

> How could such new things [remarkably exact scientific astronomical calculations] be found in already well-known ancient texts? Science, at all times, involves a technical language which can hardly be understood if it is not even recognized. Nobody can interpret farther than he understands, nor can anyone translate technical terms from an utterly foreign language if he is not first acquainted with the corresponding technical terms in his own. This should strike one as rather elementary. The vast amount of ancient and Near Eastern and related "mythological" texts are at best obscure and ambiguous, often strangely incongruous. The most refined philological methods in the hands of expert philologists will yield only childish stuff out of them if childish stuff is expected. Technical indications which would make clear sense to scientists go unnoticed or are mistranslated. How, e.g., could anyone recognize planetary periods who has never known them, and has cut the line of millennial tradition which valued astronomy as the Royal Art? It should be kept in mind that every translation is a mere function of the translator's expectation. If his own way of thinking is under the influence of the psychoanalytic pattern, whether consciously or not, it will cause him to accept any amount of terrifying nonsense as "sacred" lore, and to translate it accordingly. It is in fact a wonder how pleased most readers

> seem to be when fed lunatic utterances, without ever wondering how the devil the pyramids managed to get built in spite of the strange state of mind their constructors were cursed with. (11–12)

Reading Santillana's book more fully than the present quotation, illustrates how preconceived notions prevented scholars from recognizing that these texts were in fact, not mere mythology or mysticism, but also precise astronomical texts of the very highest intellectual order.

Mysticism has always been diligently (if secretly) studied by psychologists and those interested in consciousness studies. It is from mysticism that psychology has largely been inspired. Mysticism is even thought, by P. D. Ouspensky and Jungians, for example, to be simply psychology under a different name. In his seminal book, *The History and Origins of Consciousness,* Princeton professor Erich Neumann (1949) explores this issue in depth:

> In this way the hero myth develops into the myth of self-transformation, the myth of the divine sonship which is latent in him from the beginning, but can only be realized through the heroic union of the ego (Horus) with the self (Osiris). This union had its first exponent in the mythical Horus, and then the Egyptian kings who succeeded him. . . . These were followed by individual Egyptians—though in their case identification with the king was a matter of primitive magic only—and finally, in the course of further spiritual development, the principle that man had an immortal soul became the inalienable property of every individual. (252)

And further, keeping in mind that "higher masculinity" and "heaven" in this context means the development of consciousness and reason, Neumann writes:

> In some of the classical mystery religions there is evidence of initiation rites whose purpose was to produce the higher masculinity, to transform the initiate into the higher man and so make him akin to, or identical with, God. For instance, the *solificatio* of the Isis mysteries stresses identification with the sun god, while in certain others the aim is to achieve fellowship with God by means of a *participation mystique*. The path varies, but whether the celebrant is seized with ecstasy and becomes *"entheos"* or is ritually regenerated or takes God into his own body through communion with him, always the goal is the higher man, the attainment of his spiritual, heavenly part. As the Gnostics of a later day expressed it, the initiate becomes an *"ennoos,"* one who possesses nous, or whom nous possesses, a *"pneumatikos."* (252–53)

Typologies of Mysticism

Scholars of comparative mysticism have offered many typologies of mysticism. We will look at two of these. The first typology, offered by Evelyn Underhill (1915), divides mystics in two main categories: immanence (or nondualism), and emanance (or dualism). Mystics placed in the immanence (or nondualist) category are those who claim by personal experience, that the self longs to achieve and does achieve "union" with God, Reality, or the Absolute. This means that in some sense, they claim that the self or the "I" can fully become God or Reality. This means that the "creature vs. creator" dichotomy, in the technical language of Catholic mysticism for example, is "overcome." This is the type of mystic most often burned at the stake because this position is almost always considered heretical.

Mystics in the emanance or dualist category on the other hand are those who fall short of such an identification and confine their claim to the ability and longing of the self only to "commune" with God. These mystics claim that the "I" comes very close to God, in a "communion," as lover and beloved do in the *Song of Salomon*, yet the "creature vs. creator" dichotomy is never fully overcome. The "I" does not fully become God, just as lover and beloved do not become one, no matter how deep the "communion." In Hindu mysticism, it is said that the followers of advaita, that is, the nondualists, wish to "become sugar," while the followers of dvaita, the dualists, wish to "taste sugar." As Underhill (1915) explains:

> As everyone is born a disciple of either Plato or Aristotle, so every human soul leans to one of these two ways [union or communion] of apprehending reality. The artist, the poet, everyone who looks with awe and rapture on created things, acknowledges in this act the Immanent God. The ascetic, and that intellectual ascetic the metaphysician, turning from the created and denying the senses in order to find afar off the uncreated, unconditioned Source, is really—though he often knows not—obeying that psychological law which produced the doctrine of Emanations. . . . A good map then, a good mystic philosophy, will leave room for both of these ways of interpreting our experience. It will mark off routes by which many different temperaments claim to have found their way to the same end. (103)

Now, how does the definition of mysticism presented here relate to this typology? We can see that what both union and communion, or immanence and emanance, or advaita or dvaita have in common, is the centrality of the idea of the "I," of the self and its longing. We can see that the "I," and the ability and

desire of the "I" to do this or that, is the main subject of discussion. Whether the "I" or the self, in some sense, becomes God (or Reality), or whether it falls just short of this, it is the individual's "I" that makes it possible for him to reach and embrace and know God (or Reality or Self with a capital S). The longing and goal of mystics of either category, by means of techniques of self-discipline and self-purification, such as meditation, is to bring their self as close as possible to becoming God or reach Reality, which also means attaining and understanding true Self. Mysticism of all ages and places is a never-ending discussion of these subjects, without which it cannot be called mysticism. And complementarily, when the relation of the self to God (or the highest within) or, in the case of atheistic forms of mysticism, the relation of self (lowercase s) to the Self (uppercase S) becomes a subject of discussion, we are ipso facto on the well-delineated territory of mysticism. Therefore, the identification or association or longing of the idea of the "I" with or for the idea of God (or Reality or the higher Self), as the leading subject of mysticism, serves as the defining and distinguishing characteristic of mysticism. Indeed, a survey of mystical literature reveals, invariably, the juxtaposition of His names to the idea of Self, I, or Consciousness. The most famous example of this juxtaposition is in Exodus (3:14). When Moses asks God what His name is, He answers: "I am that I am."

I mentioned already that the mystics who maintained the doctrine of immanence, or union with God, were those most often persecuted in varying degrees, including burning at the stake. In *The Power of Myth*, Joseph Campbell (1988) explains:

> Those in the Middle Ages who experienced it [meaning the identification of Self and God] were usually burned as heretics. One of the great heresies in the West is the heresy that Christ pronounced when he said, "I and the Father are one." He was crucified for saying that. In the Middle Ages, nine hundred years after Christ, [Hallaj] a great Sufi mystic said, "I and my beloved are one," and he too was crucified. (117)

The fate of the saint in Rand's novel, *Anthem*, who was burned at the stake for having uttered, and hence identified himself as being the unspeakable word "I," is typical of a long line of mystics. The explicit official reason and justification of the murder of these mystics, as recorded in the extant transcripts of their trials, for example, is their having had the audacity to articulate even loosely the identification of the "I" to God. This historical fact alone should raise a red flag concerning the Objectivist view of mysticism as self-abnegation, as involving a destruction of "the highest within" of the Self. Mystics historically are individuals who were willing to live and die for the promulgation of the idea of the I. The very idea of individualism as far as we can see from history, as presented

in Neumann's book cited above, comes from them. Throughout the centuries they were the men who were willing to die, to be burned, for their public affirmation of their exalted vision of Self as something to be revered as sacred and worshiped both as an idea and in every individual.

