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Katniss Shrugged:  
The Problematic Legacy of Ayn Rand in Contemporary American Young Adult  
Dystopian Literature

Steven N. Beckett

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Abstract

In this thesis, I examine Ayn Rand's *magnum opus* *Atlas Shrugged* and her philosophy of Objectivism, in order to explain how contemporary American young adult critical dystopias are the literary heirs to Rand's Americanist sociopolitical female-driven novels of rebellion in the face of totalitarian governments. Interwoven with my study on Rand, I focus on four trilogies: *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins, *The Testing* by Joelle Charbonneau, *Matched* by Ally Condie, and *Divergent* by Veronica Roth. In examining these works through an Objectivist lens, I make an original contribution to the field of literary criticism by addressing the legacy of Rand's political and ethical philosophy in these contemporary YA critical dystopias.

I focus on Ayn Rand, her influence on politics and literature, and the similarities between her work, *Atlas Shrugged*, and these contemporary YA critical dystopias. I argue that Rand created an archetype of the female rebel that we now see emerging in the identified texts, the coming-of-age Randian heroine; i.e., a young female protagonist with an ethical system that is congruous with Objectivism. It is through the use of this archetype, that these contemporary YA critical dystopias promote a political and ethical philosophy that is consistent with Rand's Objectivism. Furthermore, that these works provide young adult readers with a uniquely Objectivist solution to contemporary American social concerns through the actions of their coming-of-age Randian heroines.

I conclude by addressing the need for further research into how Rand's work has influenced other areas of literature, philosophy, politics, and society in America and beyond.

**Katniss Shrugged:**  
The Problematic Legacy of Ayn Rand in Contemporary  
American Young Adult Dystopian Literature

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Steven N. Beckett

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A Thesis submitted for the degree of:  
Doctor of Philosophy

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Department of English Studies  
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# **Part I – Non-Contradiction: Framing**

# Chapter 1 – Dystopian & Young Adult Dystopian Literature

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## Dystopian Literature

Conventional wisdom and scholarship places the birth of the dystopian novel in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Over the course of most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a steady stream of dystopian novels were regularly published, with increases at or near times of war, political upheaval, and technological advancement. As an academic area of study, dystopian works have often been attached to utopian studies, science fiction, or contemporary literature.

The term dystopia is rather straightforward in its evolution. In his 1994, and now highly cited, article “The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited,” Lyman Tower Sargent set the record straight by properly pointing out that there is a discrepancy in the use of the word “utopia.” In both academic and non-academic circles the word “utopia” is often used with the intent of describing a perfect place or society; however, this is not the original meaning of the word. The word “eutopia,” derived from the Greek “eu” meaning “good” and “topos” meaning “place,” literally “good place,” was actually the first of the “topian” terms. The first major notion of a negative “eutopia” was in 1516 when Thomas More coined the term “utopia” with the publication of his work of the same name. Although the term derives from the Greek “ou” meaning “not” and again “topos” meaning “place,” literally meaning “not a place,” the two terms were confused in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and “utopia” became the term used to describe a “perfect place.” More’s *Utopia* was a work of satire so it is possible that the satirical element was lost on many individuals during the 17<sup>th</sup> century; however, it is also possible—and more likely—that the confusion arises from the fact that both terms are pronounced identically in English and “utopia” became the

dominant spelling. So it is that in this thesis that when referring to a perfect, ideal, or better than contemporary society the word “eutopia” will be used rather than “utopia.”

The next major moment in the negative “eutopia’s” history came when the term “cacotopia” was used by Jeremy Bentham in 1818, with the prefix coming from the Greek “Kakos” meaning “bad” or “wicked.” Writing in a *Plan for Parliamentary Reform, in the Form of a Catechism*, Bentham suggested, “As a match for utopia, (or the imagined seat of the best government,) suppose a cacotopia, (or the imagined seat of the worst government)” (73). Although Bentham’s term did not pass the test of time, his student John Stuart Mill used it along with a new term fifty years later while speaking before the British House of Commons. Mill stated, “It is, perhaps, too complimentary to call them Utopians, they ought rather to be called dys-topians, or caco-topians” (Trahair 110). Although Mill was making a political point and not a literary one, the term “dystopia” eventually emerged as the dominant antonym to “eutopia” or the common “utopia.” In *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* Brian M. Stableford notes that the “recent fashionableness [of the term ‘dystopia’] probably stems from its use in *Quest for Utopia* (1952)” by Glenn Negley and J Max Patrick (Stableford).

The dystopian literary genre “began to proliferate in the last decades of the nineteenth century” (Stableford). While the genre has touched on many themes, predominantly taking place in future societies, “The single most prolific stimulus to the production of dystopian visions has been the political polarization of capitalism and socialism,” wherein the majority has been anti-socialist (Stableford). Skepticism of technology, often portrayed in narratives where machines have taken over society, was also a popular topic of early dystopias, establishing a trend of addressing social concerns and anxieties beyond politics. “Revolution against a dystopian regime was

to become a staple plot” in the middle part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, in the years following World War II:

Many of these novels are neither accusations directed at particular social forces nor attempts to analyse the nature of the dystopian state, but seem to be products of a new kind of incipient despair; only a few [...] offer a significant note of hope in their account of rebellion against evil circumstance. This, it appears, was a period of history in which US-UK society lost its faith in the probability of a better future, and the dystopian image was established as an actual pattern of expectation rather than as a literary warning device. (Stableford)

Thankfully, this pattern of pessimism, wherein society accepted the dystopian image as inevitable, faltered “During the 1960s [when] a whole series of reasons for believing in a dystopian future were discovered – to justify rather than to cause the pessimistic outlook typical of the time” i.e., the Cold War (Stableford).

In his article Sargent also does an excellent job of establishing a set of definitions for seven key terms in the field of utopian studies, which at the time included definitions that would cover most dystopian works that had been published:<sup>1</sup>

**Table 1 (Lyman Tower Sargent’s Definitions)**

Utopianism	Social dreaming.
Utopia	A non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space.
Eutopia or positive utopia	A non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably better than the society in which that reader lived.
Dystopia or negative utopia	A non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived
Utopian satire	A non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located

<sup>1</sup> Any reference to a term that is listed in the table is done so with the intent that Sargent’s definition be applied unless expressly noted otherwise in the text.

	in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as a criticism of that contemporary society.
Anti-utopia	A non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as a criticism of utopianism or of some particular eutopia.
Critical utopia	A non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as better than contemporary society but with difficult problems that the described society may or may not be able to solve and which takes a critical view of the utopian genre.

However, as the genre continued to expand and evolve an additional definition became all the more pertinent. With the exception of the terms “utopianism” and “utopia,” all of Sargent’s definitions require that authorial intent be established, making the assignment of any particular definition to a given text problematic. Within negatively depicted fictional societies it can be quite difficult, if not impossible, to determine whether or not the author intended their depiction to be viewed by the reader as “considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived” or “as a criticism of that contemporary society”, thus making it indiscernible as to if a text is a “dystopia or negative utopia” or a “utopian satire,” respectively. In 2001 Sargent added an eighth definition, this one for the “critical dystopia”:

a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as worse than contemporary society but that normally includes at least one eutopian enclave or holds out hope that the dystopia can be overcome and replaced with a eutopia. (“US Eutopias” 222)

With this new term and definition, the defining attribute separating a “critical dystopia” from a “dystopia or negative utopia” or a “utopian satire” is the fact that

critical dystopias have “at least one eutopian enclave or holds out hope that the dystopia can be overcome and replaced with a eutopia.” With this added requirement, it is clear that all of the works discussed in this thesis most aptly fall into the category of critical dystopia because they have elements of a positive ending.

## **Young Adult Dystopian Literature**

It would seem that the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been a Golden Age for Young Adult dystopian literature. As previously discussed, the term dystopia originated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The term “young adult” also originated at this time. While in the past there were works that were widely read by readers in the age group we now call Young Adults, in its earliest acknowledgments it was simply referred to as “Books for Young Persons” by author and critic Sarah Trimmer in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century (Grenby xv). Even “until World War II, the term *young adult*—like its apparent synonym *teenager*—was scarcely used at all,” mostly because society necessitated that children transition into the workforce at a young age and take on adult-like responsibilities (Cart 3).<sup>2</sup> We saw the first hugely successful novel specifically aimed at the emerging young adult population when S. E. Hinton published *The Outsiders* in 1967 (Michaud).<sup>3</sup> The following decades saw novels of varying success and an increase in publication of YA works.

During the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the adult genre of dystopian literature saw individual social issues become the driving force behind many narratives, this was in contrast with earlier dystopian works that focused primarily on political and economic systems, i.e., capitalism and socialism. Although politics

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<sup>2</sup> Original emphasis.

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that *The Outsiders* was not immediately successful upon publication and gained success only after being used by teachers in classrooms. Furthermore, *The Outsiders* was not the first YA novel, for more on this topic, see Eschner (full citation provided in the bibliography).

remained prevalent in dystopian literature, it became more of a conduit to justify how such extreme societal predicaments could exist. While works in the so-called “adult” genre of dystopian literature continued to be produced at approximately the same rate during the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, dystopian literature in general has seen a large uptick in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, strongly because of the influx of YA works.<sup>4</sup>

Explaining the nature of critical dystopias, Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan note in the introduction of *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination* that “the new critical dystopias allow both readers and protagonists to hope by resisting closure” suggesting that, “the ambiguous, open endings of these novels maintain the utopian impulse *within* the work” (7).<sup>5</sup> This type of ending is in contrast to many so-called adult dystopian works where often the protagonist is doomed and the society continues to be just as dystopian as it was at the start of the work, if not more so.<sup>6</sup> Critical dystopias, as opposed to dystopias, are most often found in the children’s and YA genres. When looking at dystopian-orientated texts for readers that are children, Kay Sambell notes that “The convention of the happy ending, in which answers or solutions are eventually supplied, a reassuring return to normality is secured, or a successful outcome to the hero’s quest is achieved, is so pervasive that it amounts to an unwritten law in the production of children’s books” (Sambell 165). This trend among dystopian texts in children’s literature results in the majority of them technically falling into the category of critical dystopia. When examining the dystopian genre within YA literature, critical dystopias are also exceeding common; however, they fall somewhere in the middle of the spectrum

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<sup>4</sup> For more about the increasing popularity of YA dystopian literature in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, see Ames (full citation provided in the bibliography).

<sup>5</sup> Original emphasis.

<sup>6</sup> The most notable examples being *Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

between highly ambiguous dystopias for adults and highly positive critical dystopias for children.

I argue that the conclusion for many critical dystopias written for the YA audience tend to be less ambiguous and open ended than adult critical dystopias but not entirely conforming to the optimistic ending in children's critical dystopias where the world is often guaranteed to be a better place. Many YA critical dystopias end with the protagonist achieving their goal, yet not necessarily with the protagonist living through the experience that resulted in that achievement. Furthermore, while YA critical dystopias typically produce a positive ending, they tend to do so with a certain amount of skepticism. More often than not, the protagonist is pitted against a dystopian government; however, the government is only one aspect of what make the protagonist's world dystopian. Usually a war, disease, or natural disaster has plunged the world into a dystopia that allows for a dystopian government to emerge. Despite the protagonist's success, the physical world is still a dystopia and there is little guarantee that another equally dystopian government will not emerge. The extent of the open or happy ending is always novel specific, but simply because a novel ends on a more or less positive note does not discount it from being a critical dystopia.

Baccolini and Moylan also describe the nuances of critical dystopias noting that "Another device that opens up these texts is an intensification of the practice of genre blurring" adding that "critical dystopias more often blur the received boundaries of the dystopian form and thereby expand its creative potential for critical expression" (*Dark Horizons* 7). Often based in the future, many YA critical dystopias have science fiction themes and advanced technology; even when their dystopian setting has resulted in a loss of technological knowledge, they often still have access to technology that is beyond our contemporary knowledge. The works are also often

represented as a coming-of-age story where the protagonists discover the dystopian nature of their society while trying to find his or her place in said society. During their literary journey, protagonists are often faced with social, economic, gender, class, race, and political inequality that they aim to remove or must overcome in order to achieve their goal.

One of the first major texts in the current flood of dystopian literature for young readers was Lois Lowry's *The Giver* in 1993, which Carrie Hintz notes, "sensitized readers to the important subgenre of utopian and dystopian writing for children and young adults" (Hintz 254). Although the remainder of the 1990s produced little more in the form of YA dystopias, the major exception being *Among the Hidden*, Margaret Peterson Haddix's first novel in the Shadow Children series, the turn of the century saw an explosion of YA dystopian literature. The natural inclination is to point the metaphorical finger at Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* trilogy because it has seen the most commercial success in both literary and cinematic forms, yet it is important to note that the first novel of the trilogy was not published until 2008. Many other YA dystopias were published before *The Hunger Games* and enjoyed success: Margaret Peterson Haddix completed the other six novels in her Shadow Children series, Jeanne DuPrau published all four books in her post-apocalyptic dystopian *City of Ember* series, and Scott Westerfeld published the four novels that make up his *Uglies* series. Although the success of *The Hunger Games* trilogy added to the popularity of YA dystopias and likely influenced publishing companies to publish more novels in this genre, no single text or series is single-handedly responsible for the trend.

We have also seen increased critical attention being given to YA dystopias in the wake of their popularity, particularly in regard to *The Hunger Games* and

*Divergent* trilogies. Two notable works are *The Hunger Games and Philosophy: a Critique of Pure Treason* edited by George A. Dunn and Nicholas Michaud and *Divergent and Philosophy: The Fractions of Life* edited by Courtland Lewis.<sup>7</sup> Both of these works provide a variety of philosophical analyses on a great deal of topics from a range of authors, adding a significant amount of criticism to the growing body of work on YA dystopias. Another recent edited volume is *Contemporary Dystopian Fiction for Young Adults: Brave New Teenagers*, which examines some of the literary and political implications of a number of YA dystopias.<sup>8</sup> We have also seen focused analysis on YA dystopias published recently, namely *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction*.<sup>9</sup> In addition to these works, there is an increasing amount of scholarship on YA dystopias in YA and Children's literature journals, particularly *The Lion and The Unicorn* published by Johns Hopkins University Press. This growing body of scholarship on YA dystopian literature is paramount to understanding the literary, social, and political potential for these contemporary works.

The early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has also been subject to an increased critical interest in the literature of Ayn Rand and her philosophy of Objectivism. Following the financial crisis of 2008, sales of *Atlas Shrugged* skyrocketed, propelling her works and her philosophy back into mainstream discussion (Ganley). Subsequently, *Atlas Shrugged* was adapted into a three-part film series that were released in 2011, 2012, and 2014. While Rand and Objectivism had been largely dismissed by academics in

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<sup>7</sup> Full citations for both works provided in the bibliography (see Dunn and Lewis respectively).

<sup>8</sup> Full citation provided in the bibliography (see Basu).

<sup>9</sup> Full citation provided in the bibliography (see Day).

both the fields of literature and philosophy, they are beginning to take note of her importance in light of her increased presence following the 2008 financial crisis.<sup>10</sup>

In 2016, Adam Weiner, an Associate Professor of Russian and Comparative Literature at Wellesley College in the United States, published *How Bad Writing Destroyed the World: Ayn Rand and the Literary Origins of the Financial Crisis*. Although obviously highly critical of Rand, Weiner's account nevertheless demonstrates an academic taking Rand seriously as an author and philosopher, something Skye C. Cleary, associate director of the Center for New Narratives in Philosophy at Columbia University, argues more academics need to do. In her piece "Philosophy Shrugged: Ignoring Ayn Rand Won't Make Her Go Away," Cleary acknowledges that many academics "propose that [Rand is] not a philosopher at all and should not be taken seriously." However, Cleary sees this attitude as shortsighted, noting, "The problem is that people are taking her seriously. In some cases, very seriously." Because so many people are beginning to embrace Rand, Cleary suggests that as an academic community "it's time to admit that Rand is a philosopher," albeit in her opinion "not a very good one." Another academic that has begun to take Rand seriously is Neil Cocks of Reading University who is "currently working on a monograph provisionally entitled *Ayn Rand and Deconstruction*".<sup>11</sup> Writing about a future conference he is planning to stage, Cocks argues, "Rand has emerged as a major force within contemporary culture, one that meets with little organized

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<sup>10</sup> While articles and books about Rand, her fiction, and her philosophy have been published, these have primarily, but not exclusively, been products written by Rand acolytes or staunch critics. One notable exception of a nonpartisan analysis of Rand is *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right* by Jennifer Burns.

<sup>11</sup> This information comes from Neil Cocks's staff page at Reading University (full citation provided in the bibliography under Cocks).

resistance”.<sup>12</sup> Given her previous role as president of the American Studies Association, Lisa Duggan, Professor of Social and Cultural Analysis at New York University, who has a forthcoming monograph entitled *Mean Girl: Ayn Rand and the Culture of Greed*, is perhaps the academic with the most public profile to take an interest in Rand.<sup>13</sup> While many academics tend to hold a clearly negative opinion of Rand, often evidenced by the titles of their works, the growing body of scholarship that they are contributing to confirms an increased interest in Rand and, more crucially, an acknowledgement that she needs to be taken seriously as an author, philosopher, and cultural influence.

While the growing body of scholarship on Rand demonstrates that more and more academics are taking her seriously, other groups have been taking her seriously for quite some time. As discussed in the next chapter, Rand has influenced several generations of authors and continues to have a strong literary presence. Furthermore, though often ignored by those on the political left, Rand has been highly influential with those on the political right. Examining how Rand has historically influenced politics and literature will provide context for how Rand and her philosophy of Objectivism can be seen to be influencing the identified contemporary YA critical dystopias.

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<sup>12</sup> This information comes from a conference page linked from Cocks’s staff page (full citation provided in the bibliography under Cocks).

<sup>13</sup> This information comes from the University of California Press website (full citation provided in the bibliography under University of California Press).

## **Chapter 2 – Rand: Check Your Premises**

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### **A Brief Biography of Ayn Rand**

In the opening paragraph of *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right*, Jennifer Burns describes “a wintry day in 1918 when the Red Guard pounded on the door of Zinovy Rosenbaum’s chemistry shop. The guards bore a seal of the State of Russia, which they nailed upon the door, signaling that it had been seized in the name of the people” (Burns 9). Witness to this event was Zinovy’s twelve-year-old daughter, Alisa, who would later, upon moving to America in 1926 at the age of twenty-one, take the name Ayn Rand. This event, like most of her time in Russia, had a profound influence on Rand’s political philosophy. Burns notes that Rand “burned with indignation” when her father’s shop was seized (9). Rand took issue with “those who invoked such lofty ideals” and came to believe that “Talk about helping others was only a thin cover for force and power” when it came to politics and governments (9).

Her family suffered greatly in the years following the seizure of her father’s shop, but the revolution did allow Rand to enroll at Petrograd State University. The Bolsheviks’ liberalization of higher education “made tuition free, creating a flood of new students, including women and Jews, whose entrance had previously been restricted” (Burns 15). As a student, Rand “was immune to the passions of revolutionary politics [...] In her first year [Rand] was particularly outspoken. Then the purges began. Anticomunist professors and students disappeared, never to be heard from again.” Rand herself was victim to this purge and was “briefly expelled” for having a “bourgeois background.” Upon her readmittance, Rand was “Acutely aware of the dangers she faced” and “became quiet and careful with her words.” The Marxist influence in her education—enforced by the government—made her

“skeptical of the education she received,” however, as Burns notes, Rand would later “considered herself an authority on propaganda, based on her university experience. ‘I was trained in it by experts,’ she explained to [Isabel Paterson]” (16).

Rand had several romantic interests that had a profound impact on her prior to her marriage to Frank O’Connor in 1929. Most notable was a man named Lev Bekkerman, whom she had met through “a social group of young men and women called Uno Momento” while still living in Russia (McConnell 51). Burns notes that Lev “had no genuine interest in a romance, soon abandoning her for other pursuits. [Rand] was crushed. Lev symbolized all the lost possibility of her life in Russia” (Burns 18). According to Burns, following the separation Rand could be heard by her parents “shouting with despair behind her bedroom door.” Lev later served, to some extent, as the inspiration for at least two characters in her fictional works, Leo Kovalensky in *We the Living* and Francisco d’Anconia in *Atlas Shrugged* (McConnell 50-51). Although she eventually married Frank O’Connor, Rand came to believe that “To desire was to need, and Rand wanted to need nobody,” which led her to create “a fictional world where beautiful, glamorous, and rich heroines dominated their suitors” (Burns 22).

While this is but a brief summary of Rand’s life prior to arriving in America, it reveals a person that had good reason to dislike and distrust the ideas of communism, socialism, and collectivism. Rand’s experiences at university taught her how to create her own form of propaganda and of the negative consequences of a society controlled entirely by the government. Her short-lived relationship with Lev Bekkerman, her reaction to its ending, and how she moved on reveal one of the reasons she wrote such strong female characters. These experiences, and no doubt many others, influenced Rand’s Philosophy. Her desire “to need nobody” likely advanced—if not cemented—

her thoughts on individualism (Burns 22). Individualism and egoism came naturally to Rand, evidenced by her viewing “herself as ‘a child of destiny’” (11). It is of little surprise that someone with Rand’s background, experiences, and self-perception would go on to write about and create a philosophy rooted in ethical egoism.

Rand was never one to shy away from her beliefs or ideas and included them even in her fictional works, the first of which was *We the Living* in 1936. Set in post-revolutionary Russia, the novel follows Kira Argounova and her struggles living under communism. An inherently political work, Rand uses the story to denounce communism and its collectivist values. In 1938 she published *Anthem*, a dystopian novella about a man called Equality 7-2521, in which she championed individualism over collectivism. This was followed by her first literary success, *The Fountainhead* in 1943. *The Fountainhead* is the story of Howard Roark, an architect that refuses to design his buildings according to established convention. In this novel Rand again focuses on individualism over collectivism as a moral system. Her final fictional work, which will be discussed at length later, was *Atlas Shrugged* in 1957. This story is told from multiple points-of-view, but mainly focuses on Dagny Taggart, a railroad executive. *Atlas Shrugged* combines the themes of her previous works and promotes capitalism and individualism while attacking communism and collectivism. It is in *Atlas Shrugged* that Rand truly began to put down the framework for her philosophy that she would later call Objectivism.

Following *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand began to focus exclusively on philosophy and politics in her writings and speeches.<sup>14</sup> To promote and explain her theory of Objectivism she wrote many essays for “The Objectivist Newsletter” that were later published as a collection titled *The Virtue of Selfishness* in 1964. Her other

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<sup>14</sup> For an in-depth account of Rand’s philosophic thought, see Rasmussen & Uyl (full citation provided in the bibliography).

philosophical and non-fiction works include, but are not limited to: *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal* (1966); *The New Left: The Anti-Industrial Revolution* (1971), later retitled *Return of the Primitive: The Anti-Industrial Revolution* (1999); and *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology* (1979).<sup>15</sup> It is in these four works that Rand explains the vast majority of her theory of Objectivism. While these works were and continue to be far less influential in promoting individualism, capitalism, and Objectivism than her fictional works, namely *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*, they are paramount to understanding Objectivism as a philosophical system.

### **Political Influence**

As both an author of fiction and as a philosopher, Ayn Rand has had a far greater impact on contemporary American society than many realize or are willing to admit. Given her history of writing about the world of commerce, it is not surprising that Rand has always found an accepting audience in persons of business. Many have openly admitted to being influenced by Rand, including Mark Cuban, owner of the Dallas Mavericks (Ruhlin); James M. Kilts, former CEO of the Gillette Company (Rubin, “Ayn Rand’s Literature”); Neal Patterson, CEO of Cerner Corporation (Herper); T. J. Rodgers, founder of Cypress Semiconductor (D’Souza); Ed Snider, former chairman of Comcast Spectacor (Yamamura); Peter Thiel, co-founder of PayPal (Meyer); and Jimmy Wales, co-founder of Wikipedia (Finkelstein). Another area where Rand’s ideas have gained acceptance and been influential is in the world of politics, particularly among Libertarians, libertarian-leaning conservatives, and those involved with the Tea Party movement.

Rand’s influence gained recent recognition in mainstream political discussion

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<sup>15</sup> For analysis of Rand’s Objectivist epistemology, see Binswanger (full citation provided in the bibliography). It should be noted that Binswanger was a personal friend to Rand and has served on the board of the Ayn Rand Institute since 1986.

in 2012 when opponents of Paul Ryan, then a candidate for Vice President, made note of his long appreciation of Rand’s literature and political theories. However, Paul Ryan was not the first politician to admit to having a Randian influence and—as the Trump administration has proven—certainly not the last. The most notable Randian to serve in government was Alan Greenspan, a member of Rand’s inner circle ironically called the Collective (Burns 149). Greenspan served as coordinator on domestic policy during Richard Nixon’s 1968 nomination campaign, Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers during Gerald Ford’s presidency, and most notably as Chairman of the Federal Reserve from 1987-2006 (Biography.com Editors). Other politicians that have acknowledged the influence of Rand on their views include: Bob Barr, former Congressman from Georgia and 2008 Libertarian nominee for President (Lamberton); David Bergland, the Libertarian nominee for President in 1984 (Bergland and Block 45); David Nolan, one of the founders of the Libertarian Party (Nolan and Block 238); President Ronald Reagan (The Atlas Society);<sup>16</sup> Ron Paul, former Congressman from Texas and three time presidential candidate (Paul and Block 259); Rand Paul, Senator from Kentucky (Millhiser); and Clarence Thomas, Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States (Bidinotto). As this list suggests, Rand’s ideas have enjoyed particular influence on the political right in America.

It could be said that Ayn Rand’s influence on American politics began to increase as her control over her own ideas decreased. In 1968, the Nathaniel Branden Institute (NBI), which Rand had used to share her ideas, closed. Burns notes:

The break even had an invigorating effect on the spread of Objectivism, broadly considered, because the shuttering of NBI coincided with a new wave of right-wing activity on campus. As young conservatives began to mobilize against an increasingly radical

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<sup>16</sup> In a letter to William Vandersteel, Reagan stated, “Am an admirer of Ayn Rand.”

New Left, Rand's ideas became an important source of inspiration and guidance. And now, without the dictats [*sic*] of NBI, there was ample room for interpretation. No longer "students of Objectivism," those who liked Rand were free to call themselves Objectivist or libertarians...Rand's works were too potent and too popular to be confined or controlled, even by their creator. (247)

This was an incredibly important moment for Rand's influence; the fact that individuals could begin to take from Rand what they agreed with and leave behind that which they did not agree with has been paramount to the longevity of her ideas. Yet, it must be noted that this process did not take place overnight, and neither has been nor can be completely disassociated from her own ideas. Rather, they have been adopted by other movements. Between the years of 1968 and 1971, Rand's ideas slowly slipped away from her control and began to take on lives of their own as individuals began adapting them to their own political ideologies. Burns continues, "Once unleashed, Rand's ideas helped power an ideological explosion on the right that culminated in an independent libertarian movement." As noted above, David Nolan was particularly responsible for this, and in 1972 the Libertarian party was founded.

Despite Rand's lack of control over the newly founded Libertarian party, they remained, and continue to be, highly influenced by her. Burns notes, "In the early years there was a distinctly Objectivist flavor to the party" (267). Various types of Randian influences have come and gone within the party; however, the ones that remain constant are her fictional works, namely *Atlas Shrugged* and *The Fountainhead*. While libertarians, both members of the official party and those that simply identify with the movement, continue to read Rand's philosophical works, they are nowhere near as influential as her fiction. Although libertarian thinkers as a whole may not be as directly influenced by Rand's philosophy in her non-fiction works due to a lack of reading, they are being indirectly influenced by those same

ideas in her fictional works. Despite predating her non-fiction, Rand's fictional works are, in many ways, inseparable from the latter in that they present the same material in different literary forms.

## **Literary Influence**

Despite her previously stated political influence, “questions about Rand’s significance as a philosopher and a novelist continue to be debated vigorously in newspapers and magazines and across the Internet, academia remains, with some significant exceptions [...] largely silent on the issue” (Stockton 27). These exceptions are namely the Ayn Rand Institute, The Atlas Society, and *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies*. The Ayn Rand Institute and The Atlas Society are Objectivist think tanks that promote Rand’s philosophical and fictional works and have little interest in criticizing Rand or Objectivism. However, *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies*, created in 1999 by individuals that view Rand in a favorable light, allows academics to publish their research even if it is critical of Rand and/or her theory of Objectivism.

Writing in 2004 in *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies*, Jeff Riggensbach made a case for the “surprisingly widespread influence of Ayn Rand on American popular fiction” (94). Arguing “that Ayn Rand has exercised a truly decisive influence on a surprisingly large number of both well- and lesser-known authors of American popular fiction over the last forty years,” Riggensbach breaks these authors down into three categories (141). For Riggensbach these writers are generational: first came the Antediluvians who published “during Rand’s lifetime,” then the First Generation who “began publishing in the 1980s, after her death,” and finally the Second Generation who “began publishing in the first years of the new century” (105).

