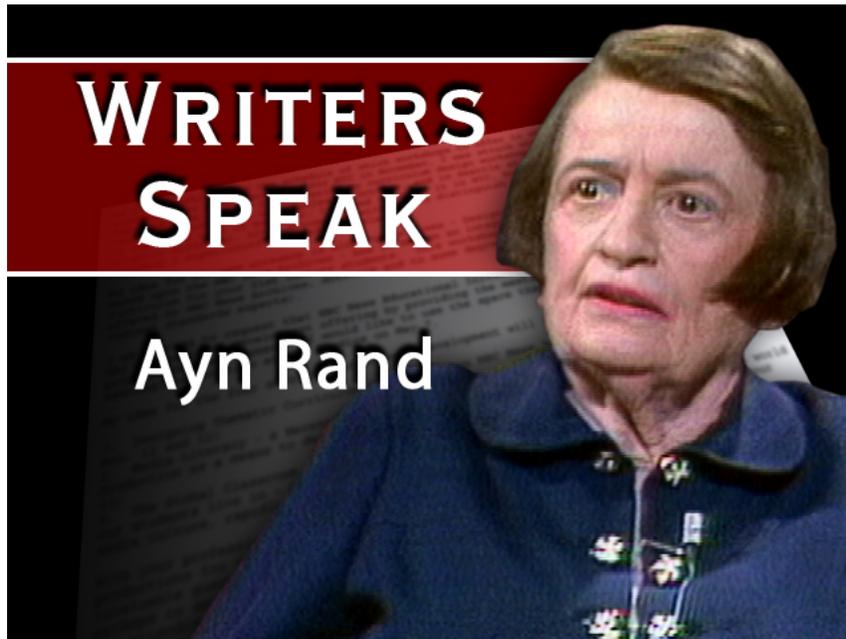


Rand: "Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology"

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Description

In a 13-minute interview with "Tomorrow" host Tom Snyder, author Ayn Rand explains the philosophy of objectivism--acting on the basis of reason, not emotion--and says writing novels is "killingly difficult."

Keywords

Ayn Rand, Philosophy, Objectivism, Rational Thought, Rationality, Reason, Choice, Independent Thought, Religion, Faith, Rules, Morality, Immorality, Reality, Science, Nature of Existence, Perception, Childhood, Intelligence, School, Boredom, End of Life, Afterlife, Life, Life After Death, Reincarnation, Eternity, True, Truth, Theologian, Dogma, Dogmatist, "Atlas Shrugged", "The Fountainhead", "Introduction to Objective Epistemology", Author, Book, Screenplay, Writer, Novel, Writing Novels, Inspiration, Structure, Outline, Leningrad, Russia, Writers Speak

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Transcript

Ayn Rand: "Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology"

TOM SNYDER, anchor:

Now, here's Ayn Rand who is the author, as I say, of "The Fountainhead" and "Atlas Shrugged", and the other one I can't remember because it's a longer title.

AYN RAND (Author, "Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology"): Of a novel?

SNYDER: No, no, no, not the novel – the new book that you have out – Objectivist -

RAND: "Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology".

SNYDER: Exactly. Now, you said that you wouldn't mind – yes, we are. You said that you wouldn't mind if I didn't read that book. You told that to my staff.

RAND: That's right.

SNYDER: And I didn't. I confess that to you. I wanna be very basic here because there are many people who don't understand objectivism who don't know what it is, but who have read much about Ayn Rand and have read her books kind of wanna know where she's coming from, if I can use that phrase. So let's just basically say what objectivism is. Okay?

RAND: And make a long speech about it?

SNYDER: Oh, not too long.

RAND: Cause that's terribly difficult, you know. To begin with, it's a philosophy. It's a philosophic system and philosophy's the science that studies the basic nature of existence. So, it's a pretty technical subject and anything I say briefly will not really do justice to my philosophy, but I can try to summarize it.

SNYDER: Well, could I ask you some specifics then about it?

RAND: Sure.

SNYDER: Alright. How does - quote – "I" fit into the philosophy of objectivism? How does objectivism

relate to me, the individual? What does it do for me?