Now to the second typology. Another scholar of mysticism, F. C. Happold, in *Mysticism: A Study and an Anthology*, refers to three major types of mysticism: "Nature mysticism," "Soul mysticism," and "God mysticism." The category "Soul mysticism" is of particular interest here because it is openly atheistic. If in the typology seen earlier, which contains two major categories of mystics, Rand could be placed in the company of the nondualist, immanence, advaita, or union type mystics, who see the "I" as identical to God, here she would fit in Happold's second type which he calls, "Soul mysticism." Happold (1990) writes:

> In pure soul-mysticism the idea of the existence of God is, in any expressible form, absent. The soul is in itself numinous and hidden. The uncreated soul or spirit strives to enter not into communion with nature or with God but into a state of complete isolation from everything that is other than itself. The chief object of man is the quest of his own self and of right knowledge about it. (44)

Black Magic, Irrationalism, Altruism

Surprisingly, Rand's broadsides against mysticism, by which she largely means irrationalism combined with altruism, are also to be found in mystical literature itself, using similar arguments. In his book, *In Search of the Miraculous*, Ouspensky (2001) writes:

> No one ever does anything for the sake of evil. Everyone always does everything in the interests of good, as he understands it. In the same way it is quite wrong to assert that black magic must necessarily be egoistical, that in black magic a man strives after some results for himself. This is quite wrong. Black magic may be quite altruistic, may strive after the good of humanity or after the salvation of humanity from real or imaginary evils. But what can be called black magic has always one definite characteristic. This characteristic is the tendency to use people for some, even the best of aims, without their knowledge and understanding, either by producing in them faith and infatuation or by acting on them through fear. (227)

The Tibetan scholar, mystic, and explorer, Alexandra David-Néel wrote an entire (quite funny) book, *Le sortilège du mystère*, on the irrationalism that can

be found among those who claim to be mystics of one kind or another. She writes:

> The lure of the "Islands of Fortune" is still as powerful as ever. Geographical knowledge has eliminated the myth of paradisiacal lands. No one seeks to attain these any longer across the oceans. But the desire to reach mysterious knowledge inaccessible to all, the anxious pursuit of esoteric revelations, has not ceased to haunt the minds of our contemporaries.
>
> Just as the ecstatic pilgrims of the past, lost in their dreams, failed to see the danger of threatening storms and embarked on frail skiffs to sail towards the horizon . . . so also, nowadays, troops of hallucinated people follow grotesque charlatans or pseudo-magi pontificating in outlandish costumes, and are deceived by their promises to lead them to the shores of spiritual "Islands of Fortune." (David-Néel 1972, 7; my translation from the French)

I have presented these citations to show that mystics are well aware, more aware than most, I suspect, of the irrational people in their midst. They write extensively on these matters. In other disciplines (philosophy, science, economics—and even in Objectivism), I am not sure such lucidity can be found, though irrational and psychologically unbalanced people are to be found as much there as in mysticism. Mysticism faces these problems head-on and attempts to theorize them so as to manage them, the problems are extensively discussed in their writings, while others tend to sweep them under the rug, or deny they exist in their midst, while accusing everyone but themselves.

Ineffability and Mysticism

One of Rand's most vigorous philosophical attacks against mysticism is based on her objection to the idea of the ineffable. Rand's great lucidity of thought and love of language, in itself characteristic of Jewish mysticism,[10] made her very suspicious of those who claimed the ineffability of their experiences. For Objectivism, ineffability is held to be a distinguishing feature of anti-reason and any claim to ineffability is a litmus test for deciding whether an idea is mystical and therefore irrational and therefore unworthy of further consideration. Nevertheless, as we will see, the word "ineffable" has a meaning, which agrees with and even supports Objectivism. John E. Smith (1983), in his essay, "William James's Account of Mysticism: A Critical Appraisal," clarifies the point:

> . . . ineffability is surely an essential feature of all mysticism because it is synonymous with the immediacy of the experience undergone and implies the co-presence of the self and the Other, whatever form that may take. James was right in seeing ineffability as a pervasive feature among the varieties of mysticism. Ways of preparation differ and many diverse insights are claimed, but the essential is the idea of leading the individual to a point where he can apprehend something for himself. The paradoxes of mysticism claim that there never can be a surrogate for the goal at which the mystic aims. Obviously if the experience could be transferred or imparted, there would be no need for the insistence on the need to experience immediately what cannot be said. . . .
>
> I would stress another aspect of ineffability, which remains merely implicit in James's analysis, and that is the mystical aim of transcending media of expression entirely. A new note enters here: the central idea is not that something has been grasped that defies articulation, but rather that one seeks to pass beyond the mode of articulation itself in order to *be* or to *become one* with a reality or state of being. In this regard it is not merely that the mystic is unable to articulate the "love which passes understanding," but rather that, were a conceptualization possible, it would still not *be* the love that he seeks. Though it may sound strange to some, mysticism is rooted in a decidedly *realistic* motive. (Smith 1983, 264–65)

Yes, Smith did say "a decidedly *realistic* motive." Following his lead, we can see that the ineffability of the mystic is a formulation against thinking that words or book knowledge can always replace experience, such as the experience of romantic love. Ineffability is used by mystics to indicate the importance of the *direct* experience of the evidence of the senses. The desire to live the experience in real life and not merely "know" in an ivory tower of theory.

To go now to another example, the idea of ineffability or claims to the insufficiency of language as an essential or distinguishing feature of mysticism is rejected in *Mysticism and Language* by Steven Katz. At the very top of the very first page of this book, Katz places this epigram from Rumi on this issue:

> When you say "words are of no account," you negate your own assertion through your words, if words are of no account why do we hear you say that words are of no account? After all you are saying this in words. (Rumi quoted in Katz 1992, 3)

Note the manner in which Rumi attacks the idea of ineffability. It is pure Rand, a precursor of "the fallacy of the stolen concept." In this excellent book, Katz

maintains that it is false that mystics feared or mistrusted language. He says that what they feared was the written misuse of language, which could easily lead to their persecution based on the solid evidence of their writings.

Self-Abnegation and Mysticism

Another idea Rand ascribes to mystics is their selflessness, their espousing the necessity of recognizing one's nothingness, of renouncing one's self. Rand illustrates the worst evils of self-abnegation continuously in her novels. Self-esteem and self-abnegation (altruism) are a major theme running through both her opus and the literature of mysticism, constituting in fact a major point of commonality.

In *The Fountainhead*, self-abnegation, in its most destructive sense, is exemplified by the character Katherine Hasley. Katherine is depicted by Rand as an average girl, maliciously manipulated by her uncle, a champion of altruism, into abandoning every aspect of her self: her burgeoning desires, interests, all that she loves. By using ridicule and sarcasm under a veneer of rationality, her uncle Ellsworth Toohey transforms her into a kind of zombie—someone who remains physically alive, yet who is spiritually dead.

Rand is absolutely correct that a valuation of oneself as a nothing and self-abnegation or altruism is indeed immoral in this sense. But this has never been a characteristic of mysticism. That being said, ideas of self-abnegation, nothingness, or self-annihilation, are also at the very core of mysticism. They play a crucially important part in both the practical techniques and theoretical teachings of mysticism. We are again faced with what appears to be a clear contradiction. What then, is mystic self-abnegation? What is the meaning of the dagger the Tibetan mystics keep with them at all times so they can kill their "self"?[11] How can these ideas possibly be compatible with Rand's? These are the questions we will now explore.

In mysticism, ideas of self-abnegation are always found in connection to a search for a departure point, from which one builds or discovers or liberates the authentic, deeper self, masked by what Ouspensky, for example, would call a "false personality" or what Rand would call "selfishness without a self" or "social metaphysics" (see Rand [1973a] 1982). Mysticism teaches that these types of negative character traits must be tamed, controlled or put in their proper place, or annihilated in order to allow for the surfacing of the authentic self.

It is easy to see their logic here: if a psychologist or a mystic manages to help someone remove their "selfishness without a self," this person who, previously to this miraculous operation, was "selfish without a self," is now immediately after the procedure, a pure nothing. Why? Because he no longer has selfishness or a self. He is an empty hulk of a person because he has

not yet regained or rebuilt a proper "self" of the kind Rand would approve. As paradoxical as it may sound, mystics claim that the man who has become an "empty hulk" has accomplished something that is commendable since he is no longer "selfish without a self," or a "social metaphysician." The person has, in attaining nothingness—actually progressed immensely (though this is just the preparatory, cleansing "dark night of the soul" phase) and has accomplished something extremely difficult to do, which is actually a heroic achievement.

A proper heroic aim, according to mystics, is that when starting from the negative position or mindset of "selfishness without a self," one should aim to move toward being an empty hulk, a "nothing." Why? Because it is by means of this cleansing, this emptying, that one can now again be capable of rediscovering or developing the self. A self now free, liberated from accumulated self-destructive poisons of "selfishness without a self," and "social metaphysics" and many others.

Interestingly, if we read attentively what Rand wrote in *The Fountainhead*, the explanation given above should sound very familiar, since it describes quite exactly Dominique Francon as she is at the beginning of *The Fountainhead*. As she is when Roark, though he loves her, refuses to marry her on the grounds that she, Dominique, would then be "nothing but an empty hulk" (Rand [1943] 2005, 388). Roark first meets her at this very point in her life when she is this empty hulk. Roark decides to wait for her to choose, to choose her *self*, her "I," to learn how to "say the I," as he puts it. It is in this sense that she is still empty, she has no true I. This emptiness is the nothingness, the void sought by mystics as a necessary phase of cleansing to make room for the Real, the Self. And this is the reason why this strange type of "nothingness" language is used by mystics. Rand herself *had no choice,* by the very logic of it, to resort to using it as well regarding Dominique.