Riggensbach lists Kay Nolte Smith, L. Neil Smith, Ira Levin, Edward Cline, James P. Hogan, F. Paul Wilson, and Gene Roddenberry as the Antediluvians. The

First Generation is made up of Erika Holzer, J. Neil Schulman, Victor Koman, and Terry Goodkind. Those included on the list of Second Generation authors are Alexandra York, Karen Michalson, Helen Knode, and Beth Elliott. Riggenbach does state that there are others but that time and space prevent a full account of all those influenced by Rand in his article (141). It is also worth noting that Riggenbach's examples have admitted to being influenced by Rand and her works, be it her fiction or philosophy, so it is entirely possible that many others have been influenced by her but either kept it to themselves or are unconscious of her role in their own writing.

Regardless of which wave these individuals find themselves in, they all display one or more of three different types of Randian influence in their work: Surface, Deep, and/or Stylistic (Riggenbach 114). Surface Influence involves a writer borrowing "story ideas, characters, even specific incidents directly from the works of [Rand], recasting them only somewhat in the process, so that their source remains recognizable."<sup>17</sup> Deep Influence is when "the philosophical ideas dramatized by the story have clearly been influenced by" Rand. As could be expected, Stylistic Influence is when the "writer's prose style, or his style of drawing characters, or her style of storytelling, is clearly derived from the works of" Rand. It should be noted that these are types of influence, not carbon copies of Rand, her style, or philosophy.

To drive this point home, we might look at Gene Roddenberry, an Antediluvian, and Terry Goodkind, a First Generation. In supporting the claim that Roddenberry, the mastermind behind *Star Trek*, was influenced by Rand, Riggenbach points to an interview in the '70s when he admitted to reading *The Fountainhead* four or five times, along with *Atlas Shrugged*, and Rand's non-fiction work *The Romantic*

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<sup>17</sup> When explaining the three types of influence, Riggenbach notes that these are ways in which a writer is influenced by his/her mentor, not Rand specifically because any writer can be influenced in these ways by a mentor.

*Manifesto* (120). It is blatantly clear to even the most novice *Star Trek* viewer examining the work through a political lens that the philosophy of Starfleet and the United Federation of Planets is socialistic, a far cry from Rand's ideas. Nonetheless, Riggenschbach argues that Deep Influence from Rand's philosophical ideas do present themselves in Roddenberry's work. Supporting his claim, Riggenschbach cites Sondra Marshak:

When *Star Trek* says, "The universe is a place where the mind *can* know. Success is the result of deliberate actions," to a viewer who actually lives in an environment where people say with their every word, expression and deed, "Knowledge cannot cause success. My failure isn't my fault. You're not better than me, you're just lucky!"—then *Star Trek* feeds tremendous, vital energy to the real world. (Lichtenberg, Jacqueline, et al. 124)<sup>18</sup>

adding, "And in feeding such ideas to the real world, *Star Trek* is undeniably passing along, popularizing, a key element of Rand's vision of life" (Riggenschbach 121).

Although not expressly stated, this key element is the idea that knowledge and how an individual uses it are responsible for how successful they are, rather than blind luck.

While I agree with Riggenschbach's assessment, it takes a very in-depth reading and knowledge of *Star Trek* to come to the conclusion that this is evidence of Deep Influence.

On the other side are those like Terry Goodkind, a wildly commercially successful epic fantasy author, who exhibits both Stylistic and Deep Influence from Rand. As Riggenschbach points out, a speech by one of Goodkind's characters, Richard Cypher from *Faith of the Fallen*, sounds very Randian:

The only sovereign I can allow to rule me is reason. The first law of reason is this: what exists, exists; what is, is. From this irreducible, bedrock principle, all knowledge is built. This is the foundation from which life is embraced. Reason is a choice. Wishes and whims are not facts, nor are they a means to discovering them. Reason is our only way of grasping reality—it's our basic tool of survival. We are free to

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<sup>18</sup> Original emphasis.

evade the effort of thinking, to reject reason, but we are not free to avoid the penalty of the abyss we refuse to see. (Goodkind 26)

Riggenbach notes that if you “Set aside the charges of outright plagiarism” and look at this speech only in philosophical terms it is clearly Randian (132). Being both Stylistically and Deeply influenced by Rand, Goodkind does seem a bit of a carbon copy of her, save for his choice of genre. Being intensely influenced by Rand, Goodkind is among those that hang on her every word as doctrine that cannot be altered.

This comparison between Roddenberry and Goodkind illustrates the point that although many individuals in art, be it writing, cinema, or television, might be influenced by Rand, this influence can vary greatly. Goodkind is obviously and inarguably influenced by Rand, whereas the subtlety of Randian influences within Roddenberry’s work has led to critical dispute. The literature chosen for investigation in this thesis present themes, characters, and events that are all very similar to those created by Rand; however, there is no evidence to support that any of the authors were directly influenced by reading Rand. Rather, their works seem to be the literary heirs of a particular type of YA American literature of rebellion that reflects the ideas, values, and philosophy of Rand. While at the time of publication Rand’s works could only have been perceived as adult literature, it could be argued that the bulk of her audience is comprised of what we now call young adults.

## **The Rand Brand**

Writing in 2013, Will Stockton argued, “Measured in terms of political influence, Ayn Rand’s *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged* are the most important works of young adult fiction in modern America. Today’s libertarian and Tea Party movements would not be nearly so robust without *Atlas Shrugged*, especially, and its

defense of laissez-faire capitalism” (26). Although Stockton admits that neither work was ever intended to be classified as such, he nevertheless notes that both “have long found young people to be their most receptive readers” (26-27). In support of this, he points to the Ayn Rand Institute’s efforts to market the works to young people. This effort is directly stated in the Ayn Rand Institute’s mission statement and takes the form of essay contests and internships for high school and university students. The reasoning behind the Ayn Rand Institute’s decision is likely the recognition of how receptive young adults are to the political and philosophical messages of Rand’s works, not a recognition of them being YA.

Christopher Paolini, author of *Eragon*, notes that YA is an artificial classification because “you can write a book with all of the rape, murder, violence, and sex that you want and as long as the main characters are under 18 it is technically a YA or even Children’s book” (92Y Plus 5:49-6:02). Although blunt, Paolini is getting to the heart of what defines a work as YA. There are no hard and fast rules for what you will get in a YA work, there might be “rape, murder, violence, and sex,” but there just as easily could be none of those things. It is the marketing departments in publishing companies that ultimately decide what category a novel should fall in, with the age of the protagonist being one of the biggest contributing factors. That said, and although the age of the novel’s protagonist is often central in classifying it as YA, the themes in a novel can also play a major role in its classification. Stockton argues that despite Rand’s protagonists being adults “in a genre so focused on rebellious figures [...] Rand’s two novels read as rebellions against not only the youth focus but also the ethical prescriptions that have come to dominate young adult fiction” (28). This suggests that despite the age of Rand’s protagonists and the fact that her works were intended for adults, that meaningful conclusions can be drawn from analysis of her

works in comparison to the YA critical dystopias identified in this work, for both focus on rebellion and present protagonists with anti-authoritarian ethical beliefs.

Roberta Seelinger Trites notes that historically and most frequently YA or adolescent novels have presented “protagonists [that] must learn about the social forces that have made them what they are” (3). In learning about these social forces, “They learn to negotiate the levels of power that exist in the myriad social institutions within which they must function, including family; school; the church; government; social constructs of sexuality, gender, race, class; and cultural mores surrounding death” (3). The bulk of the narrative then consists of the protagonist discovering and learning about these social forces and the powers they have. The resolution comes “Once protagonists of the YA novel have learned to discursively negotiate their place in the domination-repression chain of power” (52). Or as Stockton puts it, “young adult novels more often, and often more didactically, treat conflict with compromise by gradually outlining the rules within which the protagonist must operate” (28). However, this is not the case in *Atlas Shrugged* or the other texts covered in this work. Aside from its designation as an adult text—which can be disputed—*Atlas Shrugged* and the texts discussed in this work share key themes—non-negotiation, fighting against a government or ruling power, female protagonists, and end in social change or the hope thereof. These themes make them distinct from historical YA novels that were dominated by male protagonists that were learning to understand their place within the existing fictional power structures of their societies.

When trying to account for this disparity between historical YA and the texts discussed in this work it is worth noting that in addition to being YA, they are also critical dystopias. Being generally dystopian does not guarantee that a text will preach non-negotiation or end in social change or the hope thereof; as previously noted, this

is specific to critical dystopias. Many dystopian works such as Huxley's *Brave New World*, Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and Golding's *Lord of the Flies*—considered by most as a YA novel—present stories where the characters must interact—mostly indirectly in the case of *Lord of the Flies*—with the social forces at work in their worlds. Just like the adolescent and YA novels discussed by Trites and Stockton, *Brave New World*, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and *Lord of the Flies* all result in the characters accepting the reality of the power structures of the world they live in. *Brave New World* presents a protagonist, John “the Savage,” who is dissatisfied with society and, unwilling to accept the social forces of his world, takes his own life in a macabre compromise. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* Winston and Julia attempt to challenge the social forces of their society only to eventually give in to Big Brother and accept their roles in society. Despite the power conflict in *Lord of the Flies*, both tribes of boys recognize the need for social organization and when rescued revert to their proper ages when in the presence of an adult, ultimately accepting the power structure of the real world. Given the narrative themes of compromise and societal stability, these three novels are evidence that a text does not preach non-negotiation or end in social change or the hope thereof simply by virtue of being dystopian, to do that it must be a critical dystopia. In fact, as dystopian works *Brave New World*, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and *Lord of the Flies* all have more in common with traditional YA than they do with YA critical dystopias.

However, Rand's “*The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged* preach nonnegotiation [*sic*]—the former by heroizing an architect who blows up his own building rather than see its design compromised, the latter by heroizing a group of ‘prime movers’ who go on strike and wait for the world to collapse” (Stockton 28). Furthermore, both of Rand's works end with the hope that things can get better,

suggesting that they too are critical dystopias. Similarly, the contemporary YA critical dystopias discussed in this work present situations where negotiation or compromise between protagonists and social powers do not take place, which necessitates a non-compromising or rebellious protagonist. Despite *Atlas Shrugged*, the previously mentioned texts, and the YA works discussed later all being placed under the umbrella term of dystopian literature, *Atlas Shrugged* and the YA works explored in this thesis are all actually critical dystopias, which is absolutely necessary in order for Rand's Objectivist influence to be present.

## Chapter 3 – With a Rebel Yell: Good “Bad Girls”

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### The American Rebel

The United States of America is a country born out of rebellion. As the first nation to successfully gain independence from a colonial power, it should come as no surprise that America has a love affair with rebel protagonists, be it in television, film, or literature. As discussed in detail below, since gaining independence, American authors of fiction have created some of the most potent and memorable rebels of the 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Often created in times of disillusionment, dissatisfaction, and war, the rebel has become increasingly popular in American literature, particularly following World War II. Historically, American authors have created rebels for both contemporary predicaments and times long past.

One of the early rebel stories of American literature is that of Hester Prynne, an adulteress that refuses to bow to a patriarchal colonial America in Nathaniel Hawthorne's 1850 novel *The Scarlet Letter*. Soon after, in 1851, came Captain Ahab, the monomaniacal sea captain that refuses to allow anything to get in the way of his revenge in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. Twenty-five years later, Mark Twain gave us Huck Finn, the independent thinking vagabond in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and, subsequently, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885). Following two World Wars and the start of the Cold War, the rebel character became all the more prominent in American literature. Holden Caulfield, the cynical and resentful protagonist in J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), is one of the most iconic rebels of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century. In 1953, Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* gave us Guy Montag, a book-burning fireman that becomes disillusioned with his futuristic dystopia. Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), set in the 1930s, presents

Atticus Finch, a southern white lawyer who makes the unpopular decision to defend a black man. The geopolitical tension of the Cold War gave rise to many social and political concerns—particularly those that effected youth and young adults—and consequently allowed rebels to emerge as dominant protagonists in both American society and literature.

Two terms that were in part responsible for the success of the rebel in the Cold War era are “identity” and “teenager.” Given how integral these terms have become to our understanding of society, it can be hard to remember that both are recent inventions. While the word “identity” is not new, the meaning most often associated with its uses in the social sciences and humanities “was coined in 1950 with the publication of Erik Erikson’s *Childhood and Society*” (Medovoi 5). This new definition was the first “to attach identity to such elements as individuality, nationality, racial grouping, and even sexual orientation” (6). Similarly, the term “teenager” “made its very first appearance at the close of the Second World War, in an article published by Elliot Cohen in a 1945 issue of the *New York Times Magazine*” (24). Leerom Medovoi notes, “In important respects, the new category of the teenager embodied a compromise that became foundational to the postwar regime of age. The young waived any claims on adulthood per se, but they retained certain privileges acquired during the war” (26). However, this was not the case for every teenager:

whenever a young person exercised his or her autonomy in a way that visibly defied adult wishes, s/he crossed over an important threshold of Cold War cultural meaning. In defiance, autonomy passed into the even more charged state of rebellion, transfiguring the teenager into the young rebel. If the teenager provided the metanarrative of identity with its character, the rebel provided it with plot: dissent, defiance, or even insurrection mounted against a social order of conformity. (30)

Of course, in both society and literature, not all teenagers are rebels. Likewise, not all rebels are juvenile delinquents. The ability to rebel—or to associate one’s self with a rebel—is often a means by which a teenager negotiates the course of discovering his or her own identity in the greater picture of society. In literature, rebellion is often used as a means for teenagers—both fictional teens and those reading the work—to understand and define their place in society. During the Cold War, however, America was—much like its teenagers—attempting to understand and define its place in society, albeit at a global level. The rebel thus became a character that not only represented young adult identity, but also a changing national identity.

Medovoi notes that following Erikson’s new understanding of “identity,” and during the early years of the Cold War, “critics and other readers would begin to interpret works of literature in terms of the ‘identities’ they depicted or explored” (Medovoi 54). However, these “identities” were not limited to the individual. Medovoi argues that during this period there was a “demand for a ‘new image’ of America”:

It hinged on an ideological reciprocity between literature and politics that could be called the protagonization of the America character; this was a process by which the literary value of American texts, old and new alike, became measured for their hermeneutic capacity to be read as allegories of national identity. (56)

It is important to note that this “demand for a ‘new image’ of America” was not only sought after in the field of literature or the arts but in nearly every aspect of American society. Exiting World War II in an ideological battle with the only other remaining superpower, America needed to define itself, not just for the rest of the world but also for itself. Literature, “old and new alike,” was one of the means by which America was able to do this, and in many ways it was those authors who wrote about rebels that were responsible for how America would later define itself. However, this was

not a forced journey of self-discovery by the American government, nor was it entirely a conscious act by authors—as we know, authors can control what they write, but not what people read. Rather, it was, for the most part, a subconscious decision by the American people to embrace the rebel character as a symbol of national identity.

In academia this was partially brought on by hypercanonization, i.e., “that a very few single works monopolize curricular and critical attention” (Arac 14). Conscious or not, hypercanonization at the highest levels of academia had, and continues to have, a trickle down effect, resulting in a nearly uniform curriculum of literary works studied at American primary and secondary schools. Writing for the educational website *Thought Co.*, Blythe Grossberg notes that regardless of what type of high school students attend, “the most commonly read books in all high schools are all very similar.” These works often include: *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Animal Farm*, *Of Mice and Men*, and *Fahrenheit 451*. In some advanced courses, students might find *Atlas Shrugged* on their reading list. In fact, in an effort to penetrate the hypercanon in American education, “Every year, 400,000 copies of Rand’s novels are offered to Advanced Placement high school teachers, paid for by the Ayn Rand Institute” (Rubin, “50 Years On”). While it would be naive to suggest that without hypercanonization these texts would not have remained popular to present day—*Atlas Shrugged* has not fully entered the hypercanon and remains highly popular—it has certainly contributed to their continued success. Nonetheless, by existing in the hypercanon, these texts aided in America forming this “new image.”

Like most things during and following the Cold War, the rebel was not without its politicization. Medovoi argues, “It was not simply that literature was politicized, however, but that politics were rendered literary through these processes of national representation” (59). Replacing the existing American literary tradition,

“the newly invented tradition erected a vision of American literature as inherently anti-totalitarian, aesthetically and politically hostile from its very inception to the closed-minded simplifications of both left-wing and right-wing world visions” (58). Critically, pre-Cold War literature, like those listed earlier in this chapter, “were now redeployed as a coherent tradition that dramatized the emergence of American freedom as a literary ideal.” The rebel as a character or allegory served as a means of communicating this message of national identity with “American freedom as a literary ideal,” an ideal that would eventually lead to a sense of American exceptionalism being communicated through American literature.<sup>19</sup>

As Medovoi states, “The rebel allegory dramatized the revolutionary moment of national self-declaration, reflective of the moment (stressed by Erikson) when a self came to establish itself as a free and sovereign character by repudiating all coerced ‘role expectations’ placed upon the conduct of its personality” (61). In this way, rebels represented both what it was to be an American and what America represented as a nation. As citizens, the rebel supported the teenaged American desire to be an individual freethinker, a moral crusader, and to discover one’s own place in the world. As a nation, the rebel supported the growing idea of American exceptionalism; the idea that America could be a model nation for other nations that were breaking free from colonial rule, and that America alone held a moral superiority on the world stage.

## **The Female Rebel**

Strong independent female rebels were virtually nonexistent in early Cold War literature, and they remained few and far between as the period progressed. There are

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<sup>19</sup> For an in-depth analysis of post World War II American exceptionalism, see Pease, *The New American Exceptionalism* (full citation provided in the bibliography).

plenty of reasons for this; however, a decisively male majority among published American authors during the period is likely to blame, given that the increase of female authorship has subsequently given rise to more female rebels. Medovoi argues that we see a limited number of female rebels because “Rebellion and conformity often mapped tightly onto masculinity and femininity respectively” throughout this period (265). That is not to say that female rebels were non-existent, for “Many of the decade’s principal bad-boy narratives, after all, also featured an (admittedly overshadowed) rebellious girl who acts as the bad boy’s female counterpart and romantic partner” (Medovoi 266). Yet these so-called “rebellious girls” often served as little more than arm candy to the bad boy, having very little impact on the narratives themselves, except to humanize the bad boy by creating a romantic interest. Furthermore, these “rebellious girls” did little in providing the female readership with any sense of reasonable role models and often reaffirmed male superiority to both male and female readers.

### **Rand’s Archetype**

Despite being a woman in a male-dominated field, Rand did not exclusively create female protagonists. While her debut novel, *We the Living* (1936), contains a female protagonist, it is not of the Cold War period or an American novel, for the story was written before World War II and takes place in post-revolutionary Russia between 1922 and 1925. If her second novel, *The Fountainhead*, is indisputably an American novel, it nevertheless lacks a female protagonist, and—like *We the Living*—was neither published nor set during the Cold War period. As previously mentioned, many works with rebels that predated the Cold War were redeployed for the emerging new national identity; however, Rand’s earlier works were not among them. It was not until her final novel, *Atlas Shrugged* (1957), that Rand checked all of

the boxes, i.e., she produced an American work during the Cold War with a female protagonist.

The character Rand created was Dagny Taggart, the Operating Vice President of Taggart Transcontinental. As presented in the introduction, Dagny is the true protagonist of *Atlas Shrugged*, not John Galt. While Galt might be the Randian hero, the hero of the story, and a hero to Dagny, much of the narrative follows the events surrounding Dagny. In fact, despite his name being the third and fourth words in the text, it is not until Part III, Chapter I, following Dagny's crash landing in the mountains of Colorado, that we as readers actually see or hear from John Galt. In contrast, Dagny is present from the opening chapter. While ever present as an idiom—"Who is John Galt?"—and later as a rail line, two-thirds of the novel is virtually devoid of Galt as a knowable character. Given the length and structure of *Atlas Shrugged*, this would be the equivalent of introducing a character at the start of the third book of a trilogy. While characters that are revealed this late in the text might be responsible for many events in the preceding narrative—just as Galt is responsible for removing many American industrialists from society—and might be the overall hero of the narrative, they cannot be considered the overall protagonist of the story due to their overwhelming absence in the majority of the text. It is Dagny's story that we follow, making her the real protagonist of Rand's novel.

As a rebel, particularly a female rebel, Dagny represents a new archetype at the time that American national identity was being redefined. Although Rand does not give a date for the time in which her novel takes place, we do know that it is meant to be in the "near future," which is a reasonable assumption given the technology used in the novel and Dagny's position within Taggart Transcontinental. As a woman, Dagny's position was not impossible at the time of publication. We know, for

instance, that Clara Abbott began her first term on the board of her husband's company Abbott Laboratories in 1900 and that in 1934 Lettie Pate Whitehead "was invited to join the board of the Coca-Cola Company as its first female director" (Larcker & Tayan 2). From that, we can deduce that Dagny's position as Operating Vice President, although rarely held by women while Rand was writing, was certainly a possibility, particularly within family businesses. Nonetheless, it is not the position that makes Dagny a rebel, but how she—regardless of her sex—chooses to fulfill its demands.

Unlike many male rebels—bad boys, revolutionaries, social exiles, etc.—Dagny's rebelling is not selfish in the colloquial sense, and ironically appears vaguely altruistic to the untrained eye. Given Rand's Objectivist philosophy, the potential for a reader to misinterpret Dagny's actions as altruistic would seem a major oversight by Rand. Despite a lack of approval from Galt and the rest of the inhabitants at Galt's Gulch—although they accept and respect her decision—Dagny's desire to continue to work to save Taggart Transcontinental is never explicitly condemned in the text, and she continues fighting for the company until the moment that Galt is captured. The reason that this is never fully condemned—and is not, in fact, altruism as most would understand it—is because Dagny's decision to try to save Taggart Transcontinental is reasoned and logical. She understands that others will benefit from her actions as a byproduct, but ultimately wants to do it for herself. Unlike many male rebels that are willing to sacrifice others for their own gain, Dagny's rebelling is morally grounded.

Dagny's actions are motivated by a desire to achieve what is best for her but not at the expense of others. Through this desire we see other aspects of her personality and character that will serve to establish her as an archetype for other female rebels. Her most notable characteristic is arguably her intelligence; not only

did Dagny study engineering while at university, but she is also a highly competent businesswoman. She is gifted but does not let her gifts define her; she has a work ethic that would allow her to go far regardless of natural talent. This is depicted in her determination and willingness to work hard to get what she wants, starting at the bottom of Taggart Transcontinental and working her way up to the top. This is in direct contrast to her brother, Jim, who takes full advantage of nepotism when starting his career, and immediately secures a very comfortable position within the Public Relations department. Dagny is also highly independent, making up her own mind. She is not deaf to the opinions of others, but her actions are always led by facts, and it is her understanding of the situation, rather than the desires of others, that ultimately leads Dagny to a decision. Even when she arrives at Galt's Gulch and discovers a world where she could thrive and be appreciated, she still acts out of her own desire by choosing to return to society. Indeed, it is only after the government collapses that she finally gives up Taggart Transcontinental. Taken together, these characteristics and personality traits are what make Dagny an archetype for the female rebel; a role model that is intelligent, naturally gifted, determined, independent, a free-thinker, and possessing a strong work ethic. While Galt might be a hard and fast superhuman representation of everything Rand's philosophy claims to be, Dagny is a human version of the same principles that readers can realistically relate to. Ayn Rand's Dagny Taggart would—as the following discussion demonstrates—go on to become the archetype for many female rebels in 21<sup>st</sup> century American literature.

### **The New Wave of Female Rebels**

Despite the plethora of works to choose from, I have isolated four YA critical dystopias to examine in relation to Rand's *Atlas Shrugged: The Hunger Games* trilogy, *The Testing* trilogy, the *Divergent* trilogy, and the *Matched* trilogy. There are

a multitude of reasons for the selection of these particular works, many of which I will cover in time; however, there are several worth noting before progressing any further. Obviously, all of these works are trilogies and, while the three-part structure that naturally comes with trilogies renders them similar to the three-part structure presented in *Atlas Shrugged*, it is the breadth of such narratives that allows for a substantial understanding of the characters and the worlds they occupy. As I will detail in Part II of this work, the governments faced by these female protagonists are all of the same collectivist mentality as the government in *Atlas Shrugged*. Each of these works also present female protagonists that, as I explain in Part III, are best described as coming-of-age Randian heroines. By this phrase—coming-of-age Randian heroine—I mean a character that begins the story as a young adult unsure of their moral standard and over the course of the work, or works, develops and exhibits a specifically Objectivist sense of morality. The narratives contained within these four works all present different social concerns that exist in contemporary society, just as *Atlas Shrugged* did, and are confronted in the same manner. Furthermore, limiting the scope of analysis not only allows for continuity, but also allows us to observe just how similar these works are in their entirety to Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*, particularly regarding how female rebels work in these series.

The first rebel covered in this work is Katniss Everdeen from Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* trilogy. Katniss is by far the best known and most popular of the rebels covered in this work. Like all the other rebels covered, Katniss is a strong female character. As the sole narrative voice of the trilogy, we are able to learn a vast amount about Katniss as a character. Although she does not possess a Dagny Taggart-level intellect, she is a far from unintelligent. However, just like Dagny, Katniss is very gifted within her field: Katniss can wield a bow with the

marksmanship of an Olympian; her co-tribute from District 12, Peeta, remarks that when hunting squirrels “the arrows never pierce the body. She hits every one in the eye. It’s the same with the rabbits she sells the butcher. She can even bring down a deer” (*The Hunger Games* 89). Peeta is not embellishing because of his feelings for Katniss; during her training, she shoots an apple out of the mouth of a roasted pig, earning her top marks. Katniss is also fiercely independent, which is depicted in both her initial refusal to form alliances and in the fact that she has taken care of her family since the death of her father. She also displays amazing determination, not only to keep her family alive, but also to keep herself, and later Peeta, alive once in the arena. Katniss also displays a set of ethics that are comparable to those of Dagny. She does not do things simply because they are expected of her; instead, her decisions—even when beneficial to others—are made based on her own desires.

The second rebel discussed is Malencia “Cia” Vale in Joelle Charbonneau’s *The Testing* trilogy. Cia possesses a high level of intellectual ability, revealed specifically through her love of engineering, just like Dagny Taggart. As a child, Cia created a solar-powered outdoor lighting system for her family, and later displays her keen technological knowledge during *The Testing*. Although she forms an alliance with her long time friend and fellow Testing candidate Tomas before they arrive at The Testing center, she is an independent thinker. Cia makes decisions based on her own opinion and not based on what others want, just like Dagny. Throughout the trilogy, Cia displays extreme determination, both to succeed and to stay alive. However, this determination is never compromised by sacrificing others for her own success. Much like Dagny, Cia wants to succeed on her own terms and based on her own work, not off the backs of others. In doing so, she reveals an ethical system that is equally in keeping with that of Dagny’s in *Atlas Shrugged*.

The third rebel covered is Cassia Reyes from Ally Condie's *Matched* trilogy. Again, Cassia is a strong character, both physically and mentally. Cassia lives in a world where nearly every aspect of her life is regimented by the government, called the Society. However, even the Society recognizes Cassia's physical potential and gives her physical fitness opportunities not afforded to all citizens. Her mental strength is represented in her job training, where she excels despite the difficult nature of the tasks she is presented with. Cassia is also independent: willing to leave her family to find the boy she cares about, fighting to take down her government, and thinking independently. Her unwillingness to make decisions based on what others tell her is right and instead based on what she believes to be right is what makes her such a problem for the Society.

The final rebel is, after Katniss, likely the most popular and well known of those considered, owing to the trilogy's adaptation into films. Veronica Roth's *Divergent* trilogy gives us Beatrice "Tris" Prior. In Tris's society everyone is separated into groups called factions based on their personalities. People live, work, and die according to their faction; however, at the age of 16 every member of the society must take an aptitude test and then choose to either stay with their faction of birth or switch to a different one at a public event called the Choosing Ceremony. Tris shows her capacity for independence very early on in the text, informing the reader that she does not feel that she fits in with her faction of birth and soon after chooses to defect at the Choosing Ceremony, despite her parents strong desire that she stay. Regarding her ethical leanings, her choice shows an ability to make decisions based on what she wants, rather than those that others would have her make. While displays of conventional knowledge are fairly limited given that Tris chooses a faction that is more focused on physical strength and courage, she is portrayed as being highly

intelligent. Her intelligence is depicted in the results of her aptitude test, where she shows an aptitude for Erudite, a faction that is focused on knowledge and intelligence. However, Tris also shows aptitude for two other factions, an anomaly called divergence. Being Divergent means that Tris does not naturally fit into any single faction, making her problematic for a society that expects everyone to act a certain way based on their faction.

All four of these female rebels display the characteristics necessary to consider them to be of the same rebellious mold as Dagny Taggart. They are all intelligent, independent, freethinking, and, most importantly, they all display ethical systems that are similar to that of Dagny. These similarities and more will be discussed in Part III, where I explore the individual ethics of these characters in relation to Dagny, and Rand's philosophy of Objectivism. However, before delving into individual ethics or the nature of dystopian governments, it is paramount to begin to address the cultural implications of these works.