RAND: Are you a human being? Well, then it relates to you. It tells you how to lead your life and how to achieve things, how to be happy. It tells you the fundamental principles, by which you can make your own choices. Above all, it tells you that you have the means to make this choice, if your mind is valid, that the reality you perceive exists and that is epistemology. That's a branch of philosophy and it tells you how to make the best – by what principles to guide the basic choices of your life.

SNYDER: Now, there are many philosophies that would offer that to an individual.

RAND: Oh, yes.

SNYDER: There are religions that offer it. There are forms of government that offer it. How does -

RAND: Not forms of government. That's politics. That's a different branch. That comes later.

SNYDER: Well, yes, but governments in some areas, in some instances, would define for you choices or dictate to you how to live your life.

RAND: Yeah.

SNYDER: But I'll retract governments and just say religions are philosophies, aren't they? How does objectivism differ from the philosophies that many of us have been exposed to in our youths?

Philosophies based upon religions, theologians, dogmatists?

RAND: The very first difference - objectivism tells you that it is not right. It is not proper to man to take anything on faith. Religion is a matter of faith. You accept a religion emotionally or because you were born to it. You have not chosen it rationally. What objectivism will tell you is that reason, man's reason, is his basic means of survival. That is the most important faculty which he has and he has to guide his life and make his choices by means of his rational faculty. He has to make his own choices, but he has to know how to make them. It is immoral for him to act on his emotions. To be guided by the whim of the moment, that objectivism holds as very wrong, very immoral, and morality, in fact, consists of following your reason to the best of your ability so that rationality is the basic virtue from which all the others proceed.

SNYDER: Now, then, you believe this for yourself. Do you not? You accept this philosophy.

RAND: Oh, yes. Certainly.

SNYDER: It has guided your life. It has -

RAND: Yes. It has brought me what I need.

SNYDER: So that you believe in Ayn Rand for first and foremost.

RAND: Oh, certainly.

SNYDER: Not necessarily a God or a Heaven or a Hell or a government or other people or forces beyond your control, but you believe in you.

RAND: Uh, I wouldn't put it that way. I would say that yes it's true to some extent, but it's very inexact cause it's just a matter of faith. I have confidence in my own rational ability, but more than that, I also know that if I had less abilities than I have, no matter what happened to me, my mind is all that I have to guide me so that if I were me or the lowest girl in the class mentally, which I never was, the same morality would apply to me.

SNYDER: How smart – you brought now – you were not the dumbest girl in the class.

RAND: No.

SNYDER: How smart were you in school when you were a little girl?

RAND: Very. I was the top student. I went to two different schools in two different cities and I was the top student there.

SNYDER: In addition to being the top student, did they ever measure your intelligence and tell your mom and dad, “Oh, this girl is so bright. This girl is a jewel”?

RAND: No, by, in my time, they didn’t do those tests, not in Russia.

SNYDER: But you knew that you were smart?

RAND: Oh yes.

SNYDER: Did you feel that school was too slow?

RAND: Yes.

SNYDER: That you were so far ahead of the material?

RAND: Yes.

SNYDER: How did you handle that? How did you school yourself beyond the curriculum or curricula of the school?

RAND: Is it our interest to tell you?

SNYDER: Yes, it really is.

RAND: I always tried to sit in the back row of the class and put a book in front of me and I was writing novels from the age of 10. I was writing screenplays at 8, but I was writing novels in class because otherwise I would be terribly bored. I was never discovered because we had textbooks and if you read ahead of the lesson that they present in class, you could know what the teacher said. I had to read the textbook just once and then I knew the course so I really think it had a bad influence for me on my working discipline. It was too easy and too boring.

SNYDER: But how did it effect your working discipline?

RAND: I never had to make an effort. I certainly did have to when I began writing novels. That’s really difficult, but in school, I had no difficulties.

SNYDER: How was writing novels difficult for you?

RAND: Because it’s an enormous context that you have to keep in mind, an enormous structure you can do with inspiration. You can’t do it just by looking at the piece of paper once and deciding what you’re going to do. It’s a whole enormous structure, much more complicated than a building, and you have to keep it all in mind, never contradict your outline, and carry it out. It’s killingly difficult, but wonderful when you succeed at it. I mean, a good novel of course.

SNYDER: Do you recall what the first novel was you wrote when you were 10 years old, behind that book in the back row in school?