It is the Objectivist "selfishness without a self" or "social metaphysics" that is the target of the mystics when they propound "dying daily," nothingness, annihilation, and self-abnegation. Remarkably, in all the years of existence of *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies*, apparently no essay has been devoted to the combating, and denouncing of the dangers of "selfishness without a self" and what methods can be used to combat such selfishness without a self to regain a healthy self, as if these were not real problems, as if "narcissistic personality disorder" did not exist.[12] If, however, such efforts were made to explore this idea, which after all preoccupied Rand, concepts expressing in some way the ideas of "self-abnegation," and terms such as "dying daily" or "self-denial," which seem so odd and anti-life, would have to be re-introduced or reinvented by the inherent logic of the problems raised. Perhaps this is the reason this sensitive subject continues to be left dormant.

Having, on the one hand, rejected terms such as "self-abnegation," and having, on the other hand, retained only the positive denotation of the word "selfishness," Rand's philosophy painted itself into a sharp corner it has never fully gotten out of, despite Rand's commendable efforts to escape the trap by the introduction of tongue-twisters such as "selfishness without a self." It is a sharp corner and a trap nonetheless because, aside from these tongue twisters, it contains no gamut of normal English words to denounce what ordinarily, for better or worse, we usually call "selfish" behavior. Regardless, what is of paramount importance is that Objectivism is on record in denouncing these forms of "selfishness." Rand properly and scathingly attacked them. These are the kinds of "selfishness" that the Tibetan mystic's dagger aims to kill.

Given this, should not Objectivists agree with mystics if their attacks are actually directed, as I maintain, at "selfishness without a self," even if they happen to use the word "selfish"? If, when reading mystics in full context, we discover their use of the word "selfishness" to describe the vicious immoral behavior that Rand calls "selfishness without a self," can we blame them for using the word in that sense? We should blame them only if the *actual* behavior they condemn was moral by Objectivist standards, *and not because of the words* used to describe the behavior. Rand ([1943] 2005) suggests in the preface to *The Fountainhead*, that it is the fault of mysticism that an ideal vocabulary for distinctions regarding selfishness, for example, does not exist. It certainly is not, because mystics, such as Ouspensky, develop vast technical vocabularies to deal with these issues. Their technical vocabularies elaborate many differentiations and definitions of self and selflessness, precisely to make such crucial distinctions, without which no understanding of self is at all possible.

Furthermore, the psychological usefulness of the idea of nothingness as a moral starting point is well accepted in many other endeavors, as a point of departure, a first step. Its practical use for example, is found in such associations and self-help groups as Alcoholics Anonymous. In *Trading for a Living*, Alexander Elder (1993) writes:

> The first step an alcoholic has to take is to admit that he is powerless over alcohol. He must admit that his life has become unmanageable, that alcohol is stronger than he is. Most alcoholics cannot take that step, drop out, and go on to destroy their lives. (31–32)

Rather than a tool to destroy self-esteem, "nothingness," or here, the admission of "powerlessness," is used as a tool to overcome a negative mindset.

Perhaps the best illustration of nothingness as a first step toward self-affirmation on a genuine or reality-oriented basis that I can offer is to imagine what kind of therapy Peter Keating of *The Fountainhead* would have needed

if his maker, Rand, had saved him, instead of condemning him to eternal damnation. Rand's heroes are of the Minerva type—they are born fully formed. They do not *become* heroes, Rand never describes in her fiction how a non-hero becomes a hero, except very partially with Dominique, so it is difficult to imagine this. Mystics (and psychologists) do not kill people as Rand killed off Keating. They offer them possibilities of self-evolution by means of techniques and teachings (such as the symbolic Tibetan dagger) aimed at correcting their negative character traits. So, let's imagine that in a sequel to *The Fountainhead*, Rand had dramatized the therapy or therapies, Peter Keating had sought and used to treat himself, and that after a long and painful journey, he had finally become, perhaps not a Roark, but still a genuine, integrated, healthy individual. I suspect the last book she intended to write was to be somewhat along these lines, but in a different form, not a vicious individual becoming moral, but a ballet dancer who I suppose was not immoral like Keating but who lacked some minor form of self-esteem or self-reliance that manifests itself by her going through enormous pain due to unrequited love. However, by a long process of healing, and transformation, she forgets she even was ever in pain because she so thoroughly heals herself: "What pain? she asked," were supposed to be the last lines of the novel (Branden 1986, 330). How the ballet dancer achieved this is regrettably a mystery we will never know.

At the end of *The Fountainhead*, Peter Keating is still rather young to abandon all hope and for us to abandon hope for him too. I will remind the reader that in real life countless young people self-diagnosed themselves as being Keatings, after reading *The Fountainhead*, and did seek out such therapy. Continuing our imaginary journey, we can try to envision what a psychologist or mystic might have shown and taught him. For example, we can imagine an Objectivist psychologist explaining how all his conventionally "selfish" actions are in fact *selfless*. Yet, *in order to save the self he does not even have and is certainly not worth saving*, he must begin by dropping the facade, the mask, the false personality, and finally recognize, and admit, to some remnant of his genuine self, the utter nothingness of what he mistakenly thought his self was. The Tibetan dagger must be applied to the impostor, the false self.

Low self-esteem, low ambition, poor regard for oneself, and so forth, are among the psychological problems people have always faced; boosting their ego or self-confidence is proper therapy for these types. But the Keatings of this world—the vicious narcissists, self-obsessed, greedy selfish spoiled brats, often heads of state—also exist and need therapy. Above all, we need them to go to therapy before they destroy us. Therefore, it is not surprising that mankind would develop a body of literature, of schools and techniques developed over millennia, to deal with *both* of these perennial problems. These crucial issues go to the essence of the themes and problematics found in the literature

of mysticism. They resurface with Rand in a very striking, powerful, beautiful, and original manner. But whereas, in my personal opinion, her writing seems more suited as therapy for those who have low self-esteem, it is probably risky for those who have Keating complexes. In any event, each case is individual and a good mystic school would detect or diagnose the case at hand in the individual who comes to it for healing and knowledge.

Now, it is certainly true that some mystics might have clipped too closely the wings of their students and stunted their self-development. It is in the nature of teaching of all varieties that these incidents will happen. Who has not heard of people in training of all kinds—the military, athletes, dancers—hurting and injuring themselves badly and even dying while being trained? Or doctors killing their patients? Probably all doctors at some point in their careers hurt their patients. Otherwise, why would they buy malpractice insurance? Mystical training has dangers. So does Objectivism. There is not the slightest doubt about this. The path to Self is dangerous and is never guaranteed. The alchemists referred to these dangers as the "black or nigredo phase" of the "work." The false self must decompose and putrefy so that later, the true Self can emerge. But it can very well happen that something goes terribly wrong. The true Self may never emerge and putrefaction is all that remains of you, even in the hands of a capable best-selling self-esteem guru. Putrefaction is presumably what happened to Gail Wynand, Peter Keating and Katherine Halsey in *The Fountainhead*.

Anyone who says they have an easy program (such as twelve step programs to help you think better, be more aware, be happy, at peace, and so forth) is probably a charlatan unknown to himself. According to Goldsmith and many others, the greatest initial danger in general in mystical training and/or lack of it, is the risk of what Rand would call "selfishness without a self," which means becoming a Keating as opposed to a Roark, which means you think, after and despite and even because of misreading and misunderstanding a book like *The Fountainhead*, that you are an integrated Self, when in fact you are in the putrefaction of selfishness without a self.

Here below are examples of how the word selfishness was used by Goldsmith (a Christian mystic). We can see, in different contexts, how he used the word is a positive way (especially in the first two citations), which Rand would have approved of, and also in the sense commonly used to mean a Peter Keating type (the last two citations).

> If I go not away, the Comforter will not come to you. You're apt to depend too much on a Jesus Christ, and so eventually every Jesus Christ has to leave this scene, in order that others will assert their infinite individuality and go forth and help the others. But please remember this.