## Chapter 4 – Cultural Implications

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Stableford begins his final paragraph on dystopia in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* by noting:

The significance of the firm establishment of a dystopian image of the future in literature should not be underestimated. Literary images of the future are among the most significant expressions of the beliefs and expectations we apply in real life to the organization of our attitudes and actions. (Stableford)

If we take this statement to be true, then dystopian works, regardless of the intended age of the readers, are all equally “expressions of the beliefs and expectations we apply in real life,” and no one category is more or less true or valuable than another. However, given that YA and children readers are at the age where they are organizing their attitudes about life and the world they find themselves in, it would reason that these works would aid in the construction of the organization of those readers’ attitudes and actions more so than that of adult readers. In a study published in 2001 that “explored the reader response patterns and intergenerational dialogue produced by five pairs of students reading and reacting to a young adult multicultural novel,” analysis “revealed that the high school participants viewed the novel as a means of helping them make sense of their own lives and the lives of those around them” (Bean & Rigoni, 233). In 2003, Thomas W. Bean and Karen Moni argued “Because they deal with issues that are relevant to teens, including racism, pregnancy, divorce, substance abuse, family conflicts, and political injustice, young adult novels provide a roadmap of sorts for adolescents coping with these issues in real life” (638). Critical dystopias often present social, economic, gender, class, race, and political issues, so it is likely that these works would influence the attitudes and actions of the young adults who read them.

Not unlike the protagonists of *The Hunger Games*, *The Testing*, *the Matched*, and the *Divergent* trilogies, the intended audience of these works are themselves undergoing an ethical coming-of-age. While the severity of the situations faced by the protagonists in these Bildungsromans are far from identical from those faced by today's young adults, the social anxieties they face are not entirely dissimilar. Just like Katniss, Cia, Cassia, and Tris, the intended audience are learning about their society and their place in it. The enormity of the potential for these works to influence the audience's development of their ideas and attitudes cannot be underestimated, particularly with regard to their political and ethical beliefs. Stableford states that dystopian works are "pointing fearfully at the way the world is supposedly going in order to provide urgent propaganda for a change in direction." This would suggest that in addition to aiding in the construction of the attitudes and actions of young readers, that the works are intentionally directing them towards a particular conclusion.

In directing young readers toward a particular conclusion, these four YA critical dystopias have a particular potential to influence young adults and their attitudes and actions because of their resounding success. As of July 2012, *The Hunger Games* trilogy had sold "more than 50 million copies of the original three books [...] more than 23 million copies of *The Hunger Games*; more than 14 million copies of *Catching Fire*; and more than 13 million copies of *Mockingjay*" ("Scholastic Media Room"). Furthermore, Scholastic notes, "Foreign publishing rights for The Hunger Games trilogy have been sold into 55 territories in 50 languages to date." Having been adapted into four films that have grossed more than \$2.9 billion worldwide, *The Hunger Games* trilogy and its films has the greatest potential to influence the most readers and viewers ("The Hunger Games," *Box Office*

*Mojo*). The second most successful trilogy is *Divergent*, which “sold a combined 6.7 million copies” in 2013 alone (Roback). Having also been adapted into a film series, the three *Divergent* films have grossed more than \$765 million worldwide (“Divergent,” *Box Office Mojo*). While not nearly as successful as *The Hunger Games* or *Divergent*, *The Testing* trilogy still found success within its intended demographic, “selling more than 150,000 copies” as of 2014 and the movie rights have been optioned by Paramount Pictures (Lodge, “A Final Pass”). Seeing slightly better commercial success, the first book of the *Matched* trilogy enjoyed “a 250,000 copy first printing, [has] been sold in 30 countries and film rights have been optioned to Disney” (Lodge, “Ally Condie’s”). While sales figures are difficult to come by unless a work is enjoying a great deal of success at the given moment and are not entirely representative of how influential a work is, they—along with any box office sales—can give us an idea as to how popular a work is.

Further evidence of a work’s popularity and potential for cultural influence can be found in studies that measure which works particular groups of people are reading. One such set of studies conducted annually in the United States by Renaissance Learning, Inc. called *What Kids are Reading* draws a more specific picture of how popular some of these critical dystopias are among young adults. While the exact parameters of each annual study vary slightly, the earlier ones grouping grades 9-12 together and reporting the rankings of novels both by sex and overall in each grade level, they nonetheless provide a clear ranking of novels from year to year. Furthermore, these studies provide a large sample size to reveal the most highly read books by students in the United States, with the 2008-2009 study measuring 6.2 million students in grades 1-12 and the 2016-2017 study measuring 9.4 million students in K-12.

Although the entirety of *The Testing* trilogy and the final two books of the *Matched* trilogy do not appear in the published data, *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent* trilogies are strongly present.<sup>20</sup> These studies reveal that all six of these books were among the most read books by the target audience soon after their publication, with the first book of each trilogy holding the most read position during at least one academic year at more than one grade level. Furthermore, *The Hunger Games* continues to be among the most read books in grades 6-12 and *Divergent* in grades 7-12. What we can extrapolate from this data is that YA critical dystopias, particularly *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent* trilogies, are incredibly popular among their target audience, providing them with a high potential to influence young adult readers in the United States.

With such a high potential to influence young adult readers, and the recognition that in influencing them they are aiding in the construction of the readers' attitudes and actions, the question becomes: What attitudes and actions are these YA critical dystopias influencing? In presenting their narratives, these YA critical dystopias impress upon the reader a particular set of political and ethical attitudes, which should then inform the reader's actions. By beginning with a dystopian society that is eventually overcome and by ending with either a eutopian enclave or the potential that the dystopia will be replaced with a eutopia—primarily because of the specific actions of the given protagonist—these YA critical dystopias imply that the espoused political and ethical attitudes are ideal. In doing so, these YA critical dystopias could influence a great number of young adults, their political and ethical philosophies, and how they alter the cultural DNA of America.

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<sup>20</sup> A consolidated list from all years of study of rankings for each novel can be found in Appendix 1.

## Not Just Neoliberal

When looking at how the YA critical dystopias examined in this work could potentially influence American culture, it is paramount that we understand with extreme specificity which political and ethical beliefs are being espoused within them. As with many literary works, these YA critical dystopias form a symbiotic relationship with the culture of their time; the culture informs the works and vice versa. So it is that these works promote some aspects of contemporary culture and criticize others. While they are often seen as celebrating liberalism because of their commitment to equality and liberty, implying that their politics and ethics lean to the left, these works also condemn big government and large-scale social planning, suggesting that they are, in fact, right leaning.

In regard to which end of the political spectrum these works stem from, Ewan Morrison notes that people are mistaken if they think that contemporary YA dystopian literature is left leaning, specifically in regard to *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent* trilogies. Morrison argues, “You might say, wait, they’re all about freedom and truth and oppressive societies, but the kind of freedom that’s being advocated in *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent* is, as Salon magazine recently pointed out, more like ‘agit-prop for capitalism’.” As Morrison sees it, “These books propose a laissez-faire existence, with heroic individuals who are guided by the innate forces of human nature against evil social planners.” If this is true, then these books should be seen, in one way, as a form of propaganda directing young readers to construct their attitudes and actions in accordance with laissez-faire capitalism. After all, as Morrison states:

This is one of those zeitgeist moments where the subconscious of a culture emerges into visibility. We might be giving ourselves right-wing messages because, whether or not we realise it, we have come to accept them as incontestable.

While it is entirely possible, as Morrison suggests, that these works do in fact capture the zeitgeist of the time, they are—in terms of political philosophy—far more complex than Morrison implies when he states: “The dystopian narratives which are currently consuming the minds of millions of teens worldwide are now communicating right-wing ideas.” To dismiss these works as a simple denouncement of the left and a promotion of the right is an oversimplification at best.

In his book *Magical Thinking, Fantastic Film, and the Illusions of Neoliberalism*, Michael J. Blouin states that in both literary and cinematic forms “*The Hunger Games* upholds a neoliberal framework under the illusion of its destruction” (208). While mostly agreeing with the previous analysis by Morrison, Blouin acknowledges the possibility that *The Hunger Games* is more complicated than a simple promotion of neoliberalism.<sup>21</sup> Speaking about Katniss specifically, Blouin states, “The fact that she fights on behalf of others may appear to complicate a straight forward reading of Katniss as a prototypical neoliberal heroine.” However, despite any potential complications he still believes that “*The Hunger Games* covertly disseminates neoliberal thought under the guise of a progressive alternative” (214). This is because in his analysis the word neoliberalism is broadly synonymous with capitalism, so when the trilogy presents what he believes to be a capitalist conclusion it is also, by default, a neoliberal conclusion.

When critics call *The Hunger Games*, or any of these YA critical dystopias, neoliberal or right wing simply because they see them as concluding with the establishment of an economy that is capitalist in nature—which is highly debatable—

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<sup>21</sup> In his book, Blouin quotes and discusses Morrison’s statements that are cited above.

it is a failure on the critic to recognize the complexity of these works.<sup>22</sup> These works are so much broader and deeper than a consideration of conflicting economic theories. While these works do seem to support laissez-faire capitalism in the broadest sense, it is important, as Blouin himself notes, to look at how they do so. Furthermore, we must ask why and how these works come to conclude that their purported system is ideal (215).

To say that these works are neoliberal is to suggest that there is one unified and universally accepted definition for the word that is “neoliberalism.” Kean Birch asks, “How do we use a term like ‘neoliberalism’ when so many people have such different understandings of what it means?” Aihwa Ong also notes, in the introduction to her work *Neoliberalism as Exception*, “*Neoliberalism* seems to mean many different things depending on one’s vantage point” (1). In its most basic form, Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy suggest, “Neoliberalism should be understood as a new phase in the evolution of capitalism” (5). General consensus holds that neoliberalism is a broad term that encompasses a wide variety of economic and political thought, all stemming from the basic principles of capitalism.

Providing a far more precise definition in the introduction to his work *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, David Harvey states that neoliberalism is “a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (2). From this, we can extrapolate that in order to be considered neoliberal according to Harvey’s definition, it is paramount that evidence of, or the

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<sup>22</sup> Ben Child, writing for *The Guardian*, argues that *The Hunger Games* films have an “individualist yet anti-capitalist message” (full citation provided in the bibliography).

desire for, a liberated free market economy is present. However, Harvey also goes on to place further stipulations on what characterizes something as neoliberal.

For Harvey, the state plays a fundamental role in the creation and preservation of the “institutional framework appropriate to such practices” (2). It is required that the state “set up those military, defence, police, and legal structures and functions required to secure private property rights and to guarantee, by force if need be, the proper functioning of markets.” Harvey goes on to note that marketization is imperative, “if markets do not exist [...] then they must be created, by state action if necessary.”<sup>23</sup> This is because neoliberalism “holds that the social good will be maximized by maximizing the reach and frequency of market transactions, and it seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market. (3)”. Yet, despite the widespread requirement for initial action by the state, intervention should otherwise “be kept to a bare minimum because, according to the theory, the state cannot possibly possess enough information to second-guess market signals (prices) and because powerful interest groups will inevitably distort and bias state interventions (particularly in democracies) for their own benefit (2)”. So it is, according to Harvey, that while the theory of neoliberalism is rooted in economic political practices, such practices will have the trickle-down effect of influencing social interactions.

Similarly, Henry Giroux argues that neoliberalism “upholds the notion that the market serves as a model for structuring all social relations: not just the economy, but the governing of all of social life” (Nevradakis). In the words of Giroux, neoliberalism is:

an ideology marked by the selling off of public goods to private interests; the attack on social provisions; the rise of the corporate state organized around privatization, free trade, and deregulation; the celebration of self interests over social needs; the celebration of profit-

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<sup>23</sup> The omitted text is a list of areas that could be marketized.

making as the essence of democracy coupled with the utterly reductionist notion that consumption is the only applicable form of citizenship.

Again, political economics appears to be the central tenet of neoliberalism, whereby the state acts as a means for achieving, maintaining, and ensuring widespread marketization. When comparing Harvey and Giroux's summations of neoliberalism, it is clear that they hold similar notions of what defines neoliberalism. Both Harvey and Giroux stress that neoliberalism is defined by political economics characterized by marketization and privatization, and that these measures have a profound influence in the governing of social relationships. However, they do differ on one major point; Harvey defines neoliberalism as a theory, whereas Giroux defines neoliberalism as an ideology. In fact, in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, the term "ideology" is only used once, and that is in cited material.

While the terms "theory" and "ideology" are broadly synonymous in casual conversation, they, like their sister term "philosophy," can be heavily loaded within the political lexicon. As Nannerl O. Keohane notes in her 1976 article "Philosophy, Theory, Ideology: An Attempt at Clarification," "It would be the purest folly to attempt to provide" definitive definitions of these "central terms in political philosophy" (81). So it is that we cannot definitively state that the different terms in which Harvey and Giroux use to define neoliberalism—theory vs. ideology—denote a fundamental difference in their ideas about neoliberalism, nor a fundamental similarity. Likewise, we cannot draw a clear difference between neoliberalism and Objectivism simply because Objectivism is a philosophy according to Rand and neoliberalism is either a theory or ideology depending on who you ask. Nonetheless, Harvey and Giroux both define neoliberalism by its particular relationship with

political economics and come to many of the same conclusions about it, particularly that the nature of social relationships are a byproduct of neoliberalism.

Thinking about neoliberalism specifically in relation to literature, Mitchum Huehls notes in *After Critique: Twenty-First-Century Fiction in a Neoliberal Age* that neoliberalism is “No longer just a set of free-market economic policies with an attendant ideology” (ix). In fact, Huehls initially describes neoliberalism as “an amorphous mess of an idea, naming economic, political, and socio-cultural phenomena” (1). While this might seem a rather crass way of defining neoliberalism, it is extremely effective in succinctly detailing the totality of neoliberalism’s influence. Addressing some of the historical elements of neoliberalism and the ways in which it permeates American society, Huehls notes that in a neoliberal society “data reigns, and individuals are encouraged to subject their thinking about all domains of society and culture to a rigorous economic calculus committed to efficient profit maximization” (2). Although this initial analysis of what defines neoliberalism is in harmony with the arguments of Harvey and Giroux, Huehls goes further in directly defining what is and what takes place in a neoliberal society.

Crucially, Huehls argues that neoliberalism functions both normatively and post-normatively, which he admits initially sounds paradoxical. He notes:

More precisely, neoliberalism institutes norms, but in doing so it also creates the conditions that render those norms obsolete. On its face, neoliberalism is normative, representational, and thus ostensibly open and susceptible to political critique. And yet, because it has such a totalizing grasp on normative representation that it’s become impossible to represent things otherwise, its norms are entirely circular and beside the point. Given this circularity [...] neoliberalism effectively becomes post-normative, non-representational, and immune to political critique. (4)

Essentially, Huehls is acknowledging the seemingly inescapable nature and the totality of neoliberalism in American society. As members of a neoliberal society, it is

nearly impossible to subvert neoliberalism and exist because it determines how society operates. Acknowledging this, Huehls later argues that “neoliberalism is just as comfortable with heterogeneous subjects—those entrepreneurial individuals pursuing their rational self-interest—as it is with homogenous objects—those cogs in the machine of systematized profit-making” (11-12). This would imply that neoliberalism is not, as it were, concerned with any one individual’s actions, or indeed the actions of any group of people, so long as they contribute to neoliberalism’s economic structure. While Huehls does provide a solution to dealing with neoliberalism being both normative and post-normative, that is not the primary concern here. Instead, as previously noted, it is what defines and makes up neoliberalism. What is gained from Huehls’s insight into neoliberalism, in conjunction with those of Harvey and Giroux, is that neoliberalism is, at least to these individuals, a system born out of economics. The politics, ideologies, theories, values, ethics, and social relationships that are attached to neoliberalism are the consequences of neoliberal economics and neoliberal economic policy.

Of prime importance is the fact that Harvey, Giroux, and Huehls all recognize the current system in America as being neoliberal, and it is here where an extreme lack of specificity about what neoliberalism is complicates its usage as a label. Neoliberalism in current practice is not neoliberalism in theory—referred to throughout the remainder of this section as “theoretical neoliberalism” as to avoid confusion with the idiom “in theory.” Economics is, as the above theorists and I have rightly pointed out, paramount to theoretical neoliberalism; in fact, it is the genesis of all other aspects of neoliberalism. Theoretical neoliberalism demands laissez-faire capitalism as an economic system to set in motion all other neoliberal principles. However, in current practice in the United States, the economic system is not laissez-

laissez-faire capitalism, as there are many government-imposed regulations on the economy, on businesses, and on individuals. If the current system in the United States was laissez-faire capitalism, then many banks and automotive companies that were deemed “too big to fail” during the recession would not have received government assistance. Indeed, Harvey’s definition of neoliberalism is much closer to neoliberalism in practice than theoretical neoliberalism. In practice, in America, neoliberalism is a selectively regulated economic system where the government intervenes as and when it chooses, or, more specifically, a mixed economy. Although one could argue that neoliberalism in the United States is moving toward its theoretical form and is just yet to be fully realized, it would then stand to reason that designating the current system as neoliberal is a bit of a misnomer. While neoliberalism is not alone in its structure being modified in the transition from theory to practice, moving from a laissez-faire to mixed economy is a rather fundamental shift given that neoliberalism is built around its economic system. This difference in economic systems between theory and practice makes the designation of any literary text as neoliberal problematic without the explicit statement as to if the work is representative of theoretical neoliberalism or neoliberalism in practice. It is only further complicated when we consider that neoliberalism does not manifest identically in different countries. However, because the concerned YA critical dystopias are distinctly American, we need only concern ourselves with theoretical neoliberalism and neoliberalism as it is practiced in the United States.

*The Hunger Games*, *The Testing*, the *Matched*, and the *Divergent* trilogies resist the label of neoliberalism on two major fronts despite their similarities with neoliberalism. First, on an economic front, regardless of whether we are talking about theoretical neoliberalism or neoliberalism in practice in the United States, these works

do not conclude with the obvious establishment of either laissez-faire capitalism or a mixed economy. In fact, none of the YA critical dystopias discussed conclude with the overt establishment of any particular economic system or model. Even *The Hunger Games*, which, as discussed in detail later, focuses on socioeconomic inequality, does not conclude by informing the reader as to what kind of economic system will replace the state-run system of the Capitol. While *The Hunger Games* does contain allusions to contemporary American economic policies, this is done to critique contemporary policy, thus making it critical of neoliberalism or, at least, the version that is currently practiced in the United States. This brings us neatly to the second way in which these works resist the neoliberal label, the means by which they achieve their goals and principles.

As previously mentioned, it is through the economy that neoliberalism, in both its theoretical form and in practice in the United States, achieves its social goals and principles. The definitions provided by Harvey and Giroux clearly state the nature of social relationships in neoliberal societies are a byproduct of the political economics espoused by neoliberalism. In neoliberalism, then, all social relationships—how individuals deal with one another, how they deal with businesses, how they deal with the government, and how business and government deal with individuals—are dictated by the economic market, i.e., the morality dictating human interaction is created by the market. The political and ethical philosophy promoted in the conclusions of these YA critical dystopias does not align with this principle. They do not imply, infer, or otherwise suggest that the nature of social relationships should be the byproduct of the economy; instead, they promote a moral philosophy whereby the nature of social relationships dictate the economy. Returning to the example of *The Hunger Games*, this work also resists the label of theoretical neoliberalism because it

does not conclude with the establishment of laissez-faire capitalism as a means to dictate human interaction.

This is not to say that neoliberalism is solely an economic theory that is without political and social components. Rather, it is to say that in neoliberalism, as described by both Harvey and Giroux, the political and social components are the byproducts of neoliberalism's economic theory. Many of the political and social goals of the protagonists of these YA critical dystopias are in fact aligned with those of neoliberalism; however, they differ unequivocally in the means by which these political and social goals are achieved. Whereas neoliberalism achieves its political and social goals through the economy, the protagonists of these YA critical dystopias promote a system whereby political and social goals are achieved through a strict moral philosophy, where laissez-faire capitalism would simply be a byproduct.

This leaves us to ask: If these works resist the neoliberal label, despite having so many similarities with neoliberalism, what are they? As noted by Kean Birch and Aihwa Ong previously, people have very different understanding of what neoliberalism means, and definitions can be heavily dependent “on one's vantage point” (Ong 1). I have argued that, for many individuals, neoliberalism, be it in its theoretical form or in practice, is predominantly an economic theory that determines social relationships; i.e., the relationships between individuals and the relationships between individuals and groups. If, when we call these YA critical dystopias neoliberal, we mean only economic neoliberalism, then they not only resist the label but evade it. This is because none of these works overtly propose the establishment of any one economic system in their fictional societies. This is compounded by the fact that *if* the economic goals of neoliberalism were to be realized in these texts, the means by which they would be achieved—at least with regard to the philosophical

system espoused by their protagonists—is rooted in the moral philosophy of social relationships, not the other way around.

However, it must be recognized, as Huehls argues, that the totality of neoliberalism in contemporary American society means that it is no longer the case that neoliberal economics simply dictate social relationships, but that social relationships also dictate the economy; the relationship is reciprocal. This is especially true when we consider the ambiguity of the term neoliberalism; it is, for many, a blanket term that encompasses a wide range of similar thoughts, theories, ideologies, and philosophies. An analogous way of thinking about neoliberalism as a blanket term for a variety of similar ideas is to think of our use of the term neoliberalism as equivalent to the way we use “apples” as a term to refer to the wide variety of apples that actually exist. According to the University of Illinois Extension, “7,500 varieties of apples are grown throughout the world” (“Apple Facts”). While they are all apples, they vary slightly in their composition; they might be big or small, red or green, etc. Likewise, neoliberalism varies slightly depending on where it manifests, who is talking about it, what the goals or principles of the individuals involved are, etc. Therefore, if by neoliberalism we mean something other than just economic neoliberalism, then we need to be more precise about the specific type of neoliberalism we are discussing.

I propose that the YA critical dystopias discussed in this work are not just neoliberal, and, as I defend in detail throughout this thesis, should be more aptly recognized as Objectivist. To put this another way, it is not enough to simply label these works as broadly neoliberal, we must recognize that they are specifically Objectivist. These works are about more than just economics or the political practices necessary for a particular economic model to flourish, they instead espouse an entire

political and ethical philosophy, which would merely influence the economic system that might arise as a byproduct of this philosophy, differentiating them from economic neoliberalism. While it could be argued that the economic elements of Objectivism are directly in-line with the economics of theoretical neoliberalism, the political and ethical theories of Objectivism are not always congruent with the variety of political and ethical philosophies that could be placed under the banner of neoliberalism. This is especially true when looking at neoliberalism in practice in the United States. These YA critical dystopias critique and criticize many contemporary American neoliberal practices, and while their solutions may fall under the umbrella of neoliberalism, they are specifically Objectivist.

Ultimately, these works could be seen to support laissez-faire capitalism because the Objectivist philosophy they espouse would result in this type of economic system. They are inherently pro-individual freedom, anti-collectivist, and anti-discrimination; i.e., they argue that individuals should be free to make their own decisions and that the governments should not be able to tell them how to live, that people should not be forced to live to make the lives of others easier, and that people should be accepted for who they are and not be discriminated against for any reason, unless they are violating the rights of others. So it is that these novels actually promote the use of an Objectivist system of political and ethical philosophy—not the economic system of neoliberalism—when directing young adult readers to construct their attitudes and actions in regard to achieving political and/or ethical goals.

While these works appear to promote an Objectivist political and ethical philosophy that has become increasingly present in contemporary American culture, they do so by criticizing other political and ethical philosophies—not unlike Ayn Rand did in her fictional and non-fictional works. These works celebrate this political

and ethical philosophy by ending with an Objectivist eutopian enclave or the hope that an Objectivist eutopia will overcome and replace the dystopia, just as Rand did in *Atlas Shrugged*.

## Conclusion

In writing for the website *Public Books*, Russ Castronovo argues that Rand's *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged* serve "as a bildungsroman to the [political] right." Likewise, these YA critical dystopias that also present an Objectivist political and ethical philosophy are capable of being bildungsromans to the political right, but for young adult readers. Reflecting on his experience sitting in on Advanced Placement English classes in Wisconsin before the 2016 presidential election, Castronovo notes that he learned "that Rand is ideal for anyone who needs a ready-made argument about ethics, freedom, or other social abstractions." He goes on to note, "Rand's books provide students with a model of interpretation that is as brutally simple and efficient as any of the buildings designed by Howard Roark." *The Hunger Games*, *The Testing*, *the Matched*, and the *Divergent* trilogies are incredibly similar because they also present an interpretation that is brutally simple. The Objectivist political and ethical philosophy presented in them is immediately recognizable to anyone well versed in Rand and Objectivism. While many young adult readers will not be well versed in Rand or Objectivism, they would be hard pressed to miss the "ready-made argument about ethics" and politics that are present in the trilogies. However, the arguments they provide for young adult readers are not limited to political and ethical philosophy. Unlike Rand, who was primarily concerned with espousing her political and ethical beliefs in her fictional works, these YA critical dystopias also provide readers with an argument about a particular social concern.

The dystopian nature of the governments in each of the four trilogies presented in this thesis are rooted in different and specific social concerns that exist in contemporary America. While they all share some anxieties such as a lack of freedom of movement, limited individual freedoms, and government sanctioned violence against the citizens, these all aid in bringing to the forefront one defining dystopian element that is specific to each trilogy. In the case of *The Hunger Games* trilogy, this is socioeconomic inequality; for *The Testing*, access to education; for *Matched*, creative censorship; and for *Divergent*, identity politics. Through their promotion of Objectivist social practice, these YA critical dystopias present the reader with Objectivist solutions to the social issues they present. As discussed in Part IV, examining these works in further detail with regards to their presentation of social issues yields a greater understanding of their cultural and historical significance, and that of Objectivism itself.

## **Part II – Either-Or: Government and Politics**

## Introduction – The Political Angle

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Dystopian works are notorious for warning of the potential outcomes of particular political practices, be they left or right leaning. Huxley expertly warns about what society could look like if government were controlled by industry in *Brave New World*. Likewise, Orwell explains how big government and bureaucracy could equally lead to a dystopian world. Regardless of which political angle a work comes from or criticizes, it is almost inherently necessary for the work to conceive a political situation wherein the government is broadly totalitarian in order for it to be read as universally dystopian in a political sense. Most dystopias of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century exhibit a more Huxleyan approach and tend to criticize the political Right in America. However, there are a few standout works that go against the grain, namely Lois Lowry's *The Giver* (1993) and the works of Any Rand. It is Rand's philosophical works and novels, particularly *Atlas Shrugged* (1957) and *The Fountainhead* (1943), that these contemporary YA critical dystopias most closely resemble. Although the politics presented in these texts could be seen in a great number of earlier texts, and there are a number of political philosophies and ideologies that could be used to criticize these fictional governments, narratively as a whole these works appear—be it intentionally or not—more Randian than anything else.

In *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand warned of a government that valued collectivism over individualism, of a society with limited freedom, and the dangers of a political aristocracy of pull. “The Aristocracy of Pull” is the title of Rand's second chapter of the second part of *Atlas Shrugged* and the phrase is only uttered once in the entirety of the text. However, it is a powerful scene and one of the most damning criticisms of a

collectivist/anti-capitalist mentality in the novel. The phrase is uttered by Francisco d'Anconia at the wedding of James Taggart. Speaking with his like-minded friends, James proclaims:

“We are at the dawn of a new age,” said James Taggart, from above the rim of his champagne glass. “We are breaking up the vicious tyranny of economic power. We will set men free of the rule of the dollar. We will release our spiritual aims from dependence on the owners of material means. We will liberate our culture from the stranglehold of the profit-chasers. We will build a society dedicated to higher ideals, and we will replace the aristocracy of money by—”  
 “—the aristocracy of pull,” said a voice beyond the group.  
 (404)

The aristocracy of pull is the ability to succeed through one's political connections or by toeing the political line of the government, not by one's own intelligence and/or hard work. During the course of Francisco's extensive argument, he explains that an aristocracy of pull is something that occurs when governments control economics, one of the major concerns of the text. What Francisco understands, yet James and his friends fail to comprehend, is that money is not what makes people corrupt, “Money is a tool of exchange [...] Money is the material shape of the principle that men who wish to deal with one another must deal by trade and give value for value” (410). However, when politicians gain enough power to control the economic market, value will cease to be an exchange of one person's effort for that of another person's. Instead, value will be traded in favors and back room deals. Francisco finishes his argument by explaining exactly what will come of an aristocracy of pull, “When money ceases to be the tool by which men deal with one another, then men become the tools of men. Blood, whips and guns—or dollars. Take your choice—there is no other—and your time is running out” (415).