RAND: The very first one? I remember the first screenplay. Oh, the novel, I never finished. Wait a moment. No, I did finish it. Yes, I remember it. The one I didn’t finish, I started in college. I remember it, but don’t make me tell you the plot.

SNYDER: No, I will not, but I would like to think that somewhere that manuscript is in a drawer in your house or in a box up in a closet.

RAND: It's probably bombed out of existence in Leningrad.

SNYDER: So it exists then only in your mind?

RAND: Yeah. I didn't bring it with me.

SNYDER: When did you discover or think up or allow objectivism to become your philosophy?

RAND: From the time that I remember myself, which is 2 ½. The first incident of my life I can remember, I was 2 ½ and from that time on to the present, I never changed my convictions. Only at 2 1/2, I didn't know as much as I know now, but the fundamental approach was the same. I've never had to change.

SNYDER: Why has it worked for you?

RAND: Because it's true. Because it corresponds to reality. Because it is the right philosophy. By true, I mean it corresponds to reality. Therefore, it permits me to deal with reality properly and it, first of all, tells me, I have to use my judgment, not my emotions, my judgment.

SNYDER: Why do you think that religions have attracted more people to their philosophies than objectivism has attracted people to its?

RAND: Well, first of all, they had much longer time. Now, remember religion is older than objectivism. I don't think I would want to attract as many people as religions do, but the real and serious answer is this. A religion is a primitive form of philosophy because what religion and philosophy have in common is that it's a system of background premises. It gives you a frame of reference, a context, in fundamental terms, and then you leave the completes of your life accordingly. So, religion is primitive canned philosophy if you want it. It gives you canned answers and it says here you can rely on it. You don't need to think. It will tell you what to do in practically every situation. Just obey us. Take us on faith. Well, why do people accept it? Because nobody can leave without a philosophy.

SNYDER: Yeah.

RAND: Even the most primitive, unthinking man needs something to tie all of his actions, ideas, and his life together. He needs integration. Religion provides it to him ready-made. Philosophy, properly, does the same thing, but it offers an idea, a context to his mind and it demands of him that he judge it, that he use his own intelligence to understand and then to accept the kind of basic premises that he'll live his life by.

SNYDER: In my youth, I was well schooled in religious doctrine and I would not, for a second, say to you that I now believe in it as dogmatically as I did when I was a young person and had it taught to me by a rote, but I still wouldn't wanna think that all of us pass through the experience of life and then, when it comes to an end, that's simply the end of it and has no other purpose. I'm kind of trapped there. I would like to think that there is something beyond the end of this thing we call life.

RAND: But tell me, suppose that you were convinced that there isn't, what difference would it make to you now?

SNYDER: Oh, it would make a tremendous difference to me.

RAND: Yeah, I think so, but it – for the better.

SNYDER: Well, you see, I think for the worse. I wouldn't like the believe that when this body dies that this spirit is now gone that its defeated.

RAND: It's not defeated. Think of it the other way. If you know that this life is all that you have, wouldn't you make the most of it?

SNYDER: Well, I -

RAND: Cause then I think, well, if I don't enjoy this life, if I'll have limitless number of lives coming yet, I can be wasteful of my own life.

SNYDER: No, I don't think that. I don't think I would want to waste a second of this. I do waste some seconds and I'll bet Ayn Rand wastes some seconds.

RAND: Well, they're not wasted. Yes, you mean I'm doing nothing with them, just drifting.

SNYDER: Well, or creatively wasting time.

RAND: Creative waste. That's right.

SNYDER: Alright, but I still would like to think, not that I wanna come back as a Maharashi or anything like that. I tend to think of this whole thing as ongoing, that there is an eternity and that we are going to be a part of that eternity, that we aren't just corpses in graves when we die.

RAND: But we aren't corpses in graves. We're not there. Don't you understand that when this life is finished you're not there to say "oh how terrible that I'm a corpse"? No.

SNYDER: Well, this is true.

RAND: It's finished and what I've always thought was a sentence from some great philosopher that I don't, unfortunately, remember who it was, that I read at 16 and it's effected me all my life. "I will not die. It's the world that will end." And that's absolutely true and you know, for me now, it should be a serious question because my time is fairly limited and I have the same feeling that I will enjoy life to the last moment and when it's the end, I don't have to worry. I'm not there. It's too bad that the world will end and a very wonderful world will end with me, but I've had my time. I can't complain.