> It takes an awful lot of selfishness, an awful lot of leaving the rest of the world alone, until we ourselves come to a measure of spiritual realization. (Goldsmith 1957b)
>
> The words that I say to you are no power. It's the Spirit, with which they are permeated, that does it, and that Spirit comes from that degree of selfishness, that's willing to stay alone, that's willing to just pray and pray and pray, for that Spirit to be upon me, that Spirit of the Lord God almighty. . . . Develop a good case of selfishness, and stay by yourself, and be alone, and work out your own salvation within yourself, until by your very presence you know, that some are being blessed, the benediction is flowing, and then be willing that all who come to you, benefit. But even if they're members of your own family and don't want it, leave them alone. (Goldsmith 1957b)
>
> Now the function of our meditation is first of all to purify ourselves of self, selfishness, self-righteousness, self-ego, patriotism, all of these things in which crimes are committed. Then our meditations are to eliminate, to dissipate personal sense in the patient or student that comes to us. It is to dissolve the grosser elements that make up material or human living. (Goldsmith 1957a)
>
> You begin to notice this: if you look to an individual as a human being, you are going to find selfishness in the highest degree, because all humanhood is built on selfishness. That is the primal element of humanhood: the law of self-preservation; kill anybody else, as long as I stay alive; deprive anyone else, as long as I stay alive; compete with anyone else until he's bankrupt, as long as I stay solvent. This is human history. This is human relationships at its present level of civilization. Build greater bombs and throw them first. (Goldsmith 1960)

Unlike Rand, Goldsmith here simply relies on the common sense of the audience to distinguish the two opposed meanings of the word 'selfish'. Nonetheless he does defend the positive meaning most definitively.

Axiomatic Concepts and the Trinity

Let us turn now turn to epistemology—specifically axiomatic concepts in Rand's theory of knowledge. It is here that the most startling and thought-provoking connections between Rand's ideas and mystic ideas about the nonexistence of the self can be found. Those familiar with Rand's monograph, *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, will remember that Rand defines "concept" as a "mental integration of two or more units" and that two units are the minimum

amount required for such a mental integration to take place. Lacking this minimum requirement of two units, concept formation is not possible.

However, Rand also coined the term "axiomatic concepts,"[13] which refer to a very special category of concepts, such as: existence, identity, consciousness. She classified these three as "axiomatic concepts" because she viewed them, among other reasons, as a precondition to the very idea of concepts. They are, apparently, the Objectivist version of the hypostases or the Trinity. If concepts are a type of mental file, axiomatic concepts are the file cabinet itself, so to speak, holding all the files and being all the files at once. These three axiomatic concepts are unique, all-encompassing, and always implicit in all knowledge. They are a giant mother of all files.

We will look now to this trinity in relation to the Objectivist charge that mystics deny the existence of the self. Now this is not a charge that any scholar of mysticism would make against mystics, except perhaps for Buddhist mystics. For example, it is sometimes claimed that Buddhist mystics maintain that the self does not exist, which Objectivism obviously rejects and even refuses to entertain. Though, as we have seen, in an apparently glaring contradiction, Objectivism does maintain that the Keatings of the world have no self. So it is possible to exist yet not have a self. In the epistemology workshops published posthumously in a second expanded edition of *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, edited by Harry Binswanger and Leonard Peikoff, Rand approves of telling people who claim they are not sure they exist that she does not want to talk to them because she does not want to be caught talking to herself (Rand in Binswanger and Peikoff 1990, 252). But we will now see that the Buddhist mystics, who were eminently philosophical, were trying to formulate precisely what Rand meant by axiomatic concepts. They were demarcating the idea of self *from the conceptual realm*, which is entirely consistent with Rand's idea of self as a *notion* or an *axiomatic concept*—as opposed to a *concept*.

This question was explored by W. T. Stace. The idea of the nothingness or nonexistence of the self is known in Buddhism as the doctrine of *anatta*. Stace discusses *anatta* in his book, *Mysticism and Philosophy*. He maintains that *if* such a doctrine were really part of the mystic tradition of Hinayana Buddhism—it would be (given the universal mystic affirmation of the existence of Self) *an exception to all other known forms of mysticism*:

> But it may be said that the doctrine of anatta, or no-soul, if the account given of it in the Pali canon is accepted as being the Buddha's view, is, at least in spirit and probably in substance, inconsistent with the experiences of non-Buddhist mystics. This argument rejects, by means of an argument which is practically identical with the famous argument

> of David Hume, the whole concept of self or soul. . . . Atheism is not as such, I believe, inconsistent with the introvertive mystical experience. For as we have seen the concept of God is an interpretation of the experience, not part of the experience itself. . . . In the mystical traditions of all the higher cultures, with the sole exception of Hinayana Buddhism, this is interpreted as being the unity of the self, the pure ego. (Stace 1960, 124–25)

Stace then goes on to set up a counterargument in the next few paragraphs and ends by rejecting the view of *anatta* as a flat denial of the existence of self. So, we have seen above here that all known forms of mysticism do not reject self except maybe one, and Stace concludes that this is *not* the case, and that it is, therefore, not an exception, as follows:

> This then is the resolution to the apparent contradiction between the doctrine of anatta and our contention that the Nirvanic experience of the Buddha was in essence identical with the introvertive experience of other mystics. Anatta simply meant that there is no soul-substance to be found amid the stream of consciousness or in the flux of changing states and existences which is known as Samsara. . . . All these facts lead to the conclusion that nirvana, or in other words, the Buddha's mystical experience is to be assimilated to mystical states as found in other cultures. This means that his experience was of the introvertive type but that he did not choose to interpret it as being the unity of the self in the manner that other mystics have generally done. (Stace 1960, 127, 126)[14]

Now in connection to the above, it must be remembered that in one of the workshops featured in the expanded edition of *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, Rand has the following exchange (the names of the "Professors" were revealed in Binswanger 2020):

> Prof. D [John Nelson]: Is the concept of "self" something abstracted from a content of consciousness?
> AR: No. The notion of "self" is an axiomatic concept; it's implicit in the concept of "consciousness"; it can't be separated from it. (Rand in Binswanger and Peikoff 1990, 252)

Following Stace, if *anatta* is not the negation of the existence of self, but simply the recognition that there is no "soul-substance to be found amid the stream of consciousness" and if self cannot be constructed or abstracted from the

"stream of consciousness"—or as Prof D says, "a content of consciousness"—then the Buddhist notion of *anatta*, accords exactly with Objectivism. It corresponds perfectly to Rand's idea of "axiomatic concept." Axiomatic concepts, including the notion of "self," are not formed by any content of consciousness according to Rand. Indeed, they can't be.

Also, as strange as it appears to be, we see clearly and irrevocably that Rand herself does not accord the status of concept to the idea of self. Notice the precision of the word used to refer to the idea of self. She calls self a "notion." The tone is emphatic and the additional comment, "it cannot be separated from it," the word "it" here meaning consciousness, suggests, that she had thought long and very carefully about this. Mysticism, even very ancient mysticism, develops this theme extensively along the same lines, as we have seen with the example given by Stace. This indicates to me that her thinking on this issue was remarkably correct, and so also is the doctrine of *anatta*, for the same reasons.

It is also interesting that Prof. D seems surprised at this, which suggests that this crucial idea of self was really only superficially examined by the workshop participants (as opposed to Rand who had taken the time, probably by reading Stace, to acquaint herself with the difficulties relative to the notion of self.) Had they read seminal books on mysticism, such as Stace's, it is unlikely they would have been so surprised. This is a very telling example of the consequences and of the price one pays for ignoring mysticism. In chapter 6 of *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, devoted to axiomatic concepts, there is no mention amazingly, of the axiomatic status of the notion of "self." We discover this only in the workshops featured in an appendix in the expanded second edition published long after her death. Why was it avoided? Why was it accorded just a few words, not much more than a single sentence? One would think that at least a few pages could have been devoted to the development of the notion of "self". When one thinks of the declared importance of "axiomatic concepts" and above all the idea of "self" in the context of Objectivism, this is so difficult to explain; it seems hypocritcal. The only explanation I can surmise is that Rand here was running into the very same problems that thinkers have faced for millennia trying to find a "name" (meaning a term and a status relative to ordinary concepts) for "self." Rand said, in an interview with Phil Donahue, where she apparently forgot that she had declared "self" to be an axiomatic concept, that since God, according to theologians, was not in the conceptual realm, she did not feel obligated to discuss Him. And she wrote, "A concept has to involve two or more similar concretes, and there is nothing like God. He is supposed to be unique. Therefore, by their own terms of setting up the problem, they have taken God out of the conceptual realm. And quite properly, because he is out of reality" (Rand in Binswanger and Peikoff 1990, 148). Having also removed

"self" from the conceptual realm, she felt no need to discuss "self" much either apparently, going as far as not even mentioning it in chapter 6 of the original treatise where it should have featured prominently.