Despite displaying four different forms of government—a dictatorship in *The Hunger Games* trilogy, limited democracy in *The Testing* trilogy, a non-elected

bureaucracy in the *Matched* trilogy, and an oligarchy in the *Divergent* trilogy—the governments in these contemporary YA critical dystopias require that the citizens are subservient to the state. Furthermore, like the government in *Atlas Shrugged*, they all utilize the aristocracy of pull as a method for achieving collectivism. Throughout these works we observe the various governments' willingness to allow, or outright intent to make, individuals or entire groups suffer for the collective, suggesting that it is not just political philosophy but moral philosophy that is responsible for making these societies dystopian. Just as characters like Hank Rearden and Dagny Taggart are targeted for their individualistic tendencies and unwillingness to sacrifice themselves for the government, so too are the coming-of-age Randian heroines of these works. While none of the governments in these works are direct parallels to the current American political system, they are not intended to be. They do, however, have enough similarities to suggest that they could be a devolution of American politics.

## Chapter 1 – The Aristocracy of Pull: Rand’s Theory of Government

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### Where Does a Government Get its Power?

When dealing with Western forms of government, particularly a Republic, the official form of government of the United States, Rand states, “The source of the government’s authority is ‘the consent of the governed.’ This means that the government is not the *ruler*, but the servant or *agent* of the citizens; it means that the government as such has no rights except the rights *delegated* to it by the citizens for a specific purpose” (*The Virtue of Selfishness* 129).<sup>24</sup> Although citizens is the group name of those that live under a particular government, this group is made up of individual citizens. Rand explains:

Any group or “collective,” large or small, is only a number of individuals. A group can have no rights other than the rights of its individual members. In a free society, the “rights” of any group are derived from the rights of its members through their voluntary, individual choice and *contractual* agreement, and are merely the application of these individual rights to a specific undertaking. (119)<sup>25</sup>

The above suggests that individuals must have inherent rights. For Rand these inherent rights all stem from a single fundamental right. She states:

A “right” is a moral principle defining and sanctioning a man’s freedom of action in a social context. There is only *one* fundamental right (all the others are its consequences or corollaries): a man’s right to his own life. Life is a process of self-sustaining and self-generated action; the right to life means the right to engage in self-sustaining and self-generated action—which means: the freedom to take all the actions required by the nature of a rational being for the support, the furtherance, the fulfillment and the enjoyment of his own life. (Such is the meaning of the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.) (110)<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Original emphasis. In all further references to *The Virtue of Selfishness* the title is abbreviated to *VOS*.

<sup>25</sup> Original emphasis.

<sup>26</sup> Original emphasis.

This should not be misunderstood as a proclamation that only one right exists or that a man can do whatever he wants so long as it results in “the fulfillment and the enjoyment of his own life.” According to Rand, individuals are still bound to the moral principles of Objectivism. As Rand notes, “Under a proper social system, a private individual is legally free to take any action he pleases (so long as he does not violate the rights of others)” (128).

So it is, according to Rand, that all individuals have a fundamental right to their own life and “the support, the furtherance, the fulfillment and the enjoyment of” it (110). While this might seem rather minimal, this foundational right gives way for others, like the right to pursue one’s desires, be it in a particular trade, where one lives, whom they marry, or how they spend their time. It should be noted that individuals have the right to pursue these desires, not a right to them.

It is through these individual rights that a government gains its authority. An example of a government deriving rights from the people to undertake a task would be the creation of a military. Because people have a right to their lives and need protection from those that do not respect a person’s right to their life, a nation—a group of individuals—can delegate the right to create and manage a military for security to the government. Likewise, because people have a right to travel within their national borders they can delegate the right to build roads to the government. Neither of these tasks negates the right of each citizen to protect themselves or build a road on their private property, they endow the government with the right to act for them. Just as the government obtains its authority from the individual citizens, its function is to serve the individual citizens.

## What is the function of a Government?

While the specific tasks performed by a government can vary widely dependent on the needs of the people, Rand is very specific about the purpose of a government. To ensure that “physical force is to be barred from social relationships,” Rand argues, “men need an institution charged with the task of protecting their rights under an *objective* code of rules” (*VOS* 127).<sup>27</sup> For Rand, “The only proper, moral purpose of a government is to protect man’s rights, which means: to protect him from physical violence—to protect his right to his own life” (36). Calling this a “moral purpose,” Rand is stating that this is the fundamental purpose of any government. Although a government might do many other things for its citizens, its moral obligation is to protect the rights of the citizens. She breaks down the function of a government into three categories, “all of them involving the issues of physical force and the protection of men’s rights: the police, to protect men from criminals—the armed services, to protect men from foreign invaders—the law courts, to settle disputes among men according to objective laws” (131). From these three categories, police, armed services, and courts, many other functions will naturally arise, like the need to build police stations, military bases, and courthouses.

Accordingly, Objectivist philosophy holds that the rights that are delegated to a government should only serve the purpose of ensuring the individual rights of its citizens. According to Rand:

Since the protection of individual rights is the only proper purpose of a government, it is the only proper subject of legislation: all laws must be based on individual rights and aimed at their protection. All laws must be *objective* (and objectively justifiable): men must know clearly, and in advance of taking an action, what the law forbids them to do (and why), what constitutes a crime and what penalty they will incur if they commit it. (128-9)<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Original emphasis.

<sup>28</sup> Original emphasis.

This is an excellent example of how Objectivism as a moral philosophy and a political philosophy are consistent; the individual comes first. However, there is always the possibility of a government exceeding those rights delegated to it by its citizens and/or violate the rights of its citizens.

### **Where Can it go Wrong?**

For Rand, societies go wrong when their governments exceed the rights afforded to them by their citizens and begin to make decisions for the people without their consent. Any action taken by a government without the consent of the people violates the rights of those people. The act of a government violating the rights of its citizens can take many forms and does not always have to take place on a massive scale where the rights of all citizens are being violated. Rand makes the point:

What subjectivism is in the realm of ethics, collectivism is in the realm of politics. Just as the notion that “Anything I do is right because *I* chose to do it,” is not a moral principle, but a negation of morality—so the notion that “Anything society does is right because *society* chose to do it,” is not a moral principle, but a negation of moral principles and the banishment of morality from social issues. (*VOS 118*)<sup>29</sup>

In comparing individual morality and government morality, Rand illustrates the point that in either case an action is not moral simply because the individual or the government has the authority to do it. For Rand, no one individual or their government/society—a group of individuals—can morally do whatever they please simply because they can and chose to do so.

In Objectivism, there are two central concerns about the ways in which a government might violate the rights of its citizens: physically and intellectually. As noted earlier, the only moral purpose of a government is to protect its citizens from physical force; it is from this that Rand states:

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<sup>29</sup> Original emphasis.

The basic political principle of the Objectivist ethics is: no man may initiate the use of physical force against others. No man—or group or society or government—has the right to assume the role of a criminal and initiate the use of physical compulsion against any man. Men have the right to use physical force only in retaliation and only against those who initiate its use. The ethical principle involved is simple and clear-cut: it is the difference between murder and self-defense. (36)

This principle likely derives from Rand's own experience as a child seeing her father's shop taken away from him by threat of physical force and declared property of the state. Because a government gains its authority to act via the consent of the governed, when a government uses physical force, or the threat thereof, to coerce its citizens' actions, consent is no longer possible. Although Rand was particularly concerned with physical force in regards to personal property and one's right to their life, she was also concerned with the mind of the individual.

In violating the rights of an individual intellectually, Rand was most focused on this occurring via physical force or the threat of it. In regard to intellectual theft or coercion Rand states:

A society that robs an individual of the product of his mind; or enslaves him, or attempts to limit the freedom of his mind; or compels him to act against his own rational judgment [...] is not, strictly speaking, a society, but a mob held together by institutionalized gang-rule. (126)

Again, considering the events of Rand's childhood, the language chosen in this citation is understandable. When her father's shop was taken, the Soviet government did not only take his physical property but limited "the freedom of his mind," because he was no longer free to use it according to "his own rational judgment." As we will see later, one of Rand's biggest concerns in regard to intellectual freedom, or freedom of the mind, was that a government would use the resources intended to defend the rights of its citizens to compel individuals to surrender their ideas and inventions to the government.

Once a government has begun to violate the rights of its citizens, be it physically or intellectually, the government has lost its right to govern, even if it is still capable of physically governing. Rand states, “A nation that violates the rights of its own citizens cannot claim any rights whatsoever [...] A nation ruled by brute physical force is not a nation, but a horde” (121). Rand never gives a threshold for when exactly a nation can no longer claim any rights, making it unclear whether this occurs when the rights of even a single individual are violated or if it needs to take place on a larger scale. Her commitment to the individual would suggest the former, yet the use of the word horde suggests that it must have the potential to affect many individuals. Once it is determined that a nation has violated the rights of its citizens, one question remains: what can be done about it?

### **Can People Take Action?**

According to Rand, when a government violates the rights of its citizens and remains in control of the country, that country has become a country of slaves. Of course this is not in the traditional sense of people being bought and sold, but in the sense that the government controls the people. Rand notes that “A slave country has no *national* rights, but the *individual* rights of its citizens remain valid, even if unrecognized” (VOS 122).<sup>30</sup> Objectivism does allow for other nations, be it individually or in a cooperative like the UN, to respond to these violations of individual rights. Rand states:

Whether a free nation chooses to do so or not is a matter of its own self-interest, *not* of respect for the nonexistent “rights” of gang rulers. It is not a free nation’s *duty* to liberate other nations at the price of self-sacrifice, but a free nation has the right to do it, when and if it so chooses. (122)<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Original emphasis.

<sup>31</sup> Original emphasis.

According to Rand, free nations thus have the option to liberate people of slave nations, although it is not a requirement. Because external aid cannot be guaranteed it is often up to the individual citizens of these slave nations to take a stand against their so-called governments.

Generally speaking, it is the Objectivist belief that “man has the right to take actions he deems necessary to achieve his happiness” (114). We know from what has been covered previously that this does not include physical force. We also know that Rand said, “Men have the right to use physical force only in retaliation and only against those who initiate its use” (36). When a government has violated the rights of its citizens and has not used physical force or the threat of physical force against its citizens, the only Objectively moral thing to do is to utilize non-violent avenues to correct the government. However, when a government does use physical force against its citizens, those citizens are morally justified to respond in kind.

As we move forward, considering how Rand can better help us understand unethical governments in these contemporary YA critical dystopias, we will see both non-violent and violent responses to governments that violate the rights of their citizens. I will begin first with an analysis of the government in Rand’s *Atlas Shrugged*, which will aid us in understanding exactly how her political philosophy can be used as a means to determine whether or not a government is unethical in a dystopian setting. From this, we will consequently develop a better understanding of how a government might violate the rights of its citizens and how Rand believed those citizens should respond. In the case of *Atlas Shrugged*, we are most often faced with a non-violent violation of individual rights, which will allow us to explore non-violent response. As we move on to the YA critical dystopias, we will work with violent violations of individual rights and then, in Part III of this work, assess whether

or not the responses by these coming-of-age Randian heroines is Objectively ethical. By moving from an Objectivist analysis of Rand to an Objectivist analysis of the other texts, we will be able to better understand how these texts, knowingly or unknowingly, are promoting Objectivist political values.

## **Government in Atlas Shrugged**

### *People's States*

The first depiction of government in *Atlas Shrugged* is that of the fictitious People's State of Mexico. This government is first mentioned as Dagny and her brother Jim argue about the future of Taggart Transcontinental. Unfazed by failing tracks becoming more and more common, undelivered orders of steel, or lost profits, Jim demands to know what Dagny finds "so alarming in the present situation of Taggart Transcontinental?" (*Atlas Shrugged* 21). Dagny takes particular issue with two things: the undelivered order of steel from a company called Associated Steel and Jim's building of a line in Mexico called the San Sebastián. Feeling little concern because the Board approved both decisions, Jim does not see a problem with either. When Dagny informs him that "the Mexican government is going to nationalize your line any day now" he refuses to believe it. He states, "I refuse to consider, I absolutely refuse to consider the possibility of the San Sebastián Line being nationalized," a decision he has made based "on very good inside authority" (22). We learn that this inside authority is comprised of Jim's group of friends, of which Orren Boyle, the owner of Associated Steel, is at the head, and some unnamed political man in Mexico. During a meeting with his cronies, Boyle informs us that the San Sebastián Mines are "private property, the last piece of it left in Mexico" (*Atlas Shrugged* 48). It is unclear if Boyle has unintentionally let slip that he knows that the San Sebastián Line is going to be nationalized; however, his statement does underscore the socialistic nature of

the People's State of Mexico. Despite his "very good inside authority," Jim soon receives a phone call from his political man in Mexico informing him that the San Sebastián Railroad and the San Sebastián Mines he was relying on for business have been nationalized (72).

In *Atlas Shrugged*, People's States represent the antithesis of Rand's philosophy of what governments should be. In addition to the People's State of Mexico, People's States of Norway, France, England, Portugal, Turkey, China, Germany, Argentina, Chile, India, and Guatemala are all mentioned in the novel. These People's States present governments that have nationalized virtually every industry within their borders. In every sense, these countries are doing the same things Rand saw the Russian government doing when she was a child. Along with nationalizing industry, these fictional countries are also confiscating private property in the name of the people and every aspect of society is operated by a vast body of bureaucrats. In addition to the negative depictions of these People's States, the fact that they are so strikingly similar to her native Russia makes it clear that this is not a form of government that Rand approves of.

Examining the People's State of Mexico allows us to see exactly which aspects of this type of government she finds so concerning. When discussing the nature of Jim's decision to originally build the San Sebastián Line, the narrator informs us:

The People's State of Mexico was eager to co-operate, and signed a contract guaranteeing for two hundred years the property right of Taggart Transcontinental to its railroad line in a country where no property rights existed. Francisco d'Anconia had obtained the same guaranty for his mines. (53)

This section of text serves two purposes: to explain the nature of the Mexican government and to reveal Jim's serious inability to make sound business decisions.

Focusing on the former, we are informed about two aspects of the Mexican government: they do not have/recognize property rights, and they do not have a moral code that would prevent them from taking advantage of people. Property rights were a major concern for Rand, leading her to declare: “Without property rights, no other rights are possible” (*VOS* 36). Therefore, the depiction of a nation that lacks property rights suggests, for Rand, a nation that lacks all other rights and without rights there is no freedom and thus no morality. In the event the reader was not aware of Rand’s particular stance on political ethics, she makes up for this by clearly spelling out the lack of a moral code by presenting a government that would steal from a private business. However, this analysis is dependent on either retrospect or the acceptance of Dagny’s belief that the Mexican government will nationalize the San Sebastián.

The People’s State of Mexico soon nationalizes both the railroad and the mines. Courtesy of Dagny’s business skills and Francisco’s cunning, the act of nationalizing the railroad and the mines is fruitless for the Mexican government. As Dagny reads the front-page story of the newspaper we are informed that the mines “were worthless-blattantly, totally, hopelessly worthless” (89). Eddie Willers, Dagny’s personal assistant, is present during this scene and explains that while unaware of Francisco’s reasoning, he knows he could not have made a mistake of this magnitude. Dagny only replies that she is beginning to understand Francisco’s reasoning and asks Eddie to set an appointment. It is only later that we learn that the pointless excavations and millions wasted was intentional, an attempt to both harm his own stockholders and to give nothing to the People’s State of Mexico.

While Francisco’s intentions are interesting and Dagny’s geopolitical business understanding is impressive, in this scene it is the response by the People’s State of Mexico that is most fruitful in understanding why Rand disliked this form of

government. The narrator informs us that the People's State of Mexico "felt that they had been cheated" by Francisco because they were expecting financial gain when they nationalized his mines (89). In creating this response for the government, Rand demonizes their system by presenting them as nothing more than looters looking to capitalize on the efforts of others. When Dagny meets with Francisco she reveals that this is also her assessment of the People's State of Mexico, "You knew, before you bought that property, that Mexico was in the hands of a looters' government. You didn't have to start a mining project for them" (119). Pleased with himself, Francisco describes the government's response as a "spectacle" and asks Dagny if she read what they are saying about him:

They're saying that I am an unscrupulous cheat who has defrauded them. They expected to have a successful mining concern to seize. I had no right to disappoint them like that. Did you read about the scabby little bureaucrat who wanted them to sue me? (122)

In retrospect, we know that in addition to Dagny, Francisco is one of the heroes of Rand's narrative. His pleasure at the Mexican government's response reveals Rand's own thoughts on governments that take such actions, and on the fact that they expect others to do the work for them so that they can benefit.

The primary purpose of Rand's inclusion of the People's State of Mexico and her heroes' depictions of (and responses to) it is to convey the idea that these forms of government are harmful, immoral, and wrong. There is no mistaking the exact type of scene that Rand is presenting to her audience and it is abundantly clear that the actions and thoughts of her heroes are intended to suggest how the reader should interpret what she places before them. Yet these are foreign governments and while they do help present what type of government Rand believed to be wrong, it is her depiction of the United States government that both allows us to see how this kind of

government can come to be and to dive deeper into the immorality of such a government in Rand's formulation.

### *What the government of the US is like*

It is clear from very early on in the text that the American government depicted is nothing like that of the American government during Rand's time. The government presented at the beginning of the text has yet to reach the level of a People's State but it is well on its way and moving fast. However, the echoes of the old American government can still be found in Rand's heroes. During the Aristocracy of Pull speech, Francisco reminds the other guests of the former greatness of America:

To the glory of mankind, there was, for the first and only time in history, a *country of money*—and I have no higher, more reverent tribute to pay to America, for this means: a country of reason, justice, freedom, production, achievement. For the first time, man's mind and money were set free, and there were no fortunes-by-conquest, but only fortunes-by-work, and instead of swordsmen and slaves, there appeared the real maker of wealth, the greatest worker, the highest type of human being—the self-made man—the American industrialist. (414)<sup>32</sup>

Although Francisco ends this citation by pointing at the American industrialist, a key component in making America successful, it is the type of government described first that allowed industrialists to thrive. According to Francisco, the America of the narrative's past was a freer society where there was limited or no regulation on industry. Francisco's words echo Rand's own thoughts about a highly regulated society moving away from laissez-faire capitalism and the direction she felt America was going. Namely, Rand believed that there was an increase in government controls in society that were limiting people's freedom, that this lacked reason and justice, and

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<sup>32</sup> Original emphasis.

that production and achievement would suffer as a result of further government controls in the private sector.

When we learn early in *Atlas Shrugged* that nearly every industrialist has a political person in Washington, D.C., it is clear that pay-to-play crony capitalism and government intervention into private businesses have become the standards by which the American government operates. One example of this government intervention takes place when they attempt to defame and later purchase Rearden Metal from its inventor, Hank Rearden, to prevent him from eliminating his competition by having a monopoly on the market. Because Rearden Metal is “tougher than steel, cheaper than steel and will outlast any hunk of metal in existence,” it is a threat to all steel manufacturers, such as Orren Boyle’s Associated Steel (21). Although it would seem that a new product on the market is the least of Associated Steel’s worries, given that they cannot deliver steel even when it is ordered, the government still attempts to stop Hank via the State Science Institute. After their attempts to defame the metal are unsuccessful, they try and purchase it from Hank. The government-run State Science Institute sends Dr. Potter to convince Hank to not move forward with Rearden Metal and it is during this conversation that we discover the real reason they disapprove of it; they think he will put other companies out of business because they cannot compete. Dr. Potter initially ventures to persuade Hank to not move forward and sell Rearden Metal by suggesting that it is his social responsibility to keep the market equal. When Hank refuses, noting that he does not hold to Dr. Potter’s collectivist morality, Dr. Potter attempts to purchase the rights to the metal. He informs Hank that he is “in a position to speak of large sums of money. *Government* money” (181).<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Original emphasis.

The emphasis on the word “*Government*” speaks volumes about Rand’s opinion of this practice. In Rand’s view of moral political philosophy the idea that a government would bribe a company to prevent it from producing a product is unacceptable, both for the government and the company if they should choose to take the offer. For Rand, government had no place in business, and she communicates this by having Hank refuse the offer. Her reasoning for why this is unacceptable is mirrored in Hank’s refusal, “Because it’s *mine*. Do you understand the word?” (*Atlas Shrugged* 181). Again, such emphasis is important in understanding Rand’s position; Rearden Metal belongs to Hank, he spent the time and money creating it, and it is thus his to do with as he pleases and not the government’s place to say otherwise. At this point in *Atlas Shrugged*, the American government is in the early stages of becoming a more powerful force in society, one that will eventually be able to dictate every aspect of life like the People’s States are already doing in other countries.

The American government quickly takes its next step in becoming more like a People’s State a few pages later with the implementation of The Equalization of Opportunity Bill (212). This piece of legislature prevents Hank, and other businessmen, from owning more than one business. The government believes that this will create more competition but they lack the foresight necessary to realize that this policy will dissuade many from any attempt at progress. Thus, Hank is forced to sell off all of his other businesses, including the most important for his steel and Rearden Metal manufacturing: Rearden Ore. On his way home, Rearden considers The Equalization of Opportunity Bill, how it was brought into being by lobbyists and politicians that have little to no knowledge of industry, and asks “By what right?” did they have the authority to make such a decision (*Atlas Shrugged* 215). Through Hank, Rand communicates her frustration with the idea of a government getting involved in

business and industry. The problem Rand is suggesting takes place when elected officials make decisions about topics where they lack the proper understanding of the field in which they are making a decision on. This is an important moment for Hank, for the direction of his narrative, and for how Rand will be able to use him to promote her own views on how a government should not act. As the narrative progresses, the American government begins to more closely resemble a People's State, though they have yet to rename themselves as such. In opposition to the People's States and the American government, Rand presents her eutopia Galt's Gulch.

### *Rand's Eutopia*

Galt's Gulch, isolated in the mountains of Colorado, is a eutopia based on—but not a fully realized version of—Galt's, i.e., Rand's, philosophy. After Dagny's arrival, Galt informs her: “we have no laws in this valley, no rules, no formal organization of any kind. We come here because we want to rest. But we have certain customs, which we all observe, because they pertain to the things we need to rest from” (714). Although Judge Narragansett, formerly of the Superior Court of Illinois, “is to act as [an] arbiter, in case of disagreements,” his services have yet to be called upon (748). Midas Mulligan, the legal owner of most of the land that makes up Galt's Gulch, explains the situation in Galt's Gulch much more precisely: “We are not a state here, not a society of any kind—we're just a voluntary association of men held together by nothing but every man's self-interest” (747). Galt gives the reason Galt's Gulch has yet to form a proper government when he tells Dagny that all of those on strike in the gulch plan to return to society once “the code of the looters has collapsed” (748). Despite not creating a fully Objectivist society, the gulch presents many of the key elements of Rand's philosophical views.

The reason its inhabitants are able to forgo the creation of a functioning government could be attributed to the fact that there are so few of them and that they are all selectively chosen to live there based on a shared moral philosophy. Ellis Wyatt, a former oil tycoon who was the reason Dagny built the John Galt Line, explains the gulch's moral code on trade:

If my oil takes less effort to produce, I ask less of the men to whom I trade it for the things I need. I add an extra span of time to their lives with every gallon of my oil that they burn. And since they're men like me, they keep inventing faster ways to make the things they make—so every one of them grants me an added minute, hour or day with the bread I buy from them, with the clothes, the lumber, the metal [...] an added year with every month of electricity I purchase. That's our market and that's how it works for us—but that was not the way it worked in the outer world. (722)

With no laws to speak of, the policy of lowering prices on a product in the event it costs less to produce depends on a mutual moral code that is ensured by individually selecting those that are allowed to live in the gulch. However difficult it would be to maintain this model, it presents Rand's belief in a moral form of laissez-faire capitalism. It is clearly suggested that those living in the gulch are living properly. This is done through the contrast between the success and living conditions taking place in Galt's Gulch—symbolically represented in a three-foot tall, solid gold dollar sign—and those that remain in society, many of who are struggling to survive. Furthermore, the fact that all of the people in the gulch are able to cohabitate without disagreement and without laws, while those living on the outside are constantly arguing and passing one law after another, makes clear Rand's opinion on how people should live.

Based on the limited time Dagny stays in Galt's Gulch and the fact that the others intend to eventually return to society once the governments of the world have collapsed, it serves less as a model of how society should be and more as a point of

contrast to the outside world, which shows how society should not be. Narratively, Galt's Gulch also serves as a beacon of hope that society can change and prosper if people are willing to realize their mistakes. While *Atlas Shrugged* does end on a positive note, the hope that things will get better now that the totalitarian government has been removed from power, Galt's Gulch is the only true eutopia ever fully realized in the text. Although the novel is full of long speeches explaining what a better system of government would be and look like, the narrative focuses mostly on denouncing the current system in power, something we also see happening in these contemporary YA critical dystopias.

Like *Atlas Shrugged*, the YA critical dystopias covered in this work all present oppressive governments with immense power over their citizens. Similar to Rand's use of Dagny Taggart, the authors of these works use their protagonists to explore the dystopian governments, be it by direct experience, observation, or by second-hand knowledge. While all the protagonists, including Dagny, are aware that their governments are doing more harm than good to the citizens, none of them realize the extent to which their societies are dystopian until the actions of their respective government's directly affect them as individuals. This direct action forces the protagonists to either experience or be witness to the full extent of their government's dystopian nature and leads to their rebellion against their governments. All of these soon to be rebels have this experience early on in the text: for Katniss it is volunteering as tribute when her sister is selected for the Hunger Games, for Cia when she is selected for The Testing, for Tris when she is forced to select a faction, and for Cassia when a glitch shows her Ky instead of Xander as her match. However, these moments are only the catalyst for revealing how dystopian their governments are. The journeys of these protagonists, while ones of self-discovery, are also ones of

discovering the negative effects of big government. In the following chapters I will examine the forms of government depicted in these texts and how they all violate Rand's Objectivist political philosophy of what a government should be. Doing so will allow us to see how these seemingly everyday female protagonists become coming-of-age Randian heroines, while also aiding in the understanding of the political message that is consistent throughout all of these works.

## Chapter 2 – The Hunger Games Trilogy

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The government in *The Hunger Games* trilogy is a clear dictatorship. Although other leadership roles, specifically the District Mayors and the Head Gamemaker, are given the authority to make decisions, they serve at the pleasure of President Snow, who has the final say about anything and everything he chooses. Little is given in regard to how Snow became president, whether he was elected, appointed, or seized the position. However, Finnick, the victor of the 65<sup>th</sup> Hunger Games from District 4, does explain that Snow was “Such a young man when he rose to power. Such a clever one to keep it,” and that when he was younger he eliminated his rivals and other potential threats to his power through the use of poison (*Mockingjay* 171). Although Finnick’s observation does not reveal exactly how Snow came to power, it does explain that he has been able to maintain it because of his intelligence and ruthlessness. These traits are shown in his ability to use threats and fear to get people to do what he wants them to, which is the very way he governs the districts. As we are given a clear picture of what life is like for many of those that live in the districts under Snow’s regime, his iron grip on Panem, and his absolute power over the citizens, we are left with no doubt that we are dealing with a dictatorship.

### The Hunger Games

#### *Hunting*

In beginning to ascertain whether the government in *The Hunger Games* trilogy adheres to an Objectivist system or a non-Objectivist system we can start by determining if they have objective laws. In regard to law, Rand states, “All laws must be *objective* (and objectively justifiable): men must know clearly, and in advance of taking an action, what the law forbids them to do (and why), what constitutes a crime

and what penalty they will incur if they commit it” (*VOS* 128-29).<sup>34</sup> The first law we are introduced to in *The Hunger Games* involves the fence surrounding District 12. When we meet Katniss Everdeen, she is hunting and gathering outside this fence. We learn that “Separating the Meadow from the woods, in fact enclosing all of District 12, is a high chain-link fence topped with barbed-wire loops. In theory, it’s supposed to be electrified twenty-four hours a day as a deterrent to predators that live in the woods” (*The Hunger Games* 4) and that “trespassing in the woods is illegal and poaching carries the severest of penalties.” (5). In regard to this law, it is clear from Katniss’s internal monologue that people are aware of the law, the penalty for breaking it, and have been given a reason for it; however, there is a question as to whether or not it is “objectively justifiable.” Certainly, this law serves a purpose, either to keep predators out, as is suggested, or to keep people in, but serving a purpose does not mean it is objectively justifiable.

According to Objectivism, because the Capitol has forced the citizens living in the districts into a form of slavery—forcing them to produce for the Capitol’s benefit—and fails to respect and protect the individual rights of its citizens, Panem is a slave country with no national rights. With the absence of national rights, the Capitol has no right to its territorial integrity—meaning government owned land—its social system, nor its form of government, and therefore is incapable of putting in place ethical laws. Like any contemporary dictatorship, the government of a nation with no national rights may continue to exist and even be officially recognized by other nations; however, ethically it has no right to govern the lives of its citizens. According to Objectivism, the Capitol is acting unethically simply by the means in which it created this law and thus ethically incapable of passing any legitimate laws.

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<sup>34</sup> Original emphasis.

