

Altruism in Ayn Rand's The Fountainhead

Dr. Pradip.G.Sonawane

Late M.D.Sisode Alias Bhausahab

Arts & Commerce College, Nardana, Tal.

Shindkheda, Dist.Dhule. Maharashtra (India)

ABSTRACT

Altruism is not a synonym for kindness, generosity or good will but the doctrine that man should place others above self as the fundamental rule of life. Ayn Rand has covered this ground too well in theory, practices in history and from every aspect. The concept of altruism advocates self-sacrifice and consistency. *Altruism* is not a simple benevolence or charity but rather the moral and political obligation of the individual to sacrifice an interest for the sake of a greater social good. It has been man's ruling moral code through most of the history of mankind. The concept of altruism holds that man has no right to exist for his own sake. Man's service to others is the only justification of his existence and that self-sacrifice is his highest moral duty.

Ayn Rand wants to interpret that altruism is not a basic cause for brutality worship and that the cause lies in the fundamental philosophy of unreason. It lies in the epistemology of intrinsicism and subjectivism. Intrinsicism reduces cognition to revelation. The moral man's reward is life. The concept of altruism is also viewed by *Objectivism*. It is the idea that people live for others and place others above the self. The creators who are not altruists initiate or follow *Objectivism* are "self-sufficient", "self-motivated", and "self-generated" who serve no one but themselves. *Objectivism* leads the view beyond the perceptual level as a volitional adherence. The antagonist of a novel, Toohey is altruist who tries to degrade a protagonist, Roark who overcomes Toohey's motifs.

KEY WORDS: Altruism, Self-sacrifice, Objectivism, Individualist.

Ayn Rand believes that the individualist must above all things avoid the modern cult of altruism. *Altruism* is defined as self-sacrifice, self-immolation, self-abnegation, self-denial and ultimately self-destruction. According to her, *altruism* is a primitive phenomenon with subversion to a tribal ethic. It is used by the modern “second-handers” who cannot thrive in an open society to keep ‘the man of ability’ in his place. This axis has created the present “Age of Envy” in which the good are being hated for being good, the strong for being strong and the producer for being productive.

Ellsworth Toohey is an altruist who knows how to control people and chooses the role of a soul-collector over other courses in his life. His method is to find weakness and play on them. Toohey’s aunt says him: “You’re a maggot Elsie,” She told him once. “You feed on sores.” “Then I’ll never starve,” he answered.” (FH, 297) Toohey always considers that he helps to kill individual’s integrity by making him feel small, guilty and low. It is all done by preaching *altruism*, selfishness and egolessness and by destroying people’s hierarchy of values.

Ellsworth Toohey says:

“To achieve virtue in the absolute sense,” said Ellsworth Toohey, “a man must be willing to take the foulest crimes upon his soul-for the sake of his brothers. To mortify the flesh is nothing. To mortify the soul is the only act of virtue. So you think you love the broad mass of mankind? You know nothing of love. You give two bucks to a strike fund and you think you’ve done your duty? You poor fools! No gift is worth a damn, unless it’s the most precious thing you’ve got. Give your soul. To lie? Yes, if others believe it. To deceit? Yes, if others need it. To treachery, knavery, crime? Yes! To whatever it is that seems lowest and vilest in your eyes. Only when you can feel contempt for your own priceless little ego, only then can you achieve the true, broad peace of selfishness, the merging of your spirit with the vast collective spirit of mankind.”

(FH 300)

Toohey, as an altruist, recognizes a dangerous adversary in Howard Roark-an individualist. But in spite of Toohey’s all-out efforts to defeat Howard Roark and break his spirit, we see that Roark triumphs over law, religion and society. It is because Roark believes that man’s ego is the fountainhead of the human progress.

Throughout *The Fountainhead* Rand emphasizes that integrity is one of the distinguishing qualities between men who have retained their sense of self and men who have completely destroyed their egos, subordinating themselves to the ideas of equality and *altruism*. Gail Wynand gets pleasure out

of destroying other's integrity. He reveals both how much he longs to find a man who cannot be broken and how afraid he is that he might.

Gail Wynand's newspaper *The Banner* which deals with sensationalism and crudity dishes out what the public wants. It is a candid example of *altruism* which discourages all individuality and progress. Toohey has written a column, *One Small Voice* in *The Banner*. He preaches sentiments like unselfishness, brotherhood and equality. Some of the thoughts propagated by Ellsworth Toohey illustrate that he would rather be kind than right. Mercy is superior to justice. Everything that proceeds from the ego is evil.

Ellsworth Toohey says:

"Tell man that he must live for others.....Not a single one of them has ever achieved it and not a single one ever will. His every living impulse screams against it. But, don't you see what you accomplish? He'll obey ...use big vague words. a Universal harmony, Eternal spirit, Divine spirit, a paradise, a Radical supreme." (FH, 230)

Toohey makes his speech to a terrified Keating. Everything else he says is purposefully empty of real meaning. There is a sinister inner working of Toohey's mind. When Toohey defines "big vague words", he uses concepts from real-world ideologies and religions.

Ayn Rand steps from the allegorical world into the real world. She tells us exactly which groups she abhors and exactly which groups she means to pillory with her allegory. Rand wants to condemn every concept the arch villain Toohey supports. He uses the religious phrases "External Spirit", "Divine purpose", "Paradise", "Nirvana" and "Universal Harmony" suggesting Rand's low opinion of organized religion like Christianity and Buddhism.

Mimi Reisel Gladtein comments on the character of Toohey as an altruist: *"By making humans feel small, guilty and low, he helps kill their integrity."*¹ The spirit of *altruism* is a message which is very vociferously propagated by Ellsworth Toohey. He organizes a club of Wynand employees, where he makes most of the speeches to advocate the idea of altruism. In addition to this, he regularly attends the meetings of the Council of American Builders, the Council of American Writers, and the American architects which he organizes.

Ayn Rand propounds: *"Here they did not talk so much about the proletariat but merely rebelled against the tyranny of reality and of the objective."* (FH, 30) These Councils sign a declaration which states that writers are servants of the proletariat. The member artists are all directionless and do not

know what they are doing. Lois Cook is a writer. She is a product of the depraved tastes of an altruistic society. She is the author of *The Gallant Gallstone* a mediocre book which has become famous due to an altruistic spirit encouraged by Toohey.

Lois Cook has no delusions about the quality of her work, but argues that work is not important, that words should be faced from the stranglehold of reason. This large, unkempt woman lives on inherited money; she wants to build the ugliest house in New York. She is a part of Toohey's inner circle.

The characters such as Howard Roark and Domonique represent freedom while characters such as Ellsworth Toohey, Gail Wynand, and Lois Cook represent the forces of coercion. Toohey claims that "only by accepting total compulsion can we achieve total freedom." At that point in the novel, the problems with Toohey's claim are fairly altruistic.

Austen Heller, a man of integrity fights coercion wherever he sees it. Neither Heller nor the reader recognizes Toohey for what he is, despite the fact that Toohey's book, *Sermons in Stone*, has already been discussed. The tension between freedom and coercion also lies at the heart of several character conflicts.

Dominique lives her life solely to ensure freedom of action and movement but that obsession with freedom prevents her from possessing real happiness for seven years. Wynand believes that the power he possesses buys him all the freedom he needs. At another time, he claims that he has traded his freedom for power and by the end of the novel he learns that he has neither freedom nor power.

Works Cited

1. Mimi Reisel Gladsten. *The Ayn Rand Companion*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1984, p.56.