We can also see the possible reason for the omission—both words "self" and "God" refer to the same unclassifiable among unclassifiable things: axiomatic concepts. The same exact epistemological problems arise when trying to grasp, explain and define the meanings of God and Self and consciousness.[15] Since identical problems are evidence we are dealing with identical phenomenon that call for identical solutions or explanations, conversely, the identical proposed solutions by Rand (the removal of both God and Self from the conceptual realm) are evidence that we are dealing here with identical phenomenon. Mystics are right; "self" and "God" are in the same category and even share the same name: "I am that I am."

The Preface to *The Fountainhead*

Let us now examine the mystical ideas that can found in Rand's preface to the twenty-fifth anniversary edition of *The Fountainhead*. These are exaltation, worship, reverence, and the sacred. Rand ([1943] 2005) writes:

> Religion's monopoly in the field of ethics has made it extremely difficult to communicate the emotional meaning and connotations of a rational view of life. Just as religion has preempted the field of ethics, turning morality *against* man, so it has usurped the highest moral concepts of our language, placing them outside this earth and beyond man's reach. "Exaltation" is usually taken to mean an emotional state evoked by contemplation of the supernatural. "Worship" means the emotional experience of loyalty and dedication to something higher than man. "Reverence" means an emotion to be experienced on one's knees. "Sacred" means superior to and not-to-be-touched-by any concerns of man or of this earth. Etc.
>
> But such concepts do name actual emotions, even though no supernatural dimension exists; and these emotions are experienced as uplifting or ennobling, without the self-abasement required by religious definitions. What, then, is their source or referent in reality? It is the entire emotional realm of man's dedication to a moral ideal. Yet apart from the man-degrading aspects introduced by religion, that emotional realm is left unidentified, without concepts, words, or recognition.
>
> It is the highest level of man's emotions that has to be redeemed from the murk of mysticism and redirected at its proper object: man.

> It is in this sense, with this meaning and intention, that I would identify the sense of life dramatized in *The Fountainhead* as *man-worship*.
>
> It is an emotion that a few—a very few—men experience consistently; some experience it in rare sparks that flash and die out without consequences; some do not know what I am talking about; some do and spend the rest of their lives as frantically virulent spark-extinguishers. (xi)

Notice the rather curious way that Rand presents us with her list. She, herself, accuses religion of having a monopoly on these four ideas in particular—exaltation, worship, reverence, and sacred—and further, on the entire field of ethics. Not only does she accuse religion of having a monopoly on ethics, but she, who routinely attacks mysticism for resorting to "ineffability" as an excuse for mystification, suddenly feels the need to find an excuse for her own difficulty expressing what *she* is talking about when *she* decides to broach these themes. Instead of taking responsibility for the difficulty or simply stating, as mystics sometimes do, that these ideas are very complex, to the point of being almost "ineffable," she decides to blame *her* difficulties on "religion's monopoly in the field of ethics."

Paradoxically, however, she is confessing something quite remarkable, namely that the *only people she can find worthy of some consideration*, here in the ethical field, the field of morality, are those who are religious or mystical. Rand's lament and complaint *in themselves* concede that the mystical enemy camp contains *something of objective value*—namely, in this case, nothing less than "the highest level of man's emotions." These, according to Rand, are supposedly badly tarnished or surrounded by mysticism's "murk"—and we are left to wonder why this "murk," curiously, like soil around a plant, seems such fertile ground (perhaps the only ground) for forming concepts, "the most exalted ones," which Rand clearly cherishes, which the philosophers (all non-mystics), by her own humiliating accusation, have left "unidentified, without concepts, words or recognition." This exception is all to the glory of mysticism then.

Now let us turn to Rand's discussion of these four concepts, which she seeks to "redeem from the murk of mysticism."

Exaltation

Rand begins by defining for us what she says exaltation is "usually taken to mean": "an emotional state evoked by contemplating the supernatural." Though she does not provide us with her own formal definition of the concept, the context and further usage makes it clear that the part of the definition that she objects to is the *differentia*, that is, the idea of "contemplating the supernatural."

The "supernatural" for Rand is a term of deep opprobrium. It is said to pertain to the domain of inexplicable miracles, of references to other non-earthly worlds that do not exist except in twisted minds degraded by rotten mystical epistemology. In Objectivist terminology, the "supernatural" means the unreal, the false, and therefore is seen as a source of error, confusion, and evil. It follows from this that its contemplation is necessarily wrong or evil, though the emotional state of exaltation, if evoked, in itself, would be legitimate if reapplied, "redirected" in Rand's words, toward man, or, more specifically as Rand states, "man's self-esteem." Thus, Rand states that mysticism evokes exaltation by contemplating the "supernatural." She proposes instead to evoke that emotional state of exaltation by contemplating man or man's self-esteem. This redirection would "redeem" the concept from "the murk of mysticism."

Now what should be our attitude if, by examining the writings of mystics we should find that many of them would agree with Rand, given the way in which she sets up the problem? To elucidate this point, let us briefly review Objectivist metaphysics. Rand ([1973a] 1982) writes:

> Any natural phenomenon, i.e., any event which occurs without human participation, is the metaphysically given, and could not have occurred differently or failed to occur; any phenomenon involving human action is the man-made, and could have been different. For example, a flood occurring in an uninhabited land, is the metaphysically given; a dam built to contain the flood water, is the man-made; if the builders miscalculate and the dam breaks, the disaster is metaphysical in its origin, but intensified by man in its consequences. To correct the situation, men must obey nature by studying the causes and potentialities of the flood, then command nature by building better flood controls. (33–34)

However, Rand also tells us that, man-qua-man is not innate, spontaneous or metaphysically given. Self-esteem is not an innate, spontaneous, naturally or metaphysically occurring phenomenon—and neither is man's soul. According to Rand, man is "a being of self-made soul." Then why not view man's soul, reason, will, and self-esteem (his spiritual dimension in general), as above the natural, as the man-made is above or in some way markedly distinct from the metaphysical? The essence of the question is the following: is man-qua-man "metaphysically given" or is he "man-made"? Or to put it another way, is Rand's thoughtful conception of the man-made "natural"? To illustrate: is Ayn Rand "metaphysical" (did she "have to happen") or is she man-made—that is, primarily a product of her own volition, self-made by her own soul, and therefore something that did *not* "have to happen" like a natural phenomenon?

Let us consider what Aristotle has to say on this issue in discussing the life of *nous*, the most excellent form of happiness (also known as the life of contemplation):

> But such a life would be too high for man; for it is not in so far as he is man that he will live so, but in so far as something divine is present in him; and by so much as this is superior to our composite nature is its activity superior to that which is the exercise of the other kind of excellence. If intellect is divine, then in comparison with man, the life according to it is divine in comparison with human life. (*Nicomachean Ethics* 10.1177b27–1177b31 in Barnes 1984, vol. 2, 1861)

Daniel Robinson (1979, 131) cites the above passage and remarks: "The biologist has run his argument to the end of its empirical and taxonomic tethers and now discovers something in this creature of nature that transcends the natural order."

Notice that "something in this creature of nature that is supernatural" would have been much more economical than the heavy formulation "something in this creature of nature that transcends the natural order." Here, and in many other passages, Robinson seems to share the phobia with which Objectivism sometimes reacts to certain words, even certain sounds. He continues:

> Even the ethicist must be perplexed, for the greatest happiness of this creature turns out to be aloof even to that social and political world in which ethical prescriptions operate. The moral excellences are tied to the passions and appetites and arise from man's *composite nature.* But this ultimate condition of happiness is. . . . (131–32)

Is what? Robinson is going to tell us *what* this "ultimate condition of happiness" is tied to. But identifying positively the "*what*" would involve here necessarily the very embarrassing, un-Aristotelian reference to something *real* but somehow *not* part of man's "composite nature"—that is, something *supernatural* in man. Robinson apparently too uncomfortable to make a positive identification, sidesteps the issue. He says instead what "this ultimate condition" is *not* tied to. His complete sentence reads: "But this ultimate condition of happiness is not part of this at all" (132). The latter "this" stands here for "man's composite nature." Notice nonetheless that Robinson wants to make the point very forcefully with his emphatic words "at all." But where Robinson seems to dillydally, leaving us to impute the word "supernatural" in his formulation, the Catholic tradition as represented by the *Catholic Universal Encyclopedia* is blunt:

> The Supernatural Order is the ensemble of effects exceeding the powers of the created universe and gratuitously produced by God for the purpose of raising the rational creature above its native sphere to a God-like life and destiny. The meaning of the phrase fluctuates with that of its antithesis, the natural order. Those who conceive the latter as the world of material beings to the exclusion of immaterial entities, or as the necessary mechanism of cause and effect to the exclusion of the free agency of the will, or again as the inherent forces of the universe to the exclusion of the extrinsic concurrence of God, quite consistently call supernatural all spiritual facts or voluntary determinations or Divine operations. ("Supernatural Order" in *Catholic Encyclopedia*)

Now what is evident in the above excerpt is the use of the term "supernatural" as a genus embracing aspects of man's nature, such as "spiritual facts" and "voluntary determinations," the exercise and development of which are *not* in Rand's understanding of the terms "metaphysical." The tension between Rand's "metaphysical" versus "man-made" surfaces. More than that, since others have traveled these lofty spheres long before Rand, the same encyclopedia entry, too well aware of the logical possibility (always inherent in the idea of man as supernatural) of an atheistic and selfish deification implicit in its own theory, a few sentences later warns us against what comes to the mind, quite logically.