Despite the fact that the law and the Capitol are unethical according to Objectivism, Katniss's decision to break the law is not automatically ethical; after all, breaking an unethical law for unethical reasons does not place the individual on any ethical high ground. Although Objectivism would conclude that the Capitol has no ethical legitimacy to govern its citizens or to implement law, this does not negate the fact that the Capitol is still in control and the law still exists. To ascertain if Katniss's action is ethical in an Objectivist sense, we must ask what rights does she possess as an individual and what are the limits of her rights.

If we apply Rand's theory of the "one fundamental right" to Katniss in conjunction with the recognition that the Capitol does not have a right to its territorial integrity, i.e., government owned land, then we must recognize that she has the right to exit the fence surrounding District 12 (*VOS* 110). This is because the "one fundamental right" allows her to "engage in self-sustaining" action in order to support "the fulfillment and the enjoyment of [her] own life" (110). To put this another way, Objectively speaking Katniss has a right to hunt and gather on the land outside District 12 for two reasons: first, that the Capitol has no right to own the land, and second, that she has a right to sustain herself through nature's gifts. Although Katniss should have the right to exit the fence, considering the fact that—as a human—she has a right to life and the law itself is unethical because it violates her right to life, is it ethical for her to break the law?

To answer this question, we might consider asking if her decision has been made with reason, i.e., logic. Her reasoning is fairly simple, as she mutters to herself while in the Meadow, "District Twelve. Where you can starve to death in safety" (*The Hunger Games* 6). Katniss's reason behind breaking the law is her recognition that if she does not hunt and gather food then she will go hungry. Despite the fact that she is

already accepting Capitol assistance through the tessera program, an exchange of a year's supply of grain and oil for another entry into the Hunger Games, what they give her does not provide her with enough food to survive. Her need to acquire food in another manner is compounded by the fact that she has taken parental responsibility for her sister, the ethicality of which will be discussed in the next section. Recognizing her need for food and her inability to acquire it by any other means, Katniss must turn to the area outside District 12; therefore, her decision to break the law is completely logical.

Finally, we must ask who is affected by Katniss's action. Rand's "*one fundamental right,*" a man's right to his own life, does not allow an individual to prevent another individual from doing the same. According to Rand, it is fundamentally unethical for one individual to violate another individual's right to their own life because it is an act of sacrificing others for one's own desires. In Katniss's case, her decision to exit the fence surrounding District 12 does not affect any other individual's rights. By hunting wild animals and gathering uncultivated plants outside of District 12 she is not taking from anyone else, in fact, it allows her to become a producer. The excess food that is not needed for her family becomes a tradable item that she can use to exchange value with other people and acquire items that she cannot produce herself. This also helps fuel free trade in District 12, making her decision to break an unethical law entirely ethical according to Objectivism.

To summarize, according to Objectivism, the Capitol has no national rights because it violates the individual rights of its citizens, this makes the government, and by extension its laws, unethical. Katniss's decision to hunt and gather in the Meadow is rational because she has recognized a personal desire, the need to eat in order to stay alive, and found a way to achieve it. Her action does not violate the rights of any

other person and actually helps bring some semblance of prosperity to her fellow citizens. Thus, because the government is unethical and incapable of implementing ethical laws, breaking the law can only be ethical or unethical based on the logic behind doing so and who the action affects. Since Katniss's decision is logical and her action does not violate any other individual's rights, she is acting ethically according to Objectivism.

### *Perceptions of the Hunger Games*

The idea of an anti-Objectivist political and social dystopia is further depicted through the difference between the Capitol's and District 12's perceptions of the Hunger Games. It is clear from the onset of the novel that the Capitol represents a Plutocratic class and that the districts represent the common people. This is first presented by District 12's Capitol escort Effie Trinket, who has arrived to draw the names of the tributes and take them back to the Capitol. Katniss describes her as "fresh from the Capitol with her scary white grin, pinkish hair, and spring green suit;" for Effie this is a day of celebration (*The Hunger Games* 17-8). However, the reaping is a somber event for those in the districts because they know that having their name drawn will likely result in their death. This is lost on Effie, "Bright and bubbly as ever," she addresses the district, "Happy Hunger Games! And may the odds be *ever* in your favor!" (19).<sup>35</sup> Effie provides an important contrast between Capitol and District citizens; although it is only a taste of what Katniss later discovers once she arrives in the Capitol. Effie's upbeat attitude and treatment of the reaping as an exciting event compared to the subdued portrayal of the people of the district is polarizing. The opposition of their dichotomous perceptions of the reaping reveals the disparity between the Capitol and District 12. Katniss explains to the reader how District 12

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<sup>35</sup> Original emphasis.

feels about the Hunger Games; it is an evil and unfair event that no one can do anything to change. However, Effie's excitement suggests that the Capitol actually enjoys the Hunger Games and sees it as a great form of entertainment instead of its original and perverse intent to prevent civil war by reminding the districts of the Capitol's power.

To sell the Hunger Games to the Capitol citizens, the government uses a set of terms that are less threatening than the reality of the situation. As Jill Olthouse explains, "*Reaping* is a term the Capitol uses to make the murder of innocent young people seem as natural and necessary as a fall harvest" (45).<sup>36</sup> The natural sounding term 'reaping' helps make the selection process appear like something that needs to, and must, occur; whereas if it were called the "offering" it would sound much more sinister. The pageantry and entertainment that the Capitol citizens view as the Hunger Games, versus the districts view of them as a death sentence, adds to the divide between the Capitol and the districts. Although it is likely that both the districts and the Capitol citizen are aware of the divide, their perceptions of it are completely opposed.

Olthouse also notes that the term "*Tribute* originally referred to a payment by a less powerful state to one of its more powerful neighbors" (45).<sup>37</sup> Again, this term is a selling point to the Capitol citizens not the district citizens. For the Capitol, "tribute" is a term that confirms their sense of superiority over the districts. Olthouse correctly notes that the Capitol has already virtually bled the districts dry, "All that's left to take are their sons and daughters, along with their hopes and dreams" (45-6). As intended, the Hunger Games serve as a reminder to the districts how powerless they are against the Capitol. Chad William Timm observes that the districts "generally

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<sup>36</sup> Original emphasis.

<sup>37</sup> Original emphasis.

accept the Capitol's power without question, going about their daily routines in a way that maintains the status quo" (277-78). The reason for this is because the Capitol is very effective in dishing out tyranny and oppressing the districts. The reaping and the Hunger Games remind the districts of the Capitol's absolute power.

The Capitol's perception of the Hunger Games can be informed by the government's desire to maintain power and the perversion of art. In creating the Hunger Games, they have taken the art of entertainment to the extreme by creating a reality television show where tributes must kill one another for the Capitol's entertainment. Brian McDonald notes, "the Capitol represents the monstrosity of art when it declares war on the principle of mimesis" (13). Whereas mimesis is the imitation of nature through art, the Capitol's art is an "insult to nature" (13). One way in which this is done is through "The science that produces the mutations [*sic*]—and especially the grotesque human-animal hybrids" that appear in the final day of the Hunger Games (13).<sup>38</sup> However, "Almost as sinister is the decorative preparation of the tributes' bodies for their *American Idol*-like interviews prior to their dismemberment and destruction in the arena" (13). These perversions of art by way of insults to nature and the many others that occur during the course of the Hunger Games are not done to delight and instruct but simply to entertain. The Capitol is clearly entertained, as evidenced by the massive crowds that show up for the presentation of the tributes and the interviews, the status that is obtained through sponsorship, and the bragging rights of betting on the winning tribute. However, because there is no moral or cathartic intention behind the Hunger Games, none is achieved by the audience.

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<sup>38</sup> "Muttation" is the word used by Collins's characters to refer specifically to animals that have been mutated by Capitol scientists, sometimes also called "mutts."

McDonald points out “As readers, we may experience authentic catharsis [....] For the Capitol audience, however, the catharsis is an entirely fake and perverse imitation of the real thing” (21). Part of this fake catharsis is caused by the fact that the audience in the Capitol does not see the competitors as humans but as tributes. In referring to them as tributes, the Capitol and its citizens dehumanize them, making the death aspect of the Hunger Games more palatable. Surely the Capitol recognizes that the tributes are human, but their ethnocentric view of the people in the districts results in them regarding the tributes as subhuman. So it is that through the dichotomous perceptions of the Hunger Games an anti-Objectivist political and social dystopia is revealed. Because Objectivism “holds that *human* good does not require human sacrifices and cannot be achieved by the sacrifice of anyone to anyone,” the government, and by natural extension the Capitol as a whole, is in violation of Objectivism (*VOS* 34).<sup>39</sup> In putting on the Hunger Games and demanding tributes the government is requiring that individuals be sacrificed for the entertainment of the Capitol citizens. Furthermore, in desiring such entertainment, the Capitol citizens are complicit in this violation of Objective human rights and encourage its perpetual violation.

## **Catching Fire**

*Catching Fire* begins much the same as *The Hunger Games*, with Katniss in the woods beyond the fence of District 12. We learn that it has been about six months since the 74<sup>th</sup> Hunger Games and Katniss is preparing for the Victory Tour, an event “Strategically placed almost midway between the annual Games” and “the Capitol’s way of keeping the horror fresh and immediate” (*Catching Fire* 4). Sitting on a rock and contemplating the spectacle she must endure, Katniss notes, “Not only are we in

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<sup>39</sup> Original emphasis.

the districts forced to remember the iron grip of the Capitol's power each year, we are forced to celebrate it" (4). It is clear that despite being able to better her family's situation via the "generosity" of the Capitol for winning the Games, Katniss loathes the Capitol more than ever. Furthermore, it is during the Victory Tour and the events that arise from it that we are witness to additional ways in which the government is Objectively dystopian.

### *A Visit From President Snow*

After leaving the woods and arriving at her new home in Victor's Village, Katniss discovers that she has a visitor—President Snow. It is in this scene that we gain our first direct knowledge about what kind of leader Snow is and the lengths he will go to in order to maintain power. Because the districts have no means of communicating amongst themselves Katniss is sheltered from what has been occurring in the other districts but Snow, on the other hand, is fully aware. Knowing that the Victory Tour is about to begin, Snow is looking to use Katniss to calm the districts, which have begun to rise up against the Capitol. Snow is direct and informs her, "I have a problem, Miss Everdeen [...] A problem that began the moment you pulled out those poisonous berries in the arena" (20). He goes on to explain that in some of the districts "people viewed [her] little trick with the berries as an act of defiance, not an act of love" (21). Concerned that an uprising may soon commence, Snow threatens the lives of Katniss's family and friends in order to enlist her aid in calming the districts. She promises to "convince everyone in the districts that [she] wasn't defying the Capitol, that [she] was crazy with love" (29). Menacingly Snow says to her, "Aim higher in case you fall short" (29). Unsure of how she could aim higher than convincing the districts, Katniss asks how that would be possible, Snow's

answer is simple, “Convince *me*” (29).<sup>40</sup> Given that Snow believes that Katniss was in fact defying the Capitol, his response would suggest that he recognizes the nearly impossible nature of her task.

The discussion between Snow and Katniss reveals a great deal about how things work in Panem and what lengths the government will go to maintain power. Private visits and backroom threats to eliminate a person’s family and friends are clearly not above the office of the President. Neither is orchestrating a false romantic narrative between Katniss and Peeta in order to dupe an entire nation into believing what Snow wants them to believe. Snow, like any politician that enjoys a long career, has learned how to spin a negative into a positive. If Snow can make Panem believe that Katniss and Peeta’s love is real he will silence any notion of rebellion and have new pawns he can use to entertain the Capitol citizens and, more importantly, distract the nation for years to come.

Snow’s presence alone shows how serious and important the situation truly is. Any lower politician could have delivered the message or Snow could have simply called her on the phone; however, his physical presence sends the message that this is a serious situation because it warrants the President traveling all the way to District 12 and speaking to her personally. The manner of his presence in District 12 also reveals a great deal. Arriving unannounced with no pomp and circumstance in the form of media coverage makes it clear that he does not want it known that he has spoken to Katniss prior to the Victory Tour. In order for his plan to work, the districts, as well as the Capitol, must presume that the romance between Katniss and Peeta is natural if it is to be believed that their actions in the arena were truly out of love and not defiance. Aside from constructing the media narrative surrounding events in Panem, the

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<sup>40</sup> Original emphasis.

government's primary method of preventing a rebellion is by maintaining socioeconomic inequality within each individual district.

### ***Uprising in District 8 and Increased Security in District 12***

When intentional socioeconomic inequality and control over the media narrative fail, the Capitol turns to brute force. We are informed on two occasions about how the government acts in direct violation of Objectivism by using physical coercion, i.e., force, to regain control in District 8, one of the districts that stages an open rebellion. One instance is when Katniss sees a video in the mayor's office of carnage taking place in the streets of District 8 and the other is when Katniss meets Twill and Bonnie, refugees fleeing District 8. While attending the final event of the Victory Tour, a dinner at the mayor's house in District 12, Katniss witnesses a video in the mayor's office of a riot taking place in District 8. A television announcer "warns that conditions are worsening and a Level 3 alert has been called. Additional forces are being sent into District 8, and all textile production has ceased" (88). From Katniss's perspective and knowledge this is the start of the uprising; however, when she meets Bonnie and Twill she discovers that although the uprising has just begun, people have been planning for it for quite some time. Katniss states:

Ever since the Hunger Games, the discontent in District 8 had been growing. It was always there, of course, to some degree. But what differed was that talk was no longer sufficient, and the idea of taking action went from a wish to a reality. [...] The night of my engagement [...] was the night the uprising began. (144)

We learn that the mandatory viewing of Katniss and Peeta's interview with Caesar Flickerman while on the Victory Tour provided the perfect excuse for those in District 8 to gather in large numbers and attempt to take over the district. Although initially successful, the rebels of District 8 were no match for the firepower of the

Capitol's air force. After the bombings, the Capitol put the district on lockdown to starve the would-be rebels into submission.

Although the limited success of the uprising in District 8 is disheartening, at least for anyone that finds nationalized slavery unacceptable, it reveals how far the Capitol is willing to go to maintain power and how they plan to do it. The Capitol is faced with four options when responding to the uprising in District 8: 1) they can pull back their forces and leave District 8 to survive on its own, 2) they can negotiate a peace treaty, 3) they can use force to regain control, or 4) they can completely annihilate the district. The first and last options are clearly the least desirable for the Capitol, either way results in a complete loss of District 8 and the resources it provides for the Capitol. Obviously negotiating a peace treaty between the Capitol and District 8 would be the most diplomatic and Objectivist solution; however, this solution would still be a loss for the Capitol because they would have to provide freedom to District 8 and would no longer be able to exploit the resources which currently come at virtually zero cost to the Capitol. The use of force to regain control, the option that the Capitol decides to go with, is ideal in cost and result for the Capitol. With advanced war fighting capabilities the Capitol will suffer little to no losses in the skirmish. By regaining absolute control, the Capitol will be able to continue the exploitation of District 8's resources just as they have been doing for the past 75 years.

The other time we see the government violate the rights of its citizens by use of physical coercion takes place when they send a new group of Peacekeepers to District 12. Concerned that other districts might rise up like District 8, the Capitol intends to dissuade another uprising before it can begin. The new Head Peacekeeper,

his troops, and the policies put in place are guilty of violating a number of Objectivist principles, namely the right to life and the right to be free from physical coercion.

The new Peacekeepers begin by burning down the Hob, which effectively removes the only means of cheap trade within the district, causing more socioeconomic problems for District 12 and forcing many to go without the items they desperately need. Many of the mine workers that would normally have the financial means to purchase products from regular shops are not able to do so as “The mines stay shut for two weeks [...] Food shortages begin [...] When the mines reopen, wages are cut, hours extended, miners sent into blatantly dangerous work sites” (*Catching Fire* 131). By actively preventing people from working, the Capitol is denying them the right to life by eliminating their ability to purchase food, which is only made worse by the intentional food shortages, which would drive up prices even when the food is available. The Objectivist principle of the right to be free from physical coercion is violated regularly as every crime, no matter how minor, seems to result in physical punishment at the stocks in the district square.

Presumably similar events are occurring in most if not all of the other districts. What the Capitol does not initially realize is that the actions taken against the districts will also have an effect on people in the Capitol. To prevent people in the Capitol from starting their own uprising against the government they are told a series of lies to justify the absence of the luxuries they have come to enjoy. Be it bad weather, dried up mines, or whatever; the government cannot risk informing the Capitol citizens of the truth behind the shortages. Although the Capitol citizens will suffer, their suffering is nothing compared to what the people in the districts are going through. The increase in children signing up for tesserae and the spoiled food from Parcel Day stress the socioeconomic dichotomy between the Capitol and the districts

and shows how the Capitol uses increased socioeconomic inequality to further exploit and control the citizens in the districts.

## **Mockingjay**

### ***Is District 13 Any Better?***

In *Mockingjay*, it is revealed that District 13, believed to have been annihilated during the last rebellion 76 years ago, is in fact alive and well; however, we quickly learn that just because they are willing to fight with the districts against the Capitol does not mean that they are any better politically than the Capitol. The political situation in District 13 is embodied in President Coin. While she does seem to have a group of advisors, mainly her military commanders and Plutarch Heavensbee, the Head Gamemaker in *Catching Fire* and secret rebel, she seems to operate in a similar manner to that of President Snow—in all decisions and government affairs Coin has the final say. The character of Coin forces the political critic to ask the questions: Is someone good simply because they are fighting what we perceive to be bad? And, do method and/or intent play a role in what we determine to be a virtuous government? We know that Coin is essentially running the same form of government that Snow is running—a dictatorship—yet at the start of *Mockingjay* we are sympathetic to her character because District 13 wants to fight the Capitol, that which we perceive to be bad. For Objectivism, the reason and logic behind every decision determines if it is virtuous; however, allowing a single individual to hold so much unchecked power is also against Objectivism because of the possibility for corruption is far too great. Thus, despite the potentially good intentions of Coin, her government is not inherently good simply because they are fighting the Capitol that we perceive to be bad, and Coin gives the reader plenty of opportunities to see how unethical she really is.

Only 40 pages in to *Mockingjay* Coin begins to reveal the kind of person she really is, the kind of government she is running, and how similar she is to Snow. Indeed, her name “Coin” seems to be a charactonym intended to encourage the reader to draw comparisons between her and Snow. Like their namesakes, Snow and Coin are both cold and emotionless. Furthermore, their names describe their physical appearances; Snow having white hair and Coin having gray hair. Katniss knows that Coin needs her to be the symbol of the rebellion—the Mockingjay—just as Snow needed Katniss to be a symbol of someone that was only in love and not questioning the Capitol. Unlike the situation with Snow where Katniss has little choice in the matter, after talking to her sister, Prim, Katniss realizes that Coin’s need provides her with the power to bargain. This should be a simple case of two individuals trading for equal or higher values; however, when Katniss asks for Peeta and the other captured tributes to be pardoned, Coin refuses. What is occurring in this situation is a predicament noted in Rand’s *Atlas Shrugged* in the conclusion of Francisco d’Anconia’s speech at Jim Taggart’s wedding, when he states, “When money ceases to be the tool by which men deal with one another, then men become the tools of men” (415). Although the situation between Coin and Katniss is not one where a trade with money is possible, the result remains the same, “men [have] become the tools of men.” Ethically this is not a particularly flattering scene for either Coin or Katniss, however the situation reflects more poorly on the government of District 13, that their president is willing/allowed to deal in the lives of people, especially considering that the tributes did not volunteer to become captives of the Capitol and have done nothing wrong. Despite eventually agreeing to pardon Peeta and the other tributes, Coin places the stipulation that Katniss must perform her role as the symbol of the rebellion as required by Coin. Although Peeta’s freedom is Katniss’s goal, she has effectively

become a slave to the government of District 13, something that Coin and her government find perfectly acceptable.

District 13 again shows its willingness to allow “men to become the tools of men” when it is revealed that they have captured and imprisoned Katniss’s prep team from the past two Hunger Games (*Mockingjay* 46). While being “retrieved” by District 13 might have been a saving grace for the prep team, given that Snow would have likely given them the same or worse treatment simply for being associated with Katniss, District 13 is only interested in the team because they feel it will aid them in presenting Katniss in the same fashion the other districts have become accustomed to. Being “retrieved” and later imprisoned for the minor offense of stealing bread, the prep team is given no choice in the matter, and the torture they have already endured while imprisoned serves as a sufficient coercion tactic to ensure they aid District 13. Knowingly or unknowingly, District 13, as both a society—a group of individuals according to Rand—and a government body are complicit in violating the rights of the prep team.

The willingness of District 13 to use men as the tools of men is not limited to Capitol citizens or the tributes the Capitol has captured. This is most obviously done when Coin allows Katniss to go to the front lines of the battle in the Capitol, hoping that if Katniss dies her perceived martyrdom will provide the citizens of the districts with sufficient motivation to finish off the Capitol. However, being a symbol and a tool for war is essentially what Katniss signed up for, and she is more than willing to risk her life anyway. The most distressing case of men becoming the tools of men takes place when Prim is sent to the front lines as a medic in the final push outside President Snow’s mansion and is killed by a parachute bombing.

Following the battle, Katniss confronts Snow who is adamant that the bombing was not the work of Capitol forces, despite the fact that they were Capitol hovercraft. While Katniss tells herself she does not believe Snow, part of her clearly does as she begins to second-guess the situation. Particularly, she notes that double-exploding bombs were the idea of her childhood friend Gale and her former fellow tribute Beetee; “that Snow made no escape attempt;” and that Prim was too young to be on the front lines (360-1). Furthermore, she recalls that Boggs, one of District 13’s military leaders that was sympathetic to Katniss, had once said that Coin planned to take over after the war and that Katniss “*may have more influence than any other single person,*” making her a threat. According to Katniss, Prim would have had to be fourteen to be of age to be in a battle, even as a medic, and being only thirteen should have disqualify her.<sup>41</sup> Katniss considers:

That my sister would have wanted to be there, I have no doubt. That she would be more capable than many older than she is a given. But for all that, someone very high up would have had to approve putting a thirteen-year-old in combat. Did Coin do it, hoping that losing Prim would push me completely over the edge? Or, at least, firmly on her side? (*Mockingjay* 361)

While it is quite possible—and certainly would not be out of character—that Snow is lying, Katniss seems to come to the conclusion that he is actually telling the truth.

This is evidenced by several facts: that Katniss decides to kill Coin instead of Snow at the end of the text and that Gale essentially plays stupid when Katniss confronts him about whether or not it was his bombs that were responsible for Prim’s death, stating, “I don’t know” (367).

If we operate based on Katniss’s assumption that it was actually District 13—and by extension Gale, Beetee, and Coin—that was responsible for the bombing that killed Prim, it confirms how willing they are to allow men to be the tools of men.

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<sup>41</sup> Original emphasis.

While Gale and Beetee likely had no knowledge on when and in what situation the bombs would be deployed, they are still culpable because they knew how they would work, killing or injuring people and then killing anyone that came to rescue or aid them. Gale and Beetee were more than willing to use men as tools. On the other hand, it is incredibly likely that Coin knew what was going on, as Katniss noted in the above paragraph, “someone very high up would have had to approve putting a thirteen-year-old in combat” (361). Prim and the other medics became the tools of District 13 to ensure victory. The willingness for a government and its leader to use—read: exploit—men as tools to achieve their goals is against Objectivist ethics. As John Galt said in Rand’s *Atlas Shrugged*, “I swear—by my life and my love of it—that I will never live for the sake of another man, nor ask another man to live for mine” (1069). While casualties in war are all but inevitable, the above manner is a willful slaughter of one’s own people for political gain, making the government of District 13 no better than the government they are looking to depose.

### ***Conclusion***

*The Hunger Games* trilogy celebrates an Objectivist philosophy of government by denouncing the dystopian dictatorship that rules over Panem for the majority of the text. Using both Snow and Coin as examples of proponents for authoritarian government, the trilogy ultimately leads the reader to conclude that a government that is congruent with Objectivism is ideal. This is done in part by presenting the potential for a fully Objectivist solution to the dystopian society when, in the final pages, a sense of hope is presented as both Snow and Coin are killed and an election is held for a new leader. As Katniss talks with Plutarch, who has found himself a position within the new administration, he jokes that if another war should arise “they could find a role” for Katniss, but that they are “in that sweet period where

everyone agrees that [their] recent horrors should never be repeated” (*Mockingjay* 379). Though not sure it will last, Plutarch optimistically notes that perhaps this will be “The time it sticks. Maybe we are witnessing the evolution of the human race,” which suggests that the Objectivist direction the society is heading in is the correct one.

In the epilogue, the critical dystopian elements seem to have been fully eliminated, as we learn it has been “more than twenty years” since the war ended and Katniss and Peeta are now married and have two small children (390). While Katniss is still worried that something bad could happen again, the ending of the war, which resulted in an elected leader, informs the reader that dystopia can be overcome. By informing the reader that twenty years in the future Panem remains at peace and that the quality of life is at such a level that Katniss has willingly decided to marry and have children, an act she expressly stated she would never do at the beginning of the trilogy, the work validates Katniss’s actions in helping bring down the government and her decision to prevent Coin from ever becoming the leader of Panem.

Culturally, in the broadest sense, this trilogy teaches young adults to question and challenge any political ideology that could result in conditions even remotely similar to those presented in the trilogy. However, more specifically, it influences them to form Objectivist attitudes and opinions in regard to politics and policy, particularly the trilogy’s chief social concern, socioeconomic inequality. This, coupled with the ethically Objectivist leaning of Katniss and some of her compatriots as discussed in Part III, Chapter 2, will provide a complete framework for how *The Hunger Games* trilogy influences contemporary young adults.

## Chapter 3 – The Testing Trilogy

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Joelle Charbonneau's *The Testing* trilogy, unlike *The Hunger Games*, presents a dystopian government in the guise of a democracy. It is a far cry from the constitutional republic with representative democracy found in the United States, yet some similarities are overtly present. We are first given glimpses into the exact structure of this government in the second book, *Independent Study*, when Cia and her fellow first year Government Studies students tackle their initiation. One of the tasks requires them to enter the Debate Chamber floor and retrieve an envelope from the moderating justice, which at the time is the President of the society. As Cia and her group attempt to figure out how to complete this task she gives us information about the formation of the government, which sounds strikingly similar to how the United States was formed. As noted, there is a President and presumably something similar to a congress; however, because of the Government Studies program, which is required for all future leaders, we know that while these individuals might be elected, only those that complete the program are allowed to be government officials. It is also in *Independent Study* that we learn that the Education Department operates under complete autonomy, free from all government oversight, which explains how they are able to get away with everything that takes place during The Testing. *The Testing* trilogy, like the other works covered, uses Cia's experiences to depict how this originally well-intended system of government has allowed for so much corruption and nepotism.

*The Testing* trilogy depicts a society not entirely different from that depicted in *The Hunger Games* trilogy. Like *The Hunger Games*, *The Testing* trilogy takes place in a post-apocalyptic world located in the same location as present day America.

The United Commonwealth could be seen as a society that would have been a precursor to Panem, i.e., it is still in a stage of recovery following the preceding apocalyptic events and is significantly less advanced technologically. However, the United Commonwealth is not nearly as outwardly dystopian as Panem. While the citizens in the districts of Panem suffer from blatant exploitation and violations to their human rights by their government on a daily basis, the majority of citizens in the colonies of the United Commonwealth have little interaction with their government on a national level, and the local governments are never depicted as particularly oppressive. Yet both societies have annual events that lead to the deaths of numerous teens. Where the Hunger Games is a highly publicized spectacle reminding the districts of their subordinate position in society, The Testing is a highly secretive event intended to select the future leaders of the United Commonwealth. Despite the positive intentions of The Testing, the event reveals the dystopian nature of this society and its government.

## **The Testing**

The most dystopian element in *The Testing* is—not surprisingly—The Testing itself. The Testing actually begins the moment Cia and her fellow candidates depart Five Lakes, and Cia becomes aware of this when she discovers that there are cameras hidden in the transport vehicle and inside the cabin where they stop for lunch. The fact that the candidates are being watched, and indeed evaluated, without their knowledge establishes an element of a negative Big Brother type dystopian government in this text. This element of negativity is two-fold; firstly, it suggests a sense of unfairness because the candidates are in some form being tested without knowing it, making it harder for them to pass. Secondly, it depicts a government that intentionally spies on its citizens without their knowledge or consent.

It is this second element, a lack of personal privacy, that Objectivism takes the most issue with. Rand states, “Civilization is the progress toward a society of privacy. The savage’s whole existence is public, ruled by the laws of his tribe. Civilization is the process of setting man free from men” (*For the New Intellectual* 84). In referencing the “savage” and “tribe,” Rand is arguing against a society where an individual can be ruled by the whims of men—the collective—purely based on strength or some other coercive power, hence “setting man free from men.” If individuals are to be free from tyranny they must be allowed privacy, this, according to Rand, is so that they may develop their minds (*Return of the Primitive* 63). Because the government of the United Commonwealth is willing to violate the privacy rights of its citizens it faces the same problem as the government of Panem in *The Hunger Games* trilogy, i.e., “A nation that violates the rights of its own citizens cannot claim any rights whatsoever,” confirming an Objectivist sense of dystopia taking place in the text (*VOS* 121). However, the discovery that the students are being watched is only an initial signpost that this government is dystopian, the scenes depicted once *The Testing* begins are far worse.

### ***Delectation Without Application***

At the start of *The Testing* Cia has no inkling of the dystopian nature of her central government because she is isolated in the small colony of Five Lakes, where visits from government officials are very rare and even elements of the society that we as readers might think dystopian seem common practice for Cia. However, in retrospect, we as readers can see that there are obvious signs that not all is right in this society. The text begins on Cia’s graduation day from her required education, where her primary concern is being selected for *The Testing*. As she stands in front of the mirror getting prepared for the ceremony she begins to contemplate her future,

thinking to herself, “[I] hope that today is not the end of my education, but I have no control over that. Only a dream that my name will be called for The Testing” (*The Testing* 1). Revealing that Cia has “no control” over whether or not she continues her education conveys a situation that is significantly worse than that of contemporary society, suggesting the possibility of a dystopian society. Cia’s complete lack of control is confirmed by her father, who notes, “You never know who the search committee might pick or why.”

Cia notes that as a citizen of Five Lakes colony it is even more unlikely that she will be selected for The Testing, “Our colony will be lucky to have one student chosen for The Testing—if any at all,” recalling that no one from Five Lakes has been chosen in the last ten years (2). Just prior to the ceremony, Daileen, Cia’s best friend, informs her that she has heard from her father that an official from Tosu City, the capitol of the society, will be attending the ceremony. A community not often graced with the presence of a government official, the presence of one on graduation day makes Cia believe that at least one person will be selected for The Testing. By the end of the ceremony the official has still not arrived and no announcements about The Testing are made, leaving Cia feeling dejected. However, on the following day she is summoned to the Magistrate’s house where she discovers that she and three other graduates have been selected.

Tosu City official Michal Gallen informs the four candidates that they will be leaving the following morning, but one of the candidates, Zandri, enquires, “What if we don’t want to go?” (22). It is possible that many of these young people feel similar to Zandri and simply do not desire to attend university. Cia notes, “The fact that four of us were chosen for The Testing is astonishing, but Zandri being one of the four is perhaps the bigger surprise” (22). Although Cia admits that Zandri is smart, she notes

that Zandri is more artistic than scholarly; making her selection for The Testing questionable given it would lead to the University, where all areas of study aid in survival not culture. Michal informs them that by law any “citizen chosen must present him or herself for The Testing [...] or face punishment” (22). When Zandri inquires what that punishment is, Magistrate Owens explains that failing to accept your place at “The Testing is a form of treason,” which quickly ends Zandri’s protest because treason is punishable by death in this society (23). After informing the candidates what to and what not to bring, Magistrate Owens dismisses them so they can inform their families and pack.

There are two parts of the selection for The Testing that are particularly anti-Objectivist. Firstly, the fact that there is no available standard of selection that is known to students, i.e., there is no set of requirements. Although the government might have a very robust vetting system, it very well could be completely subjective. This is anti-Objectivist because the government is keeping the information from potential candidates for no other reason than to protect itself from the citizens knowing the truth behind The Testing. Secondly, the fact that refusing to attend The Testing is considered treason is extremely anti-Objectivist because it forces people like Zandri, who would be happier staying in Five Lakes, to go to The Testing, something that results in her being sacrificed on the altar of alleged progress for the sake of the collective. The inability to refuse an offer to attend The Testing presents a case where the government abuses its power in order to coerce an individual into acting against his or her own rational self-interest.

### *Lab Tests*

During the second round of tests, “a series of hands-on examinations,” the candidates are asked to show the practical side of their knowledge (104). Dr. Barnes, the leader of The Testing, explains:

If there is a part of the test you do not understand or do not know how to complete, please do not guess [...] Leaving a problem unsolved is better than giving an incorrect answer. Wrong answers will be penalized. (104-5)

While it turns out that this is very good advice, Barnes neglects to explain how severe the penalty for a wrong answer is—no doubt intentionally. Many candidates would likely assume that the penalty is points based, as would be the case with any contemporary standardized test, however, in these tests a wrong answer could cost you your life.

The first test in this round involves sorting edible and nonedible plants. Cia and five other candidates are each given eight plants to sort, as they finish their task an instructor comes to check the work, asks if they are sure about their answers, and then removes the plants that the candidate has deemed nonedible. Once all the candidates are finished the instructor asks if anyone would like to change any of their answers, when no one does the instructor states, “Well, then, [...] you should have no problem ingesting a sample of each plant you have deemed edible” (108-9). Having a father that works with plants, Cia immediately realizes the possible implication of a wrong answer and the penalty that it could produce, “Dizziness. Vomiting. Hallucinations. Maybe even death” (109). While none of the candidates in Cia’s group drop dead immediately, the delayed effects do become evident when they begin working on the second assignment. As they begin to work on restoring pulse radios, the plants begin to take effect and Cia notes that Malachi—one of the other candidates from Five Lakes—sways, sweats, and possibly loses the ability to “think rationally”

(111). This leads Malachi to begin to fiddle with a strange metal box inside the radio, which launches a nail into his eye and kills him, showing the ultimate cost of a wrong answer.

This scene depicts a dystopian government by revealing the government's willingness to place candidates in dangerous situations where death is a real possibility without explicitly stating the risks. Furthermore, the response of The Testing instructor—a government employee—following Malachi's death suggests a greater concern for the test than human life. Cia notes that upon seeing Malachi fall to the ground she rushes over to him but is stopped by the instructor: "Asking me if I have completed my test. If not, I must return to my station. Otherwise, there is a risk I will receive assistance from observing another candidate's work" (112-3). The fact that no action is taken to save Malachi and that the officials have no issue with a candidate dying clearly communicates the government's complete disregard for human life, presenting another example of how the government violates Objectivist principles.

As is explained throughout in the trilogy, the intention of The Testing is to produce the most suitable candidates to attend the University and eventually become the leaders of the United Commonwealth; however, the means taken in order to achieve this goal are unethical according to Objectivism. The United Commonwealth's violation of Objectivism in this matter is two-fold: firstly, the violation of the rights of the candidates; and secondly, the violation of the rights of the remaining citizens.

Beginning with the former, it is not hard to see how the government violates the rights of the candidates, after all they are putting unwitting candidates in dangerous positions and allowing them to die while the officials know full well the

possible result of any error. While this is certainly a problem for Objectivism, the violation of rights goes beyond the simple fact that they are sending these young adults to their deaths. While Objectivism holds that government is a tool that ensures and protects the rights of individuals, this government violates the rights of the candidates, putting them in a position to live or die not only for the sake of the government but also for the sake of society as a collective.

In *The Virtue of Selfishness*, Rand writes that “The social theory of ethics substitutes ‘society’ for God—and although it claims that its chief concern is life on earth, it is not the life of man, not the life of an individual, but the life of a disembodied entity, the collective, which, in relation to every individual, consists of everybody except himself” (38). Rand’s concern is exactly what we see playing out on the pages of *The Testing* trilogy. As we eventually discover in the final text, President Collindar, the leader of the United Commonwealth, is supportive of the methods of *The Testing* and even wants to apply them to the candidates from Tosu City. Even Dr. Barnes, who is fighting to end many of the practices of *The Testing*, argues that when *The Testing* was established the ends justified the means. It is also revealed that many other government officials are aware of the practices and simply choose to look the other way, as if this makes them morally immune to what is taking place. All of these people essentially argue that what is taking place is necessary for the survival of humankind and of the United Commonwealth, and none of them are concerned with the lives of the individuals they are willing to sacrifice for the good of the collective. Rand argues that “The existential monuments to this theory are Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia,” and although the United Commonwealth is not directly executing people like the Nazis or the Soviets did, they are still violating the ethical principles of Objectivism (38).

The second way in which the government is violating Objectivist ethics in this matter is by violating the rights of each individual citizen, both those that are subject to The Testing and the University and those that are not. This violation is accomplished by the fact that the government is selecting who the future leaders will be instead of allowing those leaders to appear naturally. Although The Testing might result in the best leaders possible, which it arguably does not, the system forces citizens to sacrifice their rights for the sake of security, which cannot be guaranteed. By selecting who is allowed into The Testing and University the government is also rigging the election. Even if they allow the people to vote, which is never made clear, all political candidates are likely to be carbon copies of one another. This violation is far from specific to Objectivism, it is a violation of any democratic political system.

### *The Final Phase*

The final phase of The Testing is by far the most vicious and presents situations where one candidate violating the individual rights of another is far from forbidden and, in many ways, might be seen to be encouraged. Furthermore, it hints at the more heinous violations of human rights that are taking place in the United Commonwealth. The final phase involves the candidates traversing approximately 700 miles of the former United States that has yet to be revitalized by the United Commonwealth. Beginning in what was once Chicago and traveling to Tosu City, formerly known as Wichita, Kansas, the candidates are only instructed to make it from one location to the other. Dr. Barnes informs them: “You may choose to team up with other candidates. You may also choose to impair the progress of your fellow candidates in order to ensure that you obtain a passing grade before them. What choices you make during the test will be considered in your final evaluations” (134-5). While this is not a direct suggestion that candidates should team up and kill off the

competition, neither is it much of a warning that implies that such behavior would adversely affect the candidates' evaluations. However, Dr. Barnes's statement is, in effect, sanctioning the option that candidates violate the Objectivist principle put forward by Rand's character John Galt, except in this case they are not asking others to live for their sake but killing them for their own advantage. In doing so, the government is promoting the idea that individuals violate the rights of others and use physical force against one another, both clear violations of Objectivism.

Right from the start of the so-called "practical examination" Cia is made aware of the fact that other candidates have not shied away from the option to "impair the progress" of other candidates. Finding another Testing candidate's box while searching for Tomas, Cia is alerted to the presence of another candidate by a skittering stone. Worried that this candidate might be willing to remove the competition to better their own odds, Cia makes a break for cover. She deduces that "If it is a friend, they would call out," when the other candidate does not, she continues and just before reaching cover a crossbow quarrel is fired and she sees it "Embedded in the scraggly tree to [her] left" (152). Although Cia is able to escape, this is not the final encounter she has with someone willing to remove the competition.

Upon finding Tomas, or rather Tomas finding Cia, she asks about meeting with their other friends and he states, "You're the only one I told" about meeting up (160). Cia is about to question why he did not inform the others when she thinks back to "the crossbow shooter" and her other adverse experiences with fellow candidates during the earlier stages of The Testing and realizes "It all comes back to trust" (160). Although more allies would be useful, Tomas, more than Cia—as she repeatedly proves throughout The Testing—recognizes that he does not owe the other candidates

anything. While other candidates would be helpful, the risk of someone double-crossing them is not worth the possible reward of an ally. Tomas's decision does not show that he is a heartless untrusting person; but that he is capable of thinking logically given his situation and that he recognizes the reality of it.

As they continue toward Tosu City, Cia and Tomas hear "A human female scream" in the night (185). The next morning, they discover the source of the scream when they see a flock of birds circling a girl, whom Cia vaguely remembers from the earlier rounds of testing, shot with a crossbow quarrel. Cia notes, "Her Testing bag is empty. Either she lost the contents, which I doubt, or the crossbow shooter took them after bringing down his prey. Which means he is out there somewhere, hunting" (187). This confirms Cia's fear that her interaction with the crossbow shooter was not a one-off experience, but that one of the candidates is actively trying to ensure their position by killing other candidates. Later they are cooking when a trio of candidates comes across their path: Tracelyn, Stacia, and Vic. As they sit around a fire together Stacia reveals that she believes that The Testing committee is "looking for candidates with a killer instinct," and it is later revealed that Tracelyn does not finish this stage of The Testing, suggesting Stacia might have removed her as competition (195). Eventually running into Will, a candidate Cia and Tomas befriended during the earlier stages of The Testing, Cia goes off in search of water and when Will and Tomas are alone they have an altercation with Zandri, one where they are forced to kill her in self-defense after she allegedly attacks them. Toward the final part of the exam there is a shooter sniping people near the finish line and Roman, one of the candidates Cia had an adverse experience with during the group test, attacks Cia and Tomas in an attempt to eliminate the competition. Finally, it is revealed that Will is also interested

in ensuring he passes The Testing by eliminating the competition when he reveals himself to be the crossbow shooter and attempts to kill both Cia and Tomas.

The actions of these candidates are likely motivated by the extreme circumstances they face during The Testing—note that Will is looking to help Cia in the second two novels—yet their actions reveal the limits of their moral philosophy and the limits of the government’s moral philosophy. However, what we see taking place during The Testing, and most specifically during this final examination, is the government’s outright intention to place the candidates in a situation where they are likely to be subject to physical violence. Making matters worse, as previously noted, Dr. Barnes informed the candidates, “You may also choose to impair the progress of your fellow candidates in order to ensure that you obtain a passing grade before them,” making it clear that this branch of government is not interested in protecting the candidates from physical violence (134-5).

What is also clear-cut is that many of the candidates are guilty of murder. Although Tomas is guilty of committing an act of physical violence, as noted above, he did not initiate that act of violence nor did he intend to kill Zandri, in fact, he was trying to help her. It is completely acceptable from an Objectivist point of view that Cia returned fire when Will attempted to kill her at the start of the exam and that she repeated the act when he assaulted her and Tomas at the end.

Meanwhile, the government is not only complicit in all of these acts of violence because they created the situation and suggested the option to “impair progress,” they are also guilty of indiscriminately initiating physical violence against the candidates by introducing hyper aggressive wild animals—in reality, mutated humans—into The Testing ground. Interestingly this government action is evidence

of bio-power as described by Michel Foucault in his work *The History of Sexuality*.<sup>42</sup> According to Foucault, bio-power is a means for a state to achieve “the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations” (140). While this particular scene does not depict government “supervision” of the bodies of an entire population through “*regulatory controls*”—Foucault argues that this is one of the ways a state enacts biopolitics—it does present a situation where the bodies of citizens are being subjugated by the government (139). The hybrids are victims, likely former testing candidates, who have been immorally experimented on against their will; being altered both physically and mentally. In this display of bio-power, the government and the individuals responsible for both sanctioning the creation of the hybrids and physically creating them have violated Objectivist ethics. Objectivism denounces these actions and considers them immoral because of the fact that it is initiating physical violence and violating the rights of human beings. The actions taken by the government in creating the final examination and for fostering, dare I say encouraging, physical violence and for committing their own acts of violence are guilty of acting against Objectivist ethics.

### **Independent Study**

There are two primary methods by which the dystopian nature of the government is depicted in *Independent Study*: the revelation that Tosu City students also go to the University and the conflict between the rebels, Dr. Barnes, and President Collindar. These two themes portray two very different forms of political dystopia. The recognition that Tosu students also attend the University reveals a dystopian aristocratic educational system where special treatment and preference is

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<sup>42</sup> For more on bio-power, see Foucault’s *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-1978* and *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76* (full citations for both provided in the bibliography).

given to those born in the right location and particularly to those born into the right families. Although Cia's memory of The Testing was erased by the government at the end of the first book, the conflict between the rebels, Dr. Barnes, and President Collindar confirms her suspicion early in the novel that all is not right within the government. What might have been assumed in *The Testing* as simply a corrupt branch of the government—the education system that runs The Testing—the events in *Independent Study* suggests that the dystopian nature of the government is not limited to this one autonomous branch.

### *Tosu City Students*

During a conversation with Tosu City official Michal Gallen, Cia is informed that there will be more than just the three students from the colonies assigned to the Government Studies program. Michal states, “Add in the Tosu City students, and there will be a whole lot more” (*Independent Study* 45). This is news to Cia, she notes:

Icy shock is replaced by frustration at my lack of perception. With a hundred thousand people, Tosu City and the surrounding boroughs contain the largest concentration of the United Commonwealth's population. It only makes sense that the University trains students from that pool. I should have known they would be included [...] (45)

Cia goes on to note the obvious absence of the Tosu City students during The Testing and the Early Studies classes she and her fellow colony students had to endure.

Michal explains, “The selection process for Tosu City students is different. Most of the students are the sons and daughters of past University graduates. Those who wish to attend the University are required to submit an application and sit for an interview [...] Those who pass are welcomed into the University” (45). This exchange reveals that not all potential University students are treated equally.

Because “The selection process for Tosu City students is different” from that of the colonies it is inherently immoral according to Objectivism because those from Tosu City are subject to a different set of rights than those from the colonies. The difference in what students from the two locations within the same nation face reveals an aristocracy of pull taking place in the text. As Michal noted in the above citation, “Most of the students are the sons and daughters of past University graduates.” Although the Tosu students are surely tested against one another and those that are most qualified are selected, in comparison to the trials faced by the colony students they are not being equally measured on their ability to succeed. Thus, Tosu students have an easier path to the University simply because of where they were born and who their parents are.

In every case where an aristocracy of pull exists in a fictional work it will communicate an air of dystopia according to Objectivism because it is a form of collectivism that allows for individuals to be sacrificed for the sake of those with political connections. In the case of the Tosu City and colony students this goes beyond the fact that Tosu students are being admitted to University under different standards, they are also given an edge by being taught about the specific competition they will face while at University. Enzo, a bit of an outcast among those admitted to University from Tosu City, informs Cia:

Part of our Early Studies was to study not only the colonies but the students they sent to Tosu who would be attending the University with us. [...] We may not have set foot onto campus until today, but our instructors have made sure we know about you. We met for test preparation and our entrance exam at a school near the Central Government Building. And we studied you because our instructors wanted us to know our competition. (*Independent Study* 76-7)

Enzo’s statement makes it clear that Tosu students were not simply studying to achieve acceptance to the University, but also how to do better than the colony

students. Although it is never stated how grades are assigned, be it by the merit of individual performance or in comparison to other students, it is clear that the instructors of the Tosu students are interested in the Tosu students out performing colony students. In this situation, the immorality of the act is on the shoulders of the instructors and educators, for the only way Tosu students could gain access to this information about colony students is if The Testing officials and the people running the University gave it to them. The students themselves would not necessarily know that they were the only ones getting information about the competition, and even if they had known it is likely that their fear of the educators would have prevented them from speaking out against such tactics. Certainly, be it by rumor or personal experience, the Tosu students would be aware that those that do not pass the exam and move on to University are removed from Tosu City and sent elsewhere, never to be heard from again, motivating them to not speak out in fear of a similar fate.

### ***Political Conflict***

The idea of political conflict does not in itself communicate dystopia, even according to Objectivism. However, when said conflict involves rebels—persons willing to commit treason, be it ethical or not—and two branches of government positioning against one another it is hard to not find such an idea dystopian. This is only furthered by the fact that it is virtually impossible to discover—from both the perspective of the reader and the characters—who can be trusted. It is obvious that Symon—an individual that works for the President and also aided Cia during her final phase of The Testing by providing her with supplies—is working for multiple sides and never truly helps the rebels. This is primarily communicated in the final pages of *Independent Study* when he shoots Michal, whom we know to be part of the rebellion. After this event Cia tries to understand Symon's actions:

The Testing was created to ferret out the best and the brightest young minds and mold them into leaders. But the best leaders form their own opinions. They want to go their own ways. How better to control those differing opinions than to allow them to think their views are being heard and even acted upon? If those who want change think they are part of a rebellion, there's no reason for them to start one of their own. By allowing them to think they are helping one or two students like me during The Testing, Symon has convinced them that they are having a real effect. (*Independent Study* 305-6)

This is one of the most politically dystopian moments in *Independent Study* because it informs the reader that whomever Symon works for, that person is interested in controlling how people think about the society and that they want to prevent people from having differing opinions about the society. In Objectivism this is a problem for two main reasons: firstly, the act of preventing differing opinions forces the creation of a collective mind—essentially censoring thought, which gives a person the ability to reason, be rational, and by extension be ethical—and prevents individualism; secondly, the act of tricking the rebels is nothing more than having some people live, and eventually die, for the sake of others—citizens that are dissatisfied with their government are being tricked into dying for it in order to preserve it not change it.

Nathaniel Branden, who at one time was a leader in the Objectivist movement and one Rand's closest confidants, argues that collectivist thinking prevents the emergence of individualism, noting, "Man needs knowledge in order to survive, and only reason can achieve it; men who reject the responsibility of thought and reason, can exist only as parasites on the thinking of others. And a parasite is not an individualist" (*VOS* 159). Someone in the government—Cia is uncertain at this point in the story whether it is Dr. Barnes or President Collindar—is interested in turning every citizen into what Branden calls a parasite. We eventually discover, or are led to believe, that it is in fact President Collindar that is seeking to ensure that the people of the United Commonwealth are dependent on their government and that only the

government and those trained according to its beliefs are capable of running the nation. What is ultimately taking place is that the government is setting up an elite section of society and demanding all others to “reject the responsibility of thought and reason.” According to Objectivism this action is unethical for both the people if they accept it and the government for trying to do it because both groups surrender to the idea that it is acceptable for individuals to live for the sake of others.

Interestingly, President Collindar is not exactly asking/manipulating people to join a collectivist society like socialism where all people work for the benefit of the community, she is asking/manipulating them into foregoing responsibility of thought, to trust the government to make the right decisions for the people. Branden takes particular issue with this idea:

As an ethical-political concept, individualism upholds the supremacy of individual rights, the principle that man is an end in himself, not a means to the ends of others. (158)

In regards to *Independent Study*, President Collindar is looking to remove any sense of individualism because she is convinced that the cost of sacrificing people to The Testing and University system is worth the gain. She is aware that “the best leaders form their own opinions. They want to go their own ways,” which is a problem for a leader that is looking to not only control the people presently but to control their exact future, so she is willing to violate individual rights to achieve her goal (*Independent Study* 305).

As noted earlier, “A nation that violates the rights of its own citizens cannot claim any rights whatsoever” (*VOS* 121). Despite being only one person, President Collindar represents the entire nation; her violation of the rights of her citizens voids the rights of the nation as a whole. Recognizing this, citizens have taken up arms against the government in the form of a rebellion. While their goals are not expressly

stated in their entirety, we are capable of gathering that they want to stop The Testing. The act of taking up arms against their own government is entirely morally justified by Objectivism. First, the government has violated the rights of every citizen that has been involved in The Testing and those Tosu City students that fail to pass the entrance exam, which is manifest in what the text calls redirection; i.e., sent away to an unknown location. Second, the government has already acted violently against its people, i.e., those that have been redirected and are genetically tested upon or those involved in the University in any way. There are many ways in which this government violates the rights of its citizens on a regular basis, the lack of freedom of movement, forcing people to go to a different colony after University, and the disgusting human experiments that are first implied while Cia is in the final phase of The Testing. These violations give the rebels the moral high ground as it were and confirm that the entire United Commonwealth government is dystopian.

## **Graduation Day**

The political dystopia takes center stage in the final novel of *The Testing* trilogy. Just as in *Independent Study*, these elements are focused around the conflict between the central government, the University, and the rebels, or more specifically between President Collindar, Dr. Barnes, and Symon. Symon's duplicity becomes all the more difficult to track as he seems to be working for both Collindar and Barnes, and Cia's internship goes from being an assistant in the President's office to being an assassin. Although political ethics take a major backseat for most of *Graduation Day*, as most of the text deals with individual ethics and the short lived civil war, there are a few moments in the text that are ripe for analysis. The main moments of ethical political dystopia occur at bookends of the text, Cia's assignment as an assassin and the revelation about who is really trying to end The Testing.

### *Cia the Assassin*

Beginning where *Independent Study* left off, Cia makes her way to the President's office determined to inform her of Michal's death and the issues surrounding it. However, when she is summoned into the President's office she discovers Collindar talking to "a gray-haired man" who is none other than Symon, the very man Cia has come to accuse of murdering Michal (*Graduation Day* 20). At this point in the text Cia believes that Symon works for Dr. Barnes and that Barnes wishes to continue The Testing, making the murder of Michal and destruction of the tapes that reveal the true nature of The Testing necessary to keep the secret from everyone. The reader at this point is meant to believe that Barnes created the rebels so that he could eliminate all those that oppose The Testing in a swift fashion. Collindar suggests that this is the truth when she states, "Setting up a rebellion against himself is smart. It allows him to control both those who follow and those that oppose him" (*Graduation Day* 25). However, when the M. Night Shyamalan<sup>43</sup> style plot twist is revealed at the end, we discover that Symon is being played by Dr. Barnes and is nothing more than a pawn in a special Testing put in place just for Cia. Furthermore, it is revealed that Symon is a supporter of The Testing and Barnes wants to eliminate him—not the rebels—because he supports The Testing, as we will discuss in the next section.

Once Cia has revealed the details of Michal's death to the President, the presence of political dystopia becomes increasingly evident. As readers, we know that President Collindar plans to hold a vote in the Debate Chamber about the future of

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<sup>43</sup> M. Night Shyamalan is a contemporary Indian-American film director noted for making films with surprise endings that make the viewer question what they thought to be true in the film. The most famous example being *The Sixth Sense*, where Malcolm Crowe, a child psychologist, works with a boy, Cole Sear, that is capable of seeing ghosts; however, at the end it is revealed that Malcolm is himself a ghost.

The Testing; however, it is only retrospectively that it can be ascertained that the vote to take power away from Dr. Barnes is not to end The Testing but to insure it continues. This discovery reveals an aspect of dystopian political ethics taking place in the text: politicians lying to their constituents. While the idea of politicians neglecting to tell the truth to their constituents is far from an alien concept in any era of politics, people often choose to take a doublethink approach to it. This Orwellian term, which the *OED* defines as “The mental capacity to accept as equally valid two entirely contrary opinions or beliefs,” usually takes the form of individuals believing that the politicians they like are telling the truth but those they dislike are lying (“doublethink”). While people know that politicians are not always truthful, they often choose to believe them when it fits their political ideology or if they believe that the lie might serve to achieve something good.

While discussing quite a different secondary topic yet still focusing on lying, Rand explains the problem with lying through Hank Rearden in *Atlas Shrugged*. Speaking to Dagny about their affair and what he has learned as a result of it, Hank states:

People think that a liar gains a victory over his victim. What I've learned is that a lie is an act of self-abdication, because one surrenders one's reality to the person to whom one lies, making that person one's master, condemning oneself from then on to faking the sort of reality that person's view requires to be faked. And if one gains the immediate purpose of the lie—the price one pays is the destruction of that which the gain was intended to serve. The man who lies to the world, is the world's slave from then on [...] (*Atlas Shrugged* 859)

It would be difficult to not see why this would be problematic for Rand and Objectivism, if one voluntarily becomes the slave—even only metaphorically—to another, they cease to be able to live a virtuous life, they cannot live for their own sake because they are a slave to the lie and the person they have told it to or for. This is the very case in which Rearden is discussing, having lied/hidden his relationship

with Dagny he has been forced to be a slave to his lie and made many decisions that are not in his rational Objective interest. Applying this to *Graduation Day*, we can conclude that President Collindar is not being virtuous in an Objective sense of the word. Furthermore, she is violating the rights of both her office and her constituents by feeding them false information. Although it is more the nature and potential repercussions of this particular lie that make it appear dystopian, i.e., far worse than those in contemporary Western society, it is the lie itself that makes President Collindar's actions unethical according to Objectivism.

The death of Michal, someone President Collindar believed to be loyal to her, and the revelation that Symon actually works for Dr. Barnes, forces Collindar's hand beyond the attempt to take power through the vote in the Debate Chamber and she is forced to implement Cia's final test, one that only Collindar and Barnes are privy to. It is never clear if Collindar actually believed she could take control of The Testing simply through the vote or if she had ever intended to implement the final test, nevertheless she is forced to do so and assigns Cia a list of twelve individuals that Cia must kill in order to end The Testing.

This final test is a clear violation of Objectivism. Despite whatever role these individuals might have had in the running of The Testing or the University, they still have a right to live and neither Cia nor any other government agent has the right to take that away from them. Although Rand states, "Men have the right to use physical force only in retaliation and only against those who initiate its use" and many of these individuals might have been behind the events Cia faced in either The Testing or her time at the University thus far, she can only be certain of a few and that does not exactly give her the right to kill them (*VOS* 36). As previously noted, Rand states:

The proper functions of a government fall into three broad categories, all of them involving the issues of physical force and the protection of

men's rights: the police, to protect men from criminals—the armed services, to protect men from foreign invaders—the law courts, to settle disputes among men according to objective laws. (131)

This confirms that Rand supports a legal system where citizens can take action against others in a court of law, not vigilante justice. From these quotes, we can conclude that this final test is unethical according to Objectivism. Having been given by the President—a person that is displaying her willingness to violate her citizens' right to life and right to a trial in a court of law—this act eliminates the government's right to act as a government.