> Although some theologians do not consider impossible the elevation of the irrational creature to the Divine order—for example, by way of personal union—nevertheless it stands to reason that such a privilege should be reserved for the rational creature capable of knowledge and love. It is obvious that this uplifting of the rational creature to the supernatural order cannot be by way of absorption of the created into the Divine or of a fusion of both into a sort of monistic identity, but only by way of union or participation, the two terms remaining perfectly distinct. ("Supernatural Order" in *Catholic Encyclopedia*)

This warning is voiced because although the Catholic tradition recognizes a supernatural dimension to man, it is afraid that recognizing it too clearly will lead men, like it led Jesus ironically, and countless other mystics, to declare they are God.[16] The quoted passage insists that "the two terms remain," that is, man and God "obviously," "perfectly distinct." Of course, there is nothing *obvious* about this at all, which is why, far from having been able to convince mystics of the obviousness of this distinction, Catholics and other religionists have not hesitated to kill mystics to make it "obvious" to them and everyone else that they mean business.

A man who knows himself to be supernatural, obviously would suffer from no lack of self-esteem. The discovery and propagation of mystical literature affirming such a possibility has always historically served *to increase* a man's self-esteem. So much so, that he might decide he no longer needs the guidance of the official church or should not be the "subject" of anyone on earth.[17] These kinds of ideas across the ages have been the principal reason established religions and governments have been so afraid of mysticism. It is largely *this same reason* that makes faith-based religion and governments afraid of Rand. While Rand objects to "the supernatural" on the grounds that it is degrading to man, Catholics are afraid that it might lead man to think too highly of himself. Both Objectivism and mysticism have this in common; they both might lead man to think too highly of himself!

Worship

Rand defines worship as "the emotional experience of loyalty and dedication to something higher than man." Now clearly for Rand the man-worshipper, there is nothing higher than man; and any attempt to claim the existence of invisible beings on another plane or dimension that is "higher" is so supremely and risibly irrational that no argument is deemed necessary—and none is offered. Here again, as in the previous concept, the *genus* of the definition offered by Rand (that is, "emotional experience of loyalty and dedication") is retained as valid. The *differentia* "something higher than man" is rejected. One would think here that mystics of all stripes would be unanimous in their disapproval of Rand. Let's take a look.

Observe that Rand calls herself a worshipper—and she does not mean it "metaphorically." In fact, worship, like contemplation, is essential to the Objectivist sense of life. One *cannot be* an Objectivist if one is not a worshipper and contemplator of the ideal man.[18] Now what is the spatial position of the Objectivist object of worship, that is "man" in relation to the worshipper? It would seem at first glance, that it could not be "higher" in any sense. But strangely, Rand tells us elsewhere in no uncertain terms that it is most definitely higher than one's regular self. Rand even publicized a picture of herself looking up, to demonstrate what she calls "the upward glance." What *is* the object of Rand's worship? What is the object of mystical worship? How do they differ in spatial positioning and otherwise?

Objectivism claims to worship something that exists in reality called "man." On the other hand, mysticism, according to Rand, worships something that "does not exist here on earth" and is alleged by the mystics to exist in another dimension or another world called, for example, "heaven." But if we look a little closer, we see that this distinction also vanishes. We are told that

Objectivism worships man—but not man as he is on average, not the familiar "man-on-the-street" nor the "folks-next-door." And certainly, and with good reason, Objectivists would not be caught dead worshipping, collectivist style, "the people." Although the "common man" is granted a modicum of respect (but not worship) by Rand, this is only to the extent that he stands in opposition to or does not lose himself to the masses or the mob. Rather, Rand worships that decidedly mysterious entity sometimes called John Galt or Howard Roark or *man-qua-man*, or man "as he could be, should be, ought to be" or "man at his highest potential." The distinction, in Objectivism, between men as a statistical average and *man qua man* is not just fundamental, it rises to poetry in sentences such as: "Man is a word that has no plural." Consistently, for Objectivism, there is an unbridgeable gulf between the two ideas of man, so that man the statistical average, who is massed "in the street," or in plural forms such as "society" or "the people," is all too often ferociously vilified and loathed, while man is deified as a proper object of worship. Howard Roark is fully human according to Rand, but Peter Keating is subhuman.

Why then can we not agree with the mystics and simply for convenience's sake conceive of one of these two ideas of man as "higher" than the other, as in fact Rand herself does elsewhere? As we have seen, though she ferociously clings to "this earth" and "reality," she cannot resist the concept "higher" any less than the mystics—for the same reasons. Furthermore, cannot this "higher" man be viewed as so different from the run-of-the-mill "man" that a separate word is advisable? Strictly from the point of view of avoiding "package-dealing," that is, epistemologically speaking, would it not be better for Objectivism to have different words for each concept of man? Why retain, or rather, *insist* on using the same word for two radically different conceptions of man, as if an egalitarian "ungulfable bridge" (Branden 1986, 165) existed between the two?[19] It's basic to ordinary conversation, let alone to those well versed in concept formation theory, that two words are preferable to one, even when a subtle nuance in meaning is involved.

Before the advent of the science of statistics, back in the times we have seen Santillana write about, could it not have been convenient to designate the non-statistical idea of man-at-his-best as above the natural, if "natural" was taken to mean what we now call the "statistical average"? Even today is it not much easier on the mouth and on the ear to say and hear "God" or "Superman" than to pronounce the quasi-Latin formulation "man *qua* man" or the tortuous "man-as-he-could-be-should-be-ought-to-be" or to use words such as subhuman for our fellow man? Rand, usually the epitome of simplicity and economy in language, who claims (like Socrates against Meletus's accusation) to be against neologisms, here decidedly abandons all her anti-neologism principals, turns to the medieval language of scholasticism and Aristotle—in order to avoid

saying "God" or "superman" or another classic formulation of the same idea. Yet such concepts—Superman, God, Supernatural, Other Dimension—could clearly be used (and were indeed used in both philosophical and mystical literature) to characterize the being and the universe of ideal men such as Roark.

Despite her initial heroic resistance against such terms, and because of the logic inherent in these very ideas, Rand, later in her life, finally succumbed to their call and actually abandoned the idea of using the same word for these two conceptions of man. Her intriguing essay "The Missing Link," on the anti-conceptual mentality, is in fact a violent swing in the opposite direction. There she coolly hypothesizes, as harshly as Plato, a difference so radical between man and man-qua-man, that is, between the "anti-conceptual mentality" and the conceptual mentality of man-qua-man, that she suggests something quite frightening, that the former constitute the "missing link." She writes: "For years, scientists have been looking for a 'missing link' between man and animals. Perhaps that missing link is the anti-conceptual mentality" (Rand [1973b] 1982).

One legitimately wonders, after reading this, what to make of the formal Objectivist rejection of the Platonic theory of souls of gold, silver, and bronze. One wonders whether these "missing links" should be afforded voting rights, or even citizenship. Indeed, after "The Missing Link," why not call man-qua-man a "God" or a "Superman" in order to distinguish him from his anti-conceptual, non–fully human former fellowman. Certainly, it can be said that Galt's consciousness is *expanded*, and sees new vistas (long-range causality) closed to the conceptual range of a Wesley Mouch, the corrupt lobbyist from *Atlas Shrugged*. Compared to Wesley, is not Galt in another "dimension" where, *from Wesley's vantage point*, he appears as all-knowing? Is Wesley, limited by his "anti-conceptual mentality," not like the imaginary creatures that live in two dimensions in relationship to those that seem to appear from nowhere, who live in three dimensions and have fully developed their conceptual capacity?

In sum, the mystic's worship of "something higher than man," is perfectly compatible with Objectivism, which, in the context of its own vocabulary, is forced to the same position—namely, to specify that what is worshipped is not man as a statistical average, but truly the fully conceptual, self-generated, non-metaphysically given, exceptional, "supernatural" man.