### *The Plot Twist*

We discover how lacking in control the government is in the final chapters of *Graduation Day* as Cia and her friends begin killing government officials. Initially Cia considers Ian, Raffe, Stacia, Enzo, and Brick as potential allies and co-assassins in her plans, others are willing to join the fight as well and when they become aware of Cia's plans volunteer to help. Eventually the group is weeded down to Raffe, Stacia, Tomas, Will, and Cia's brother Zeen. Interestingly, all of these individuals have good reason to want to end The Testing and the practices surrounding it. Raffe and Will are both angry about siblings being redirected. Zeen has discovered the reality of The Testing and some of the corruption that is taking place within the government and wants to end it. Cia, Tomas, Will, and Stacia have all been through The Testing; however, this is not what motivates Stacia. When Stacia agrees to help Cia, she explains that she is doing it "Because I want my chance to make sure the mistakes that ruined this country never happen again. If I have to kill to make that a reality, then that's what I'll do [...] If you believe that by ending The Testing we'll prevent a potential civil war, that's good enough for me" (*Graduation Day* 111). Although pragmatic and emotionless, Stacia's reasoning is no worse than the others,

even if her reasoning comes off as a desire to benefit personally. The fact that six young adults have willingly come to the conclusion that assassinating a group of government officials is the best way to end The Testing and, as Stacia put it, “prevent a potential civil war,” is deeply out of character for the contemporary young adult.

The final element of political dystopia takes place when Cia confronts Dr. Barnes, who is not surprised to see she has come to kill him. When Cia admits that she has come to kill Dr. Barnes, he states, “I intend to let you” (257). Obviously, this comes as a surprise to both Cia and the reader but as he continues to talk we gain an understanding of why. Dr. Barnes explains to Cia the history of The Testing: that after the formation of the United Commonwealth the nation tried to pick University students based on those that “naturally assumed leadership roles;” however, when this failed to produce the desired type of leaders, Dr. Barnes’s grandfather was tasked with creating a new system and “The Testing was established” (261 & 262). Barnes goes on to explain that he is really the one that wants to end The Testing and that it is President Collindar that wants it to continue and expand. He also informs Cia that most government officials and members of University staff are very aware of what happens during The Testing but “Most choose to pretend they’re ignorant of the facts” (267).

From this massive reveal, we finally begin to see the full picture of the dystopian politics taking place in *The Testing* trilogy. Not only has The Testing evolved from a well-intentioned method of selecting future leaders to an exam where one might die, but also many government officials know the reality of what goes on during The Testing. All of these individuals are complicit in the unethical nature of The Testing and guilty of allowing it to continue. In an Objectivist sense these leaders are knowingly and willfully violating the rights of every student that undertakes The

Testing, be it a colony student or a Tosu City student. The pinnacle of the Objectively unethical actions of these government officials rests in the fact that they are forcing people to live for the sake of others and violating their right to life, be it by allowing them to die, encouraging them to kill, using them in genetic tests, or simply not giving them the freedom to choose.

As the conversation between Cia and Dr. Barnes comes to a close, he reveals that Symon aided her during The Testing on his orders:

Because that was the only way you could be here at this, your final and most important test. President Collindar has agreed to abide by the results. If you pass this one last exam, The Testing program will end. If you fail, it will move forward as it currently stands and students will continue to die. (*Graduation Day* 266)

The fact that Symon is Dr. Barnes's lackey is a piece of the puzzle that Cia has already put together; however, the revelation that President Collindar and Dr. Barnes have this perverted agreement is shocking to Cia. This agreement displays a kind of political dystopia where people can unknowingly be used as pawns in political games. Cia is placed in an impossible position, incapable of adhering to her moral philosophy regardless of her decision; she must kill or allow others to be killed.

In December of 1963, just following the assassination of John F. Kennedy and his succession by Lyndon B. Johnson, Rand wrote "The Nature of Government," which appears in *The Virtue of Selfishness*. In one of the final paragraphs Rand wrote what she believed to be the direction of the American government:

Instead of being a protector of man's rights, the government is becoming their most dangerous violator [...] instead of protecting men from the initiators of physical force, the government is initiating physical force and coercion in any manner and issue it pleases [...] instead of protecting men from injury by whim, the government is arrogating to itself the power of unlimited whim—so that we are fast approaching the stage of the ultimate inversion: the stage where the government is free to do anything it pleases, while the citizens may act only by permission [...] (133-4)

The above selection is perfectly in-line with what is taking place in *The Testing*. Applying this assessment to *The Testing* it would be impossible not to see why this government is both unethical and dystopian according to Objectivism. The government is the “most dangerous violator” of people’s rights in *The Testing* trilogy, preventing free movement and forcing people into *The Testing*. We see the government, via *The Testing*, “initiating physical force and coercion in any manner and issue it pleases” during nearly every stage. Both President Collindar and Dr. Barnes are both guilty of “arrogating to [themselves] the power of unlimited whim,” i.e., they are making decisions for the entire United Commonwealth without consulting anyone other than themselves. It is these actions—the antithesis of freedom—that drive the narrative of political dystopia in *The Testing* trilogy, that communicate skepticism in government, and drive Cia’s desire to bring an end to this dystopia.

### ***Conclusion***

By presenting a form of government that appears to be a limited democracy but is still capable of being dystopian, *The Testing* trilogy presents a warning to young adult American readers that is absent in the other three trilogies: even democracy is susceptible to dystopia. In depicting a limited democracy that is dystopian, the trilogy criticizes the ideas of career politicians, political grooming, inherited positions, and political nepotism, while championing Objectivist political practices. The final chapter of *The Testing* trilogy informs us that “three weeks have passed since that night in *The Testing Center*” where Cia and her friends sought to end *The Testing* (*Graduation Day* 285). Cia informs us that the experiments on redirected Testing candidates and University students have ended. Cia also states:

Last week, I watched from the Debate Chamber gallery as President Collindar kept her bargain with Dr. Barnes. Standing at the podium, looking out on a filled chamber and observation area, the president announced the disbanding of the University selection process known as The Testing. (288)

The ending of *The Testing* and the experiments fulfills the requirements of the critical dystopia because the dystopian government has been overcome and there is hope that a eutopian society could rise in its place. By concluding the trilogy in such a fashion, it leads the reader to conclude that more Objective political practices are ideal because the presented alternative—The Testing, the government studies program, and their evaluation methods—prevent any diversity of thought, ensures that the next generation of leaders lead in a very specific way, and results in the rights of many citizens being violated.

The trilogy concludes with a eutopian enclave, that Cia plans to return to Tosu City and the University to complete her studies; with her reasoning being: “Because the only way to be sure *The Testing* we had to survive never happens again is not to trust our leaders. It is to be one of them” (291). This conclusion encourages young adult readers to take an active role in their government, just like Cia. Moreover, when we examine Cia’s ethical philosophy in Part III, Chapter 3, of this thesis, we will see that the trilogy not only urges young adults to be politically active like Cia, but to also to think Objectively. With a full understanding of both the political and ethical philosophies espoused in this trilogy, we will be able to understand how the cultural effects of this trilogy are capable of influencing the attitudes and actions of young adults, specifically in regard to its concern about access to education.

## Chapter 4 – The Matched Trilogy

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Unlike *The Hunger Games* trilogy, which presents a dictatorship, or *The Testing*, which presents a limited democracy, the exact form of government in *Matched* is never mentioned. The few details that are provided reveal that there is a central government—of which the exact size and structure are never given—and that it is simply called the Society or, occasionally in the first book, the Government. Nonetheless, it is made abundantly clear that in the major provinces the Society controls every aspect of the lives of its citizens. The lack of detail about the exact structure of the government confirms that the trilogy is not concerned with any one particular form of government; instead, the trilogy is concerned with the idea of a government that has forced its citizens to surrender their individual freedoms in exchange for security.

Of all the works examined, the *Matched* trilogy appears the most eutopian from the start and for the longest amount of time. There are many ways in which a sense of eutopia is communicated in the first novel, *Matched*, some of which include: access to food, the treatment of death, and even the Matching system. A sense of eutopia is in one way suggested by the citizens' access to food by presenting a system that appears more efficient and humane than contemporary societies. Every citizen in Cassia's province is fed the exact amount his or her body needs. The absence of a fear of starvation and the knowledge that people will not suffer from weight related medical issues suggests an improved society. The treatment of death, as evidenced in Cassia's grandfather, also seems humanely superior to contemporary society. Although individuals are euthanized at the age of eighty, they live full and complete lives and do not have to suffer the effects that accompany dying of natural causes at

an older age. The Matching too seems like something out of a eutopian society, no longer do people have to suffer the stresses of finding the right companion; instead, the Society does this for them. The process of getting to know one's Match is structured to eliminate much of the awkwardness accompanied by traditional dating. Furthermore, the entire marriage process and procreation system seem to be structured in such a way as to insure the healthiest offspring and the healthiest pregnancy for the mother. However, all of these eliminate the individuals' ability to choose how they live their lives.

With the absence of a knowable government, aside from the various low-level officials, the realization of a dystopian government is dependent on the various aspects of the Society in which government controls are present. In *Matched*, the dystopian reality of the Society is slowly revealed over the course of the text. While all of the aspects of the Society listed above independently suggest a eutopian society, each of them does have a trade-off that encourages the reader to question if this is truly a eutopian advancement. However, as they are gradually introduced throughout the text, it is difficult to see any of them as particularly dystopian. Despite these ever-present suggestions of dystopia, it is not until Chapter 29, when Ky is taken away and all the witnesses are forced to take the red tablet, which erases their memory of the event, that the dystopia is fully confirmed. In a narrative sense, a major part of this confirmation is the emotional investment of the reader in the relationship between Cassia and Ky, which now seems to be an impossibility. The other major factor in confirming dystopia is Cassia's own recognition of how imperfect her society is and how little control she has over her own life. Once this occurs all previous events in the text are worthy of closer inspection, both individually and as a whole, and when

done so through an Objectivist lens we can see just how dystopian this society really is.

## **Matched**

Thinking back to Rand's statement about collectivism in politics, "‘Anything society does is right because *society* chose to do it,' is not a moral principle, but a negation of moral principles and the banishment of morality from social issues," we can begin to dissect the ways in which the Society appears eutopian and see how it is actually dystopian (*VOS 118*).<sup>44</sup> Again, the point Rand is making here is that just because a government or society makes a decision does not necessarily mean that the decision is moral. Remembering that according to Objectivism in order for something to be moral it must not violate the rights of the individual—i.e., the individual's right to their life—or the lives of others, save in self-defense. From this principle, individuals should be free to make any rational decision that they believe to be in their self-interest, so long as they do not violate the rights of others. Using this simple litmus test, we can easily determine whether or not the aspects of this society that might originally appear eutopian are, in fact, Objectively dystopian.

## ***Access to Food***

One of the many seemingly eutopian aspects of the Society is access to food. When it comes to food in the *Matched* trilogy, everyone is given the exact amount of food that is necessary for them as an individual. While initially this seems like a wonderful way to prevent waste, health issues arising from overeating, and starvation, it again eliminates the ability to choose. The Society has decided that individuals possessing knowledge outside of their field is unnecessary, so, as Cassia informs us,

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<sup>44</sup> Original emphasis.

their “information intake is much more specific” (*Matched* 31). For example, “Nutrition specialists don’t need to know how to program air trains, [...] and programmers, in turn, don’t need to know how to prepare food,” making nearly everyone reliant on the food delivery service the Society provides (31). Even those that have the knowledge of how to make food could not prepare their own even if they wanted to because there is nowhere to purchase food and no means to purchase it with, i.e., the society does not use any form of currency, an aspect of the text that further suggests that the Society is Objectively dystopian. The lack of access to food or the knowledge of how to prepare it removes the citizens’ right to choose how they live their lives.

This is one of the most basic violations of individual rights that can take place. People are told what to eat, when to eat, and have no choice in how much of it they do eat. Objectivism argues that individuals do not have a right to food; however, they do have a right to acquire it by fair means. This could be hunting—as Katniss does in *The Hunger Games* trilogy—or by purchasing food through the exchange of value, be that some form of currency, work, or other goods. However, the Society has eliminated all of these options. As previously mentioned, there is nowhere to purchase food, and Oria, the province Cassia lives in, does not appear to have a location where hunting would be possible, removing that as an option. The highly suburban makeup of the province also does not allow for farming. Finally, even if people wanted to go to places where hunting and gathering or growing one’s own crop would be feasible they could not do so because the Society does not allow freedom of movement or personal transportation. As the dystopian aspects in *Matched* become increasingly clear, we also see how they begin to rely on one another, all removing the right to

choose from the citizens. Nowhere is the absence of the right to choose more revolting than the Society's treatment of death.

### *Treatment of Death*

The only case of the Society's treatment of death that the reader is privy to is that of Cassia's grandfather. Early in *Matched*, Cassia reveals that her grandfather is nearing the end of his life; however, this is not due to natural causes, it is because he is approaching the age of eighty. With turning eighty comes the Final Banquet, which Cassia naively describes as "a luxury. A triumph of planning, of the Society, of human life and the quality of it" (69). Her reasoning being that "All the studies show that the best age to die is eighty. It's long enough that we can have a complete life experience, but not so long that we feel useless. That's one of the worst feelings the elderly can have" (69).<sup>45</sup> The subtext of the Final Banquet, which is by far the most overtly dystopian element of the Society, is that the Society has determined that people start to become useless at the age of eighty due to their health and that if they cannot contribute they become a burden to the Society, thus the Final Banquet is little more than a euthanizing party. While forced euthanization of the old is surely enough to convey that this practice is dystopian, we can delve deeper into why it is particularly dystopian for Objectivism.

The scene we observe at the Final Banquet appears to be humane: Cassia's grandfather is allowed to have a final meal of his choice and his family is present to say their final goodbyes while he is still able to hear and appreciate them. Furthermore, a sample of his DNA is taken to be stored, allegedly until such a time when technology would allow the Society to bring him back. Rand argues that "a man

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<sup>45</sup> The Society's implementation of an age of death is evidence of bio-power and bio-politics, for more, see Foucault in the bibliography.

has the right to commit suicide—but it is very inadvisable” (*Ayn Rand Answers* 16). However, in this case it is not suicide, the Society has determined that eighty is the ideal age of death and there is nothing Cassia’s grandfather can do about it. Rand admits that euthanasia, as a form of assisted suicide, is a very complex subject, and does not advocate a law supporting it because of these complexities;<sup>46</sup> however, she sympathizes with the situation and agrees with the principle of euthanasia as a form of assisted suicide if these complexities could be eliminated. As noted at the start of this section on *Matched*, the fact that the Society has decided to implement this policy does not make it moral, and because it violates Cassia’s grandfather’s right to his life it is Objectively immoral. For Objectivism, it is the violation of Cassia’s grandfather’s right to his life that makes this practice of euthanizing people at the age of eighty both immoral and—since it is being done by the Society—a signpost that the government is dystopian.

### ***The Matching***

The Matching, which is the catalyst for the entire plot of the trilogy, is the primary dystopian signpost in *Matched*. Cassia is originally thrilled with the prospect of being Matched, an opportunity not afforded to, or accepted by, all citizen of the Society. While some citizens choose not to be matched—the only one afforded to them in regard to relationships—and are designated as Singles, those citizens that are labeled as Aberrations and Anomalies are prohibited from being Matched. The reason for their status is based on an infraction to the rules set down by the Society; however, if a parent is reclassified as either an Aberration or an Anomaly, their children are

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<sup>46</sup> For Rand these complexities include knowing the wishes of the individual if they are not capable of communicating them, the possibility of a doctor acting on request of the individual’s so-called loved ones, and the danger of giving a “doctor the arbitrary power of killing” (*Ayn Rand Answers* 16).

likely to be reclassified as well. Although the text is not specific on the reason for also punishing the children of those that commit an infraction, based on the way the Society works it is likely to be because they are worried about noncompliance being either a genetic or learned condition that the Society does not wish to be passed on to new generations. The limitation of those individuals who are able to be Matched is a rather late development in the text, but it is by far the most obvious dystopian element of the Matching system. In an Objectivist sense of dystopia, this again comes down to the Society removing an individual's right to choose how they live their life and the fact that the government is directly and intentionally creating a class system. Interestingly in *Matched* and the subsequent two novels, these are the same elements that the texts are concerned with in regard to the Matching.

The lack of knowledge about whom she will eventually marry is what causes Cassia's nervousness when she is on her way to the Matching Banquet. If given the choice Cassia might have courted any number of prospective suitors until they mutually agreed to marry; however, that option is completely removed by the Matching. Instead of discovering what she wants in a mate, as she does when she begins a relationship with Ky, Cassia's future husband will be assigned to her, and her to him, based on what the Society believes will be the best Match. Cassia is accepting of this system until Ky's face appears when she looks at the microchip that should contain information about her Match, Xander. This leads Cassia to question the system as she begins to interact more with Ky out of curiosity. To prevent the two from defying the Society's decision, Ky is removed from Oria, leading Cassia to recognize the dystopian nature of the Society.

Like all of the dystopian elements in *Matched*, one of the main reasons the Matching is dystopian in an Objectivist sense is because it eliminates an individual's

right to choose and pretends to be moral based on the fact that it is a decision made by the Society with no visible dissent. However, unlike access to food and the treatment of death, the Matching reveals a far more sinister aspect of this dystopian society. In wishing to marry and have a family, Cassia is subject to the Society's decision on who they think she is most suited to be with. As we learn in *Reached*, Matches are made by sorters like Cassia, sorting nearly incomprehensible data based on similarities, which ultimately renders a verdict as to who is best suited for whom.<sup>47</sup> Using this method, all of the people that have the right to be matched are turned into numbers and figures, an act that results in an absolute objectification of individuals. While the absence of choice violates individual rights, the method in which people are Matched results in the dehumanization and abandonment of the individual. Individuals are not individuals; they are merely pieces that, in the opinion of the Society, make up parts of the collective. Nothing is sacred in the Society with regards to the individual; even the love lives of people are determined based on how they can benefit the Society.

Furthermore, the Matching reveals and creates a class system in the Society, one where only the most loyal are given any sense of choice. At the top are those that have full citizenship and are allowed to decide if they wish to be Matched or become Singles, both of which are lifelong decisions as to how one will live their life given that divorce does not appear to exist in the Society and that Singles are not allowed to marry or have children. On the second tier is the Aberrations, who are allowed to go to school but do not have full citizenship and are not allowed to be Matched or have children. At the bottom are Anomalies, individuals that are allegedly guilty of the most severe crimes like murder. Instead of being imprisoned they are sent to the

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<sup>47</sup> The Society's "right" to dictate the coupling of its citizens is evidence of bio-power and bio-politics, for more, see Foucault in the bibliography.

Outer Provinces to be killed off by the Society, allegedly in the war against the Enemy, but some escape into the Carving and live off the land. While this class system works as a deterrent for dissent and as a motivation for compliance with the laws, there is no hope of redemption once an infraction has been committed, big or small. With such a system in place, the trilogy clearly communicates a society and government that is worse than contemporary society, thus making it dystopian.

With the conclusion of *Matched*, like the other trilogies covered, there is no sense of how to overcome the immoral Society; instead the characters and the reader are all left only with an understanding that the Society is dystopian. In the second novel, *Crossed*, we learn more about the Society and the dystopian nature of the Society is expanded.

## **Crossed**

*Crossed* begins approximately three months following the events of *Matched*, making it five months since the start of the story. Cassia has been sent to a faraway province on a work detail, i.e., hard labor as a form of punishment, and Ky has been sent to the Outer Provinces to die. Unlike the two trilogies previously covered, the *Matched* trilogy gives substantial narrative voice to characters other than the main protagonist. In *Crossed*, Cassia and Ky narrate in alternating chapters about their respective journeys to find one another. In this aspect of providing a narrative voice for another character, *Crossed*, and by extension the entire trilogy, more closely resembles Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* than the other trilogies. The addition of Ky's direct narrative provides a sense of validation for the information Cassia has already shared, making her judgment appear more reliable because he concurs with her assessment of

the Society as dystopian.<sup>48</sup> While this is also achieved via secondary characters, the first-person narrative allows both Cassia and Ky to inform us about how they feel and think about the Society through internal thought and not just through dialogue.

While many aspects of the events in *Crossed* convey the idea that the Society is dystopian, most of them only confirm the signposting that took place in *Matched*. However, within the dual narrative two particular dystopian elements not covered in *Matched* move the trilogy toward an Objectivist solution to this dystopia. The first is the alleged war with the Enemy, which takes place during the first half of *Crossed* and is primarily experienced by Ky while living in the Outer Provinces, but also experienced by Cassia while on her way to find him. Although the direct experiences Ky and Cassia have in regard to the war while in the Outer Provinces provide limited evidence of a specifically anti-Objectivist dystopia taking place, the implications of the war and the specifics of it that are later revealed in *Reached* are a confirmation of the ethical failures of the Society in an Objectivist view. The second dystopian element is the suggestion of a possible rebellion, which is presented through the story of the Pilot. Although Ky is already aware of the story, it is Cassia that drives the narrative in this regard, introducing an element of hope that the dystopia could come to an end. These plot devices allow for a greater understanding of how dystopian the Society is while also giving reason for the full rebellion that takes place in the final novel.

### ***The War with the Enemy***

In examining the war between the Society and the Enemy from an Objectivist perspective, we must remember that “The basic political principle of the Objectivist

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<sup>48</sup> For a very brief introduction to the benefits and drawbacks to multiple narrators, see Runyan.

ethics is: no man may initiate the use of physical force against others” (*VOS* 36). The logical extension of such a principle would mean that the initiation of physical force as a nation against another would be unethical; however, Objectivism does allow for nations to initiate physical force when the other nation is violating the individual rights of its citizens. Rand states, “It is not a free nation’s *duty* to liberate other nations at the price of self-sacrifice, but a free nation has the right to do it, when and if it so chooses,” thus providing an Objectively ethical means for one nation to invade another (122).<sup>49</sup> Yet, since liberation from an oppressive government does not seem to be taking place in the *Matched* trilogy, this principle does not provide the Society with an Objective reason for being at war.

As readers, we are never presented with full and exact details regarding the Enemy. In *Reached*, the Pilot informs Ky and other members of the Rising via a radio transmission that the Enemy was “completely eliminated” by the Society when they released the Plague, however, the timing of this event is never specified (*Reached* 72). It is inferred by the Pilot that the Enemy was eliminated prior to the events that take place in *Crossed* and that the continued war that Ky finds himself an unwilling participant in is really just the Society attempting to eliminate the remaining Aberrations and Anomalies from society under the guise of continued war. Regardless of the timing of the Enemy’s demise, examining the war between the Society and the Enemy further confirms that the Society does not conform to Objectivism in relation to war.

Beginning with the facts, we know that there was a war between the Society and the Enemy, that the Society won and eliminated the Enemy, and that the Society is an oppressive regime that violates the rights of its citizens. From this we can

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<sup>49</sup> Original emphasis.

conclude that the Society was not attempting to liberate the citizens of the Enemy nation in an Objectivist sense, regardless of which side started the war, which brings us to the unknowns. Although it is possible, given the oppressive nature of the Society, that the Enemy was attempting to liberate the citizens of the Society, it is just as likely that they were attempting to take over the Society for their own national aims. Nonetheless, regardless of the Enemy's motivations for being at war with the Society, the fact remains that the Society "completely eliminated" the Enemy, the intended meaning of which clearly suggests that the Society killed them all. The effective genocide of the Enemy at the hands of the Society via biological warfare in the form of the Plague again confirms the anti-Objectivist dystopia taking place in the trilogy because it violates Objectivist ethics and its principles of morality.

### *The Pilot*

The story of the Pilot is far from dystopian in itself; instead, it is the need for such an individual and the story of their never-ending efforts that communicate the dystopian nature of the text. If the Society were truly eutopian there would be no need for a rebellion or a leader of it. The fact that the Society is so ironclad and unsusceptible to change is the source of dystopia, meanwhile the story of the Pilot provides a sense of hope that the dystopian government could be overthrown and replaced by a better system.

Although the story of the Pilot is one Ky has been aware of since he was a child in the Outer Provinces, Cassia's first experience with it comes when she attempts to obtain a map of the Outer Provinces from an Archivist—a black market dealer—while she is serving on her work detail as punishment for her transgressions in *Matched*. Instead of the map she wanted, Cassia is given the story of the Pilot, a retelling of the fate of Sisyphus specific to the Society. Similar to the classical Greek

myth of Sisyphus who, for his trickery and belief that he was cleverer than the gods, was punished by Zeus to spend eternity rolling a boulder up a hill only for it to roll back down before reaching the top, the Pilot is likewise punished by the Society for his trickery and belief that he was more clever than the Officials. However, this is not Cassia's first exposure to the general theme of the story. In *Matched*, Ky relates a version of the story to Cassia wherein Sisyphus was a legendary Aberration living in the Outer Provinces. In this first telling of the Sisyphus story, Ky interprets the story to represent the condition of the vast majority of people living in the Society who are forced to live mundane and repetitive lives. Yet, this second telling of the story, where Sisyphus is replaced by the Pilot, is much more pointed in its meaning, leaving little room for individual interpretation on the symbolic nature of the Sisyphus/Pilot character. Unlike the original myth or the version told by Ky, the Pilot is not one person condemned to eternal struggle but a position of leadership passed on from one person to the next, "*The Pilot leads the Rising—the rebellion against the Society—and the Pilot never dies*" (*Crossed* 55).<sup>50</sup> While the statement that the Pilot never dies appears to suggest a never-ending need for a Pilot, Objectively this idea is not as bleak as it might appear when one considers Rand's own fiction. As displayed in her work *Atlas Shrugged*, through the characters of John Galt and Francisco d'Anconia, Rand believed that great men, or Randian Heroes, were necessary to thwart oppressive governments. Thus, an Objectivist reading would suggest that a Pilot, or leader, is required for a rebellion to succeed against the Society, and that the existence of a rebellion is a sign of hope that change might occur. Furthermore, the never-ending presence of a Pilot would also be something Objectivism and Rand would be amenable to. Although the Rising might succeed, Objectivism holds that there will

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<sup>50</sup> Original emphasis.

always be a need for someone to be prepared to challenge the government should they be tempted to return to conditions similar to that of the Society.

It is later conveyed during Ky's narrative that he has been aware of the "rebellion and its leader [the Pilot] for as long as [he] can remember," thus revealing that he is aware of the original Sisyphus myth and that he deliberately gave an edited account of the Pilot version to Cassia in *Matched* (*Crossed* 106). While Ky's lack of candor can be interpreted in multiple ways, the most logical reason for it appears to be his own personal issues surround the Rising due to his father's involvement in it when Ky was a child. Although Ky's skepticism places some doubt in the readers mind as to the reality or likely success of the Rising, the fact that both characters—and the reader through their accounts—are aware of the story of the Rising and that the Pilot presents a possibility for hope and an end to the Society.

## **Reached**

Like the previous two trilogies discussed, the final novel in the *Matched* trilogy, *Reached*, is more concerned with events that will bring about a new beginning for society than it is with persuading the reader that the ruling government is dystopian. However, also like the previous trilogies, *Reached* does present new dystopian elements, namely the Plague. While the existence of the Plague communicates dystopia, its primary function is a plot device that weakens the Society and allows the Rising to defeat them. With the introduction of the Plague, *Reached*, like the previous trilogies, questions the means by which the dystopian government is brought to an end, which becomes morally problematic for the chief protagonist; however, in the end, the ruling government is gone and in spite of the tactics used, the seed of an Objectivist eutopia is planted in the final pages.

## *The Plague*

We first become aware of the Plague through Xander's narrative in the first pages of *Reached*. Now serving as a medical official and a covert member of the Rising, when Xander comes across a boy with an unknown illness, which includes red spots on his back, Xander informs the reader almost directly that he knows it is the sign of the Plague that the Rising has sent to topple the Society. Ky and Cassia on the other hand have no idea about the Plague until they are informed about it by the Pilot. It is through the Plague that we become aware that the Society is not the only dystopian government present in the text, as the Rising too is willing to commit acts that violate Objectivist political ethics, causing Cassia to question whether she is willing to accept the lesser of two evils, or if she will seek a third option.

When we reach Chapter 14 Xander informs us that the Plague has been going on for three months and, thanks to immunizations from the Rising, the Plague seems to be under control (*Reached* 163). However, as we later discover, things do not always go according to plan when one uses biological warfare. First there is the issue of the Plague becoming a full pandemic, something the Rising had not anticipated. We learn later when Cassia, Ky, and Xander are being questioned by the Pilot that the water sources in several cities were contaminated with the Plague virus exposing more people and allowing the Plague to reach pandemic levels (269). While a pandemic would make the Rising look even more heroic in saving everyone, they did not have enough of the cure in the event of this taking place. Furthermore, there is the issue of the Plague mutating, another outcome the Rising had not anticipated or planned for (173).