Reverence

This, Rand says, usually means: "an emotion of sacred respect, to be experienced on one's knees." Again, it is clear that what Rand objects to is the *differentia* of her definition—the idea of man genuflecting. Such an idea, requiring "self-abasement" and subjugation to a "higher authority," is profoundly revolting

to the Objectivist conception of the dignity of man. But for Rand, reverence for one's Self (if one has a real Self) is proper. Here she quotes approvingly her favorite "mystic," Nietzsche: "The noble soul has reverence for itself."

Yet because Self is synonymous with God in mysticism, self-reverence is the mystical theme par excellence. That is why we find it in Nietzsche to begin with. It is most visible in what is known as the "immanent" school of mysticism, or Soul mysticism. It is true that mystics specify that it is the "higher" Self that one must revere, but this is precisely, in their literature, a formulation to avoid what Rand, again using invented gods (neologisms), called "selfishness without a self," or Nietzschean "whim-worship." Or consider the distinction that she was at such pains to point out between *egoism* and *egotism*. It is telling (indeed it speaks volumes and volumes) that Rand of all people, Rand—*the legendary expert in the field*—herself tripped up on the subtleties of the meaning of these words and was forced to amend *The Fountainhead* to clarify her point, although the amendments are only in the preface. Presumably, one does not amend sacred literature, even if one has written it oneself. But what this shows very clearly is that even with Rand's laser precision and clarity of mind, this particular distinction remains extremely difficult to communicate. Mystics have called it the razor's edge.[20] We navigate on its narrow summit perched between two abysses. The abyss of self-sacrificial altruism and the equally deadly abyss of selfishness without a self. Our (proper) forgiveness and understanding of her self-avowed mistake—which she casually blames on a college dictionary, as if it were the extent of the research she did on the subject—we should *a fortiori* extend to mystics dealing with the same issue.

Returning to the idea of self-reverence, or "the exaltation of man's self-esteem," we find, in Rand's introduction, the following sentence about it after the Nietzsche quote: "This view of man has rarely been expressed in human history" (Rand [1943] 2005, xiii). Mystical literature has universally expressed this view of man. It is a matter of uncontested historical record that mystics have been accused and killed, for upholding these very ideas, which are reflected above in the epigrams of this article.

Sacred

Rand defines the common meaning as "superior to and not-to-be-touched-by any concerns of man or of this earth." Here she disapproves of both the genus and differentia. Nothing is higher than man and nothing is above or untouched by his concerns. The meaning she attacks here is the notion of ideas, things or places enshrined as inaccessible or forbidden to any and all men—as one forbids a dog from eating at the table. Framed in this way, her protest is of course justified. We can even find it confirmed by an alleged enemy, Meister Eckhart

(1941): "The soul cannot bear to have anything above it. I believe that it cannot bear to have even God above it." This quote is an example of Rand having allies in—of all places—mysticism. Can Eckhart, who was accused of heresy *because* of such pronouncements, be branded as a mystic-altruist-collectivist who claims that there are things as "superior to and not-to-be-touched-by any concerns of man or of this earth"? Her attack, from another point of view, is also inconsistent: her own theory of individual rights requires a similar argument—namely a designated, sanctified field of action in space and time (the concept of property), a sanctuary, where "man" can and should be free from any and all *other* men; an inviolate place where he properly should not be "touched" by anything or anyone on earth. The concept of the sacred in connection with (a prototype) of the concept of individual rights, as applied in legal practice can be found, for example, in Roman history—witness the sacredness of the persons of the plebs and the political and legal (that is, physical) protection this sacredness offered them. Sacred temples were usually also the treasury of the city state—for example in ancient Greece. In fact, when Rand defends individual rights or the sanctity of the individual or property rights, she invariably relies on such a conception of the sacred.

Here she completely forgets the soaring, Johannine words of wisdom she herself put in Kira's mouth, "But—because we are living beings—there's something in each of us, something like the very heart of life condensed—and *that* should not be touched" (Rand [1959] 1995, 204). She tells us herself, in the preface to *We the Living*, that the theme of the book is "the sanctity of human life" while giving us her usual dire warnings against viewing these furtive admissions in mystical fashion (xv). Is the idea of the sanctity of human life so perilously close to mysticism that danger warnings are in order? Such proximity besides, is all to the honor of mysticism. Why are Rand's best ideas so close to those of mysticism, that she habitually warns us about viewing them as such, when "mysticism" probably would not even have crossed our minds had she not brought it up? One would think that if they were as diametrically opposed to her views, we would not constantly be finding them is such close embrace, such communion and even union. *The lady doth protest too much, methinks.*

Conclusion

The conclusion of this paper appears at the beginning, so I will not repeat it here, but I wanted to close with the following comments. Rand's axes, "reason-individualism-capitalism," versus "mysticism-altruism-collectivism," are, as I explained, the analytical framework I used for researching mysticism. While touching on other subjects, I discussed mostly mysticism and individualism and the self, because of the centrality and importance of these ideas in both

Objectivism and mysticism. Regrettably, I had to cut out the discussions on mystics and political freedom, the issue of reason and much else. Imagine my surprise in finding mystics vigorously defending freedom as it is understood by classical liberalism, even quoting and promoting Ludwig von Mises and F. A. Hayek, while remaining almost entirely unknown to the libertarian world (see Hoeller 1992). Or consider this comment from Joel Goldsmith (1957c):

> You see, here, is a tremendous point to be remembered. All things like socialism, communism, Catholicism, mass advertising, political domination, all of these have only one object, and that is, the herding of the masses, the control of the masses and the destruction of individuality. Now as opposed to this, Christianity as it was taught by the Master, and the constitutional form of government, which was given to us by the Founding Fathers, and the Masonic fraternity—all such activities have as their goal, the development of individuality and the achievement of individual integrity, individual unfoldment, the freedom of the individual, the respect for the individual, the honoring of an individual *as* an individual.

I will end with a citation from an Ayn Rand letter, which I hope now sounds a new note:

> Jesus was one of the first great teachers to proclaim the basic principle of individualism—the inviolate sanctity of man's soul, and the salvation of one's soul as one's first concern and highest goal; this means—one's ego and the integrity of one's ego. (Rand, letter to Sylvia Austin [9 July 1946] in Berliner 1995, 287)

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NOTES

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1. This strategy was expressed to me by David Kelly in personal discussion.

2. In her essay, "Is Atlas Shrugging?," Rand writes: "It is the philosophy of the mysticism-altruism-collectivism axis that has brought us to our present state and is carrying us toward a finale such as that of the society presented in *Atlas Shrugged*. It is only the philosophy of the reason-individualism-capitalism axis that can save us and carry us, instead, toward the Atlantis projected in the last two pages of my novel" (in Rand 1967, 165).

3. For example, the works of Gurdjieff, Ouspensky, Alexandra David-Néel, and Joel Goldsmith (who is in the lineage of Emilie Cady) were all well-known to the New York intelligentsia.

4. This beautiful expression, "the highest within," meaning that God is within man himself and not outside or separate from Him, is found repeatedly in the books of a very famous American mystic with whom Rand was well acquainted, and from which she almost certainly borrowed the expression: Emilie Cady. In Emilie Cady's 1896 book, *Lessons in Truth: A Course of Twelve Lessons in Practical Christianity*, lesson 6, "Definition of Terms Used in Metaphysical Teaching," states: "We cultivate personality, in which lives pride, fear of criticism, and all manner of selfishness, by listening to the voices *outside* of ourselves, and being governed by selfish motives instead of by *the highest within us*" (Cady [1896] 1919, 75; emphasis added). This book by Cady is included in Rand's "legacy library" according to the Ayn Rand Archives (online at: https://www.librarything.com/work/431593/book/121250300).

5. The supplementary definitions of mysticism are largely based on formulations given by Ouspensky and Goldsmith.

6. Evelyn Underhill (1915, 7) offers the following definition: "Mysticism is the art of union with Reality. The mystic is a person who has attained that union in greater or less degree; or who aims at and believes in such attainment." The *Oxford Dictionary of World Religions* (Bowker 1997, 671) opens the entry "mysticism" with the following lines: "The practices and often systems of thought which arise from and conduce towards mystical experience. Mystical systems are distinguished from other systems by their intimate connection to a quest for salvation, union, or liberation realized through distinct forms of mental, physical, and spiritual exercise." Further, the same entry specifies: "But mysticism need not even be Theistic." In Carmody and Carmody (1996, 10), which is an Oxford University Press textbook for students, the definition offered is the following: "Direct experience of ultimate reality." It is striking to observe the supreme importance of the word "reality" in Objectivism and, as we see here, in these definitions. The idea of Reality is treated very seriously by mystics, and they use it as a synonym for Self and for God. Objectivists want to "correspond" with it, need assurances that there is "correspondence" with it at all times. Mystics want to "unite" with it, and so on.

7. In the scholarship of mysticism, there is usually a clear demarcation between mysticism and religion, along similar lines to the demarcation between philosophy and theology. But Rand here does not separate the two. As a result, her comments could be viewed as valid with regard to degenerate forms of religion, but not mysticism. Furthermore, she herself apparently knew they were not applicable at least to negative theology (Rand, letter to John Hospers [3 January 1961] in Berliner 1995, 529). I have read, surprisingly, mystics (Goldsmith) who hold the same position on religion as Rand and who sympathize with atheists. This is an important point to consider. It is connected to the fact that mystics have historically been as antagonistic to status quo religion and established societal (collectivist) values as Rand herself, using similar arguments.

8. Ouspensky (1973) states that "these methods cannot be described in books or taught in ordinary schools for the very simple reason that they are different for different people, and there is no universal method equally applicable to all" (37). Just as one psychological or pedagogical methodology (or prescription drug) might be appropriate to one individual or one category of individuals, but not others, so also, one methodology and pedagogical method of mysticism might be deemed appropriate for some and not others, even though the subject matter and goal of mysticism remain the same—self-actualization. Furthermore, it has to be taken into consideration that a good method for one individual might be very damaging, and even deadly, to another.

9. Frank Lloyd Wright wrote to Rand: "I've read every word of *The Fountainhead*. Your thesis is *the* great one. Especially at this time. So I suppose you will be set up in the marketplace and burned for a witch" (letter to Rand [23 April 1944] in Berliner 1995, 112). All this time, he was also transmitting the teachings of Gurdjieff to his students at Taliesin. In his view, both Rand and Gurdjieff were teachers of the "great thesis."

10. According to Gershom Scholem (1995, 17): "Kabbalism is distinguished [in comparison to other forms of mysticism] by an attitude to language which is quite unusually positive. Kabbalists who differ in almost everything else are at one in regarding language as something more precious than an inadequate instrument for contact between human beings." This is true of Sufism as well.

11. This dagger is called a phurba. Marguerite Yourcenar owned one, and mentions its meaning at the end of the chapter on Tantrism, in her book *That Mighty Sculptor, Time.*

12. This issue was peripherally discussed in a series of articles, replies, and rejoinders to an essay written by Marsha Familaro Enright. See especially Enright 2014; White 2017.

13. Rand ([1966–67] 1990) states: "An axiomatic concept is the identification of a primary fact of reality, which cannot be analyzed, i.e., reduced to other facts or broken into component parts. It is implicit in all facts and in all knowledge. It is the fundamentally given and directly perceived or experienced, which requires no proof or explanation, but on which all proofs and explanations rest" (55).

14. Stace was known to both Rand and Nathaniel Branden. Rand corresponded with Stace (see Rand [4 February 1963] in Berliner 1995, 603–4). And Branden (1997) addresses Stace as well (194, 197)—but he quotes him completely out of context and misrepresents Stace's view of the Buddhist idea of self. Though outside the scope of this essay, it should be noted that Branden later revised his views on mysticism, exhibited, for example, in discussions he had with Ken Wilber (see Branden and Wilber 2011).

15. The following dialogue in the "Excerpts from the Epistemology Workshops" (in Binswanger and Peikoff 1990, 262–63) credits a mystic, Saint Augustine, with the very

identification of consciousness as a concept. If this is true, then it is irrefutable proof that mysticism makes invaluable contributions to both a rational epistemology and individualism. As follows:

> Prof. E [Leonard Peikoff]: In the development of the human race philosophically, the three axiomatic concepts were explicitly grasped for the first time at definitely different periods of history and in a definite order: "existence" by Parmenides, "identity" by Aristotle, and "consciousness," as far as I know, not until Augustine.
>
> AR: Why would you say not until Augustine?
>
> Prof. E: I don't think there was any actual concept of "consciousness" in Greek philosophy.
>
> AR: But what of Aristotle's psychology, with the concept of "soul" as consciousness?
>
> Prof. E: Yes, but "soul" as he used it is more of a biological concept than a mental one.
>
> Prof. B [Allan Gotthelf]: Aristotle has "thinking," he has "feeling," he has "imagining," but he doesn't seem to have "consciousness" as an integration of those. The next level of abstraction for him is "soul," which applies to all living things qua living.
>
> AR: You mean Augustine was the first to isolate "consciousness" as a concept in the Cartesian sense?
>
> Prof. E: Yes. "Si fallor, sum."
>
> AR: Oh, that's interesting.
>
> Prof. E: The human race developed the three axioms in the right order.
>
> Prof. B: Good for us!
>
> AR: It's a very interesting observation from another aspect, too. You know it's been said many times that the human race follows in a general way the stages of development of an individual. And this would be an instance of that. But I shudder to think of the time elements involved, if it takes that long. It's an interesting observation, however.

16. Stace (1960, 113) writes: "The orthodox theologians of all three religions vehemently condemn what they call 'pantheism,' and keep a watchful and threatening eye upon the mystics because of their undoubted tendency to pantheism. Pantheism generally is supposed to mean the identity of God and the world. In the dispute of the theologians and the mystics it usually means the identity of God and that part of the world which is the individual self. The mystics are allowed by the orthodox to claim 'union with God,' but this union must not be interpreted as 'identity,' but as something short of actual and absolute identity. In A.D. 922 an Islamic mystic named Mansur al-Hallaj was crucified in Bagdad for having, after attaining union with God used language which seemed to claim identity with God."

17. Pagels (1979, 134) writes: "Whoever achieves gnosis becomes 'no longer Christian but a Christ.' We can see, then, that such gnosticism was more than a protest movement against orthodox Christianity. Gnosticism also included a religious perspective that implicitly opposed the Catholic development of the kind of institution that became the early Catholic church. Those who expected to 'become Christ' themselves were not

likely to recognize the institutional structures of the church—its bishops, priests, rituals, creed, or canon—as bearing ultimate authority."

And in chapter 6 of this book, entitled "Gnosis: Self-Knowledge as Knowledge of God," Pagels explains further: "What is the source of 'light' discovered within? Like Freud who professed to follow the 'light of reason,' most gnostic sources agreed that 'the lamp of the body is the mind' [a saying which the *Dialogue of the Savior* attributes to Jesus]. Silvanus the teacher says: '. . . Bring in your guide and your teacher. The mind is the guide but reason is the teacher. . . . Live according to your mind. . . . Acquire strength, for the mind is strong. . . . Enlighten your mind. . . . Light the lamp within you'" (133–35).

18. I regrettably have no space to develop here the idea of contemplation in relation to mysticism and Rand, but here is an indication. In the Middle Ages, the words used for mystics and mysticism were, respectively, contemplatives and contemplation. Objectivist literature as a *contemplation* of the ideal man falls squarely within mysticism. Furthermore, this contemplation takes place while *reading*, and is akin to a form of meditation developed by mystics called *Lectio Divina*. The pondering of sentences here and there, that struck the reader as beautiful or intriguing, using them as a springboard to germinate the reader's own ideas and cultivate deep emotions. This method (which Rand apparently practiced in relation to her own work) also has a strong Platonic flavor in the sense that it is reminiscent of a contemplation of forms in an ideal world. I am indebted to Douglas Rasmussen for this latter observation, in private conversation. When all is said and done, can it seriously be maintained that a fictional character in a novel contemplated as a supreme object of worship, shows engagement and commitment to "this world," to "reality," while the objects of worship for mystics show abandonment of the world and reality in favor of another, imaginary one?

19. It could validly be objected that the use of such terms in an era scarred by Nazism would have been unwise. Nonetheless, in discarding such terms the proverbial baby has been thrown out with the bathwater—and without any benefit, since this baby sacrifice did not spare Rand from accusations of fascism, which are still routinely mouthed today. Besides, the alternative of positing Roark as fully human and Keating as subhuman, which Rand proposes in one of her letters, seems even less palatable (letter to O. W. Kracht [4 March 1945] in Berliner 1995, 225): "Roark is the only one in the book who is completely human—man as he should be. Keating is subhuman. If Keating were the typical representative of humanity, we would never have risen out of the swamp and the cave."

20. "Arise, awake, and learn by approaching the exalted ones, for that path is sharp as a razor's edge, impassable, and hard to go by, say the wise" (Katha Upanishad n.d.).

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