The bulk of *Reached* is concerned with finding a cure to this mutation, which becomes far graver for the protagonists when Ky contracts it. However, the

introduction of the mutation allows both the readers and the protagonists time to question the actions of the Rising and to discover the reality of it as explained by the Pilot after a cure is found. On their way from the stone village to the provinces, the Pilot reveals a great deal of information concerning the history of the war with the Enemy and the Rising. Most importantly, he reveals that the Rising was not truly a rebellion by the time they introduced the Plague into the Society. He says, directly to Cassia:

“You should know that the Rising was real,” the Pilot says. “The scientists who came up with the immunity to the red tablet were true rebels. So was your great-grandmother [who was once the Pilot of the Rising]. And so were many of the others, especially those of us in the Army. But then, the Society realized that their power was slipping and discovered that they had a rebellion in their midst. At first, they tried to take back control by getting rid of the Aberrations and Anomalies. Then the Society began to infiltrate us the way we had infiltrated them.” (436)

While the initial reaction, in conjunction with the fact that the “Rising” attempted to use biological warfare to overtake the “Society,” might lead us to believe that any analysis of the Rising as an Objectivist rebellion would be void, this is not the case. Although it is true that the Rising was not a perfect Objectivist rebellion by the time the reader was introduced to it in *Crossed*, it was, as the Pilot tells us, at a time, real. But like the trilogies previously discussed, the rebellion—the Rising—was never intended to be the solution to the government—the Society—, instead it is the protagonist, or in this case the protagonists, who embody Objectivist ethics. So it is, at the end of the trilogy, when everyone is allowed to vote for who they want to be their new leader that Cassia votes for Anna—a leader of the people that had escaped the Society—instead of the Society or the Rising, because she believes that Anna represents an option that is congruent with her own ethical beliefs.

### *Conclusion*

While the *Matched* trilogy does not depict a definitive form of government outright, it does criticize large-scale bureaucracies that have the far-reaching powers to control every major aspect of people's lives in favor of a system more consistent with Objectivism. This is evidenced in the conclusion when a sense of "hope that the dystopia can be overcome and replaced with a eutopia" is presented when Cassia and Ky both vote for Anna to be the new leader of their society ("US Eutopias" 222). As Cassia notes, the Society's hijacking of the rebellion and attempt to use it to maintain control in the guise of a different name with limited change "didn't turn out as the Society intended. The Plague mutated. And the people know more and want more than the Society thought they did, [...] People like me" (438). As we see in the final chapters, the choice of what kind of government will take over is left to the people to decide by voting for who they wish to lead them now that the cure to the mutated Plague has been given to everyone. Cassia informs us that three people are running for office: "The Pilot represents the Rising. An Official represents the Society. And Anna represents everyone else" (506). While it is entirely possible that the people could vote for the Society to retake control, the overwhelming suggestion is that people will choose either the Pilot or Anna. Regardless of their choice, the fact that they are all free to make their own minds up about whom they want to lead is, for the moment, an Objectivist eutopia.

Politically, the trilogy promotes Objectivism by warning of the dystopian effects of surrendering individual freedoms into the hands of government officials. Much like *The Hunger Games* and *The Testing*, the *Matched* trilogy encourages young adult readers to question and challenge the society they find themselves in. Furthermore, in demonizing absolute social planning by suggesting that it would

eliminate individual choice and freedom, the political philosophy promoted by the trilogy is consistent with Objectivism. This political philosophy coupled with Cassia's ethical philosophy as depicted in Part III, Chapter 4, will allow us to see how this trilogy suggests an Objectivist solution in regard to the primary societal concern of creative censorship to young adult readers.

## Chapter 5 – The Divergent Trilogy

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With the fourth work covered comes a fourth type of dystopian government. The *Divergent* trilogy presents by far the most convoluted government out of all the works covered, in that the government within the city changes multiple times over the course of the trilogy. In *Divergent* we learn from Tris that while each faction has an official representative as its head, it is ultimately up to the smallest faction, Abnegation, to run the government. Unlike the Government Studies graduates in *The Testing* trilogy, not all members of Abnegation participate in running the government, making it a clear oligarchy. However, the text suggests that this is more of a social oligarchy where, despite being ruled by only a small number of individuals, they rule based on the principal that their actions must be for the greater good. Yet, the Abnegation's social oligarchy is overthrown at the end of *Divergent* and replaced by a new authoritarian oligarchy run by Erudite and Dauntless; who are only concerned for themselves. By the end of the second book, *Insurgent*, this authoritarian oligarchy is also deposed of and a new factionless dictatorship is installed just as we learn that there is an entire world that exists outside the city. In the final book, *Allegiant*, it is confirmed that the city, unbeknownst to anyone within its walls, is an isolated part of a dystopian future United States. Just as in the previous three works, it is only through Tris and her experiences that we are able to discover the extent of exactly how dystopian this society is, both inside and outside the city.

### **Divergent**

#### ***The Faction System***

Not unlike *The Testing* and *Matched* trilogies, the dystopian nature of the government in *Divergent* is not nearly as apparent in the opening chapters as it is in

*The Hunger Games*. Although the government is clearly in control of the society and how it operates, young adults do not face certain death in an annual reaping. More similar to *The Testing*, the majority of citizens seem to have a reasonable amount of choice in determining how their individual lives will be lived. For example, although the citizens are forced to choose a faction, evidence of government control, they are also free to choose whichever faction they desire, evidence of choice. Because the government is not openly taking aggressive action toward its citizens in the opening chapters of the work and everyone appears to have a place in society, it is tempting to read this society as more of a eutopia than a dystopia, similar to *Matched*. This is because the faction system, the chief source of the society's immorality, initially seems more like a product of a social contract that ensures peace and prosperity than a means to control the populous.<sup>51</sup> In fact, if we are to believe the intentions of the founders of this society, as expressed by the current government officials, peace and prosperity were the very reasons for the introduction of the faction system. Regardless of how successful this institution has been in providing peace and prosperity, it is done so at the expense of a forfeiture of individual rights and freedoms.

Although the faction system seems to be part of the social contract of this society, the fact remains that participation in this social contract is mandatory—as there are no alternative societies to choose from nor can individuals leave the city—and consent of the individual citizens is not necessary. The idea that social contracts do not, in practice, require the consent of those that are subject to them is certainly not new nor does it make the society in *Divergent* inherently dystopian; however, it does aid in determining the extent that individual rights are being violated by the

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<sup>51</sup> A comparison could be drawn between the faction system in *Divergent* and the reaping and the Hunger Games in *The Hunger Games*. While the faction system seems like a social contract, the reaping and the Hunger Games are clearly means to control the people.

government that holds the social contract, thus revealing the extent in which a society is Objectively dystopian in a sociopolitical sense.

What defines voluntary consent to a social contract is highly debatable, and there is no official answer, just philosophical opinions. Though by no means an Objectivist given the time he lived, nineteenth-century lawyer and political philosopher Lysander Spooner held some beliefs that in retrospect could be seen as proto-Objectivist in regard to consent to a social contract. He argued that even voting in an American election was not grounds to determine an individual's consent to the social contract that is the Constitution of the United States. In his work *No Treason*, Spooner argues:

In truth, in the case of individuals, their actual voting is not to be taken as proof of consent, *even for the time being*. On the contrary, it is to be considered that, without his consent having ever been asked, a man finds himself environed by a government that he cannot resist; a government that forces him to pay money, render service, and forego the exercise of many of his natural rights, under peril of weighty punishments. (NT.2.1.12)<sup>52</sup>

Applying Spooner's seemingly proto-Objectivist logic to the faction system in *Divergent*, one would be forced to conclude that simply because an individual chooses a faction does not mean they consent to the social contract that is the faction system. In essence, the individuals are being coerced into participating in the social contract, a clear violation of individual rights according to Objectivism.

Making an argument against any inherent morality in societal decisions simply because a society agrees to do something, Rand seemed to echo Spooner's thoughts when she wrote that "the notion that 'Anything society does is right because *society* chose to do it,' is not a moral principle, but a negation of moral principles and the

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<sup>52</sup> Original emphasis.

banishment of morality from social issues” (*VOS 118*).<sup>53</sup> However, simply because society chooses to do something does not make it inherently immoral either, that can only be determined by the ethical standard of one’s philosophy. According to an Objectivist philosophy, Rand goes on to argue:

Any group or “collective,” large or small, is only a number of individuals. A group can have no rights other than the rights of its individual members. In a free society, the “rights” of any group are derived from the rights of its members through their voluntary, individual choice and *contractual* agreement, and are merely the application of these individual rights to a specific undertaking. (119)<sup>54</sup>

We can see that Spooner and Rand have similar, albeit commonly held, opinions about the idea that rights stem from the individuals in a society, not the society itself. Using this idea as a philosophical framework we can begin to ascertain whether or not the *Divergent* trilogy presents a dystopian sociopolitical system according to Objectivism.

The dystopian elements of the text are often revealed by the absence of many of the simple freedoms we enjoy in contemporary Western society. In this society, individuals are not free to marry whomever they wish, they are not free to pursue whatever job they want, are not free to change occupations, are not allowed to choose where they live, are not allowed to socialize with people outside their faction, etc. Individuals are given one chance at their Choosing Ceremony to choose the life they will live, the people they will associate with, and the job they will have, and even these will be limited by the needs of the society. It is at this juncture in life that we find the protagonist, Beatrice “Tris” Prior, as the text begins.

At the Choosing Ceremony Tris and all the other 16-year-olds must make the most important decision of their lives, armed only with their limited knowledge of the

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<sup>53</sup> Original emphasis.

<sup>54</sup> Original emphasis.

factions, their gut, and the results of their aptitude tests. For Tris this task is harder than for her fellow 16-year-olds because the results of her aptitude test were inconclusive, i.e., Divergent, meaning that she showed aptitude for more than one faction. While Tris has narrowed her decision down to two factions, both of which she shows aptitude for, her decision is further complicated by family and social pressures. Eventually choosing Dauntless, Tris is mostly satisfied with her choice, despite the hardships she faces during initiation.

Rand argues that in a society “the basic condition [man] requires is the freedom to think and to act according to his rational judgment,” the very condition being denied of every individual in *Divergent* after they have picked their faction (125). Continuing to argue against this type of action, Rand states, “A society that robs an individual of the product of his mind; or enslaves him, or attempts to limit the freedom of his mind; or compels him to act against his own rational judgment [...] is not, strictly speaking, a society, but a mob held together by institutionalized gang-rule” (126). Because individuals are forced to focus both their efforts and their minds toward the specific tasks assigned to them by their faction they are not free to exercise their own rational judgment. Furthermore, because they cannot exercise their own rational judgment and leave their faction/job for another, they are essentially enslaved by society, they are living for the sake of the society and not their own sake. Although this does not seem to bother the majority of citizens in *Divergent* because they are genetically predisposed—by their altered DNA—and conditioned to accept their place in society, it is often a problem for those that are Divergent and display independent thought, which is the very reason Jeanine Matthews, the leader of Erudite, wishes to eliminate them.

### *The Battle*

*Divergent* shifts from depicting sociopolitical dystopia to purely political dystopia as it becomes more apparent that those that are Divergent are being hunted down and that there is a play for political power taking place. Throughout the text, Tris has been stumbling across bits of information that lead her to believe that Erudite, specifically Jeanine Matthews, with the aid of Dauntless, will make a move for power over the society. In some cases she gains this information by considering why the Erudite are making false claims about Abnegation and the Abnegation leadership. She also gains information when she visits her brother Caleb at Erudite headquarters. Finally, she gains most of her information from conversations with Four, her initiation instructor and romantic interest, about what he believes is going on and what he has seen happening. Throughout initiation she is convinced that Erudite and Dauntless leadership are working together, but she is never able to figure out how the Erudite could possibly get all the members of Dauntless to do what they want. It is only after the final rankings are released that she is able to make sense of everything.

At the results banquet all members are forced to receive an injection. As everyone celebrates, Four approaches Tris and offers her a congratulatory hug, no longer caring if anyone knows about their relationship, Tris kisses Four. While they are kissing, his “thumb brushes over the injection site in [her] neck, and a few things come together at once” (415). Tris has an epiphany: the serum was colored which means it contains transmitters, “Transmitters connect the mind to a simulation program,” Erudite developed the serum, and “Eric and Max are working with Erudite” (415). Tris suddenly realizes that this is how “Erudite will get [the Dauntless] to fight” (415). Despite her efforts, Tris is unable to get Four alone in

order to inform him that the serum that all the Dauntless have been injected with will be used to force them to fight for the Erudite. This is a problem for Objectivism because it eliminates free will and because it will force all the Dauntless members to initiate acts of physical forces against others.

Tris wakes up the next morning to discover all her fellow former initiates are getting dressed in silence. She notices her friend Christina tying her shoelaces and attempts to gain her attention but Christina is unresponsive and simply continues tying her shoes. She also tries to arouse her friend Will but he too simply goes about his business. Tris quickly realizes that the entire Dauntless community has turned into “sleepwalkers,” all moving “in unison, the same foot forward as the same arm swings back” (417). Realizing that acting normally will reveal that she is not under control of the simulation that is affecting the rest of Dauntless, Tris attempts to mimic their movements. This is a strategic decision for Tris, she wants to stop the simulation that will lead the Dauntless to fight for Erudite; however, she recognizes that if it is discovered that she is not under the control of the simulation that the likelihood of her being able to accomplish her desire will greatly diminish.

Knowing that she cannot keep up the facade if the Dauntless “wage war against Abnegation,” which is likely considering they are all being given guns and ammunition, Tris considers her options:

My list of options narrows, and I see the path I must take. I will pretend long enough to get to the Abnegation sector of the city. I will save my family. And whatever happens after that doesn't matter. (418-9)

With a plan in place, Tris continues acting like the others, eventually making it to the train platform where she thinks she spots Four. If Four is in fact Divergent, as Tris believes, he would be a valuable ally to help her rescue her family and stop the simulation. Tris finds Four and, finding that he too is unaffected by the serum,

together make their way into the Abnegation sector, where they hear gunshots. Eventually they are accosted by Eric, who puts a gun to Four's head. Unwilling to allow Eric to kill Four, Tris reveals their divergence by pointing her gun at Eric, ultimately shooting him in the foot. They attempt to escape but are unsuccessful and are taken to see Jeanine.

The use of serum to control people's minds acts as a literal representation for what is already taking place in this society: the people are being denied the ability to exercise independent thought. The primary difference between the society the government had already created and the serum administered by Erudite is that the serum removes all chance of independent thought, whereas the government had only encouraged preventing it. Either way, the government is violating the rights of its citizens by forcing them to live for the sake of society as a whole and not for themselves, thus violating Objectivist ethics.

## **Insurgent**

Given the faction system and the hunt for individuals that are Divergent in the first novel, it should come as no surprise that political dystopia takes the form of identity politics in *Insurgent*. Unlike identity politics where marginalized or underrepresented individuals with a shared experience or identity band together to gain equality, in this instance I mean a "type of 'identity politics' that stresses differences and creates a sense of 'zero-sum' competition between groups [...] instead [of] emphasizing common values and interests" (Berman). While to many this might seem like the antithesis of identity politics, much of the identity politics presented in the *Divergent* trilogy seeks to marginalize and isolate individuals from their common identity, citizens of the once Chicago, by defining them by more specific forms of identity, i.e., their divergence, their faction, or their lack of a faction. Like the

previous three trilogies discussed, the second novel is rather light on political criticism, choosing instead to focus on character development, the relationships between characters, and the growth of the protagonist. However, there are a few broad aspects of the text that do lend themselves to political analysis. The two primary aspects of political dystopia and identity politics in the text surround the focus on faction alliance—including the factionless—and the power struggle between Jeanine Matthews and Evelyn Johnson-Eaton, Four's mother.

### *Faction Alliance*

In *Divergent*, Tris mentions the motto written in her “Faction History textbook: *Faction before blood*,” and we find that this idea of identity being stronger in one's faction than in one's blood relations to be true in *Insurgent* (*Divergent* 43).<sup>55</sup> Following the events of *Divergent*, Tris, Four, Caleb, Peter, and Marcus go to stay with Amity outside the city walls. While there, Tris encounters her former neighbor from Abnegation that has also sought refuge in Amity, Susan. Tris explains that Susan's father, an Abnegation leader, did not survive the attack. When Tris asks if Susan has seen her brother Robert, who changed to Amity the same time that Tris changed to Dauntless, Susan says, “Briefly, last night [...] I left him to grieve with his faction as I grieve with mine. It is nice to see him again, though” (*Insurgent* 14). Susan's response is virtually devoid of emotion, not entirely surprising for a member of Abnegation; however, given that she has just lost a member of her family, one might think she would be less indifferent about it. Even if she were acting within her nature as an Abnegation, the text does not suggest that the decision to grieve with their respective factions instead of family was undesirable to Robert.

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<sup>55</sup> Original emphasis.

This reveals not only the truth of the motto “*Faction before blood,*” but the fact that it has been so strenuously ingrained within this society that they cannot even mourn with family. The scene reinforces how prominent a role faction identity plays in the text. Political dystopia is further depicted by the fact that the government is forcing individuals to be part of an exclusive and permanent collective; a clear problem for Objectivism. In this society the government, intentionally or not, restricts with whom one can mourn when they lose someone. While this is not the case for every individual following the events of *Divergent*, it is clearly the way the government intended it to be. There are examples like Tris’s friend Christina who is able to mourn the loss of her boyfriend Will with her family, but this is only because Dauntless is split as a faction and she has taken refuge with many others in the Candor complex, which happens to be the faction of her birth.

Despite the fact that Jeanine, with the help of Dauntless leadership and mind control, nearly eradicated the entire faction of Abnegation, we do not see a sense of unity against her or Erudite by the other factions, i.e., we do not see them seeking to prevent Erudite from violating the rights of others again. However, we do see factions acting as a collective mind in the best interest of their faction. The first time this takes place is when Amity decides what to do about the Abnegation refugees. Tris explains, “I learned in Faction History that the Amity recognize no official leader—they vote on everything, and the result is usually close to unanimous. They are like many parts of a single mind, and Johanna [the Amity representative to the government] is their mouthpiece” (*Insurgent* 18). On a moral footing Amity is the most closely Objective faction given they allow all members to vote on decisions that will affect them all; however, their pacifism prevents them from being fully Objective. It is not the fact that Amity chooses not to fight Erudite that prevents them from being Objective. As

Rand states, “Men have the right to use physical force only in retaliation and only against those who initiate its use,” implying that this is only a right, not a requirement (VOS 36). Rand also states, “A nation that violates the rights of its own citizens cannot claim any rights whatsoever,” and since Jeanine has taken control of the government and established a dictatorship that violates the rights of its citizens, the nation i.e., the government of the city, has no rights to govern (121). Again, just because the government has no national rights and Amity has the right to respond to an attack by the government on the citizens with force does not mean they have to do so according to Objectivism. We do see similar incidents of factions acting as a collective only for the good of their own faction taking place throughout the text, like Candor looking to secure a peace treaty and the factionless and Dauntless starting another civil war; however, these decisions, in a philosophical sense, are not very different from what Amity has done.

### ***Jeanine vs. Evelyn***

While there are many power struggles taking place in *Insurgent*, the one with the greatest political impact is the one between Jeanine and Evelyn, or the Erudite and the factionless. This struggle is important because it shows that just because one group wishes to remove a tyrannical government from power and replace it does not mean that the new government will be any better than the one they are replacing. Similar to Snow and Coin in *The Hunger Games* trilogy, Jeanine and Evelyn both control sizable groups of people, want to control the society, and are willing to use physical force to achieve their goal. Although at the start of the text Jeanine has control of the government, Evelyn’s group of factionless, who number “twice the size of Dauntless,” intend to cease to be marginalized by the official factions (100). Speaking about her group of factionless while trying to recruit Four, Evelyn warns,

“You would do well to take it seriously. Its actions may determine the future of this city.” This statement is more than a threat; it is foreshadowing the events that are to come in the rest of the text. Later, Evelyn informs Four that the factionless have the highest Divergent population, explaining that this is because “those who can’t confine themselves to a particular way of thinking would be most likely to leave a faction or fail its initiation” (108). Having the largest Divergent population is a huge advantage for Evelyn and the factionless when they attempt to overtake the government because they, like Tris, will be resistant to the same serum simulation that was used on the Dauntless. When Four asks Evelyn what she intends to do with her band of factionless, she explains, “We want to usurp Erudite [...] Once we get rid of them, there’s not much stopping us from controlling the government ourselves” (110). Flabbergasted at the idea Four retorts, “That’s what you expect me to help you with. Overthrowing one corrupt government and instating some kind of factionless tyranny.” Although Evelyn denies the desire to be a tyrant, she does confirm that she wants to end the faction system, and the rest of their conversation reveals that she intends for it to be a hostile takeover.

It is not hard to imagine that Jeanine has no interest in handing over the very power she has just gained, so the conflict that takes up the later part of *Insurgent* is not a surprising turn of events. What is taking place beyond the physical confrontation between the forces of Evelyn and Jeanine is a battle of social and political philosophy, one wishing to maintain the faction system and one wishing to free the people from the bonds of that system. However, neither of these options are Objectivist despite Evelyn’s desire to end the faction system seeming like a net positive for the society. Both Evelyn and Jeanine want to control society and both are willing to use force to do so. While Jeanine has already proven her willingness to use force, Evelyn displays

this same willingness when she has her factionless collect all the firearms following the battle at Erudite headquarters. It is obvious that Jeanine is not willing to allow the people the freedom to think and choose for themselves what they believed to be in their own rational self-interest, yet Evelyn is no different.

In regard to the use of physical force, Rand states, “The precondition of a civilized society is the barring of physical force from social relationships—thus establishing the principle that if men wish to deal with one another, they may do so only by means of reason: by discussion, persuasion and voluntary, uncoerced agreement” (*VOS* 126). Regardless of who is running the government, Jeanine or Evelyn, physical force will be the means by which they implement their social and political philosophies on the citizens. According to the citation above, use of force by the government will only have a trickle-down effect on the rest of society, because it establishes “the principle that if men wish to deal with one another, they may do so” by means of force. This would result in the society not being a society at all, but a horde of brutes, which is essentially what develops in the final text of the trilogy.

It would be remiss to not mention that a third option to Evelyn or Jeanine is always present in the text, Tris. Although Tris has no desire to lead, as evidenced by her refusal to accept Dauntless leadership, the way in which she deals with people and talks about how the government should act is much more Objectivist than either of the other two options. With the revelation at the end of *Insurgent* that there is a world outside the city, that they are essentially a petri dish to develop Divergents, the political dystopia has only begun.

## **Allegiant**

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter on the *Divergent* trilogy, *Allegiant* confirms the existence of a second system of government at play, namely

the Bureau of Genetic Welfare acting on behalf of the United States government. This revelation sets the *Divergent* trilogy, specifically *Allegiant*, apart from the previous three trilogies examined because it is the only one where the United States government exists concurrently with the initial government depicted. Furthermore, the existence of the U.S. government in conjunction with the multiple regime changes that take place within the city sets the *Divergent* trilogy further apart from the other trilogies by denying it a full-scale rebellion in which a moral dilemma regarding the means by which the primary dystopian government is brought to an end can be questioned. Instead, readers are faced with the ethical issues concerning DNA alteration and the actions of the U.S. government and the Bureau of Genetic Welfare following the failure of such a program.

### ***Bureau of Genetic Welfare***

There are three major groups operating in *Allegiant*: the U.S. government, the Bureau of Genetic Welfare, and the people in Tris's city, which is confirmed to be Chicago. By looking at the history of these groups we can gain a clearer understanding of the roles they play and the reason for it. Several centuries prior to the events in the trilogy, the U.S. government, in an act of bio-power, attempted to perfect human DNA by suppressing particular qualities to enhance others; however, this did not go to plan and instead of perfecting humanity they made it worse.<sup>56</sup> This event led to what is called the Purity War, which "caused a level of destruction formerly unheard of on American soil, eliminating almost half of the country's population" (*Allegiant* 123). At the end of the war the U.S. government created the Bureau of Genetic Welfare to "heal" those with damaged genes. To do so, the Bureau

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<sup>56</sup> In alternating its citizens DNA, even if only under a voluntary basis, is evidence of the government using bio-power as described by Foucault, for more, see Foucault in the bibliography.

cordoned off and isolated several major cities like Chicago to be used as experiments to try and heal the damaged genes. The method of these experiments was simple: place undamaged people with damaged people and hope for evolution to do the rest. Once there were a suitable number of healed individuals—Divergents—they would exit the experiments, enter normal society, and the rest of the nation would eventually heal. Again, this did not go according to plan in most of the cities, save for Chicago where a societal structure was introduced—the factions.

Although the actions of the U.S. government centuries ago surely signpost dystopia, we are presented with no evidence that anyone was forced to partake in the gene alterations, limiting any analysis of the U.S. government as an anti-Objectivist dystopia. The Bureau of Genetic Welfare, on the other hand, provides ample opportunity for analysis. While it is true, or so we are told, that the original participants of the experiments voluntarily chose to be involved, they have condemned their descendants to be born into an experiment. While this violation of Objectivist ethics takes place on an individual level not a political one, the fact that the Bureau continues the experiment without informing the “participants” is a violation of Objectivist ethics on a political level.

As previously noted, Rand argued that “A ‘right’ is a moral principle defining and sanctioning a man’s freedom of action in a social context” and that a man has the “right to his own life” (*VOS* 110). In denying the citizens of Chicago and the other experiments the reality of their situation, i.e., that they are being used as lab rats, the Bureau, and by extension the U.S. government that sanctions their experiments, is violating the rights of every single individual born into the experiments by denying them the right to their own lives. Because Rand said, “the protection of individual rights is the only proper purpose of a government,” and the government, through the

Bureau, is denying the people in the experiments their individual rights, i.e., the right to know the reality of their world and thus their right to the full potential of their lives, the Bureau and the U.S. government are dystopian in an Objectivist sense (128).

There is another element of this situation that needs to be considered, the fact that the U.S. government has lost faith in the Bureau and will shut them down if the conditions in the Chicago experiment worsen. While this does not excuse the U.S. government's role in creating an anti-Objectivist dystopia, it shows that at this point in time they are more of an accessory to the act than the perpetrator. However, the Bureau has a trump card to prevent the government from shutting them down, they can reset the experiment in Chicago by releasing a memory erasing agent into the city to prevent the war that appears to be on the verge of taking place within Chicago. Again, this act would violate the rights of the citizens, denying them the right to their lives as they know them because they would forget who they are. With this fear looming, Tris and her companions take action to prevent it by releasing the memory-erasing agent into the Bureau compound before they can use it on Chicago. While this action ultimately results in Tris's death, it also effectively destroys the Bureau as it existed because the memories of so many of their leaders have been erased.

### ***Conclusion***

Given its ever-changing political environment—starting with a social oligarchy, which is replaced by an authoritarian oligarchy, which is then in turn replaced by a dictatorship, and the final revelation that the society exists under the control of the United States government—the *Divergent* trilogy criticizes the most forms of government of any of these trilogies on its way to promoting Objectivism. The final events of *Allegiant*, specifically Tris's actions that result in ending the Bureau in its current form, suggest that the hope of an Objectivist eutopia is now

possible because the Bureau has been exposed and the people in Chicago are now fully aware of the reality of their situation. Four explains:

Johanna successfully negotiated with the government [...] to allow the former faction members to stay in the city, provided they are self-sufficient, submit to the government's authority, and allow outsiders to come in and join them [...] The Bureau, once in charge of the experiment, will now keep order in Chicago's city limits.

It will be the only metropolitan area in the country governed by people who don't believe in genetic damage. A kind of paradise. (*Allegiant* 504)

Although Chicago remains part of the United States, which for its previous actions has lost its right to govern in an Objectivist sense, the people now at least are aware of their reality and allowed to construct their own society. Just like the previous trilogies, and in fact like Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*, these final events do not guarantee an Objectivist eutopia, simply the hope that one might exist now that those responsible for the anti-Objectivist dystopia have been removed from power.

In moving beyond the various forms of government that are presented throughout the trilogy, eliminating the faction system, and concluding with the city becoming "A kind of paradise" the *Divergent* trilogy promotes an Objectivist political philosophy. This political philosophy in conjunction with Tris's ethical philosophy as discussed in Part III, Chapter 5, aids in our understanding of the *Divergent* trilogy's Objectivist solution to its central social concern of identity politics.

## **Conclusion of Part II**

As we can see when examining these contemporary YA critical dystopias in comparison to *Atlas Shrugged*, they are incredibly similar in their depictions of what would constitute a dystopian government, and in how they conclude with a eutopian enclave. It is important to remember that while government is often used to communicate dystopia in fictional societies, it is not inherently necessary for this to

be the case, or for any form of government to exist in order for a text to be considered dystopian. Rather, it is because these works use government as a means of creating and maintaining dystopia that they allow for political analysis. Despite the similarly totalitarian nature of the governments depicted in these four trilogies, they each present a different form of government. This suggests that while each of the YA critical dystopia discussed might be making a specific argument against its particular form of government, as a group of texts the primary concern does not appear to be about one particular type of government; rather, it is about any form of government that uses its power to violate the rights and freedoms of its citizens. In doing so, the governments presented in these works are inherently vulnerable to Objectivist criticism, given that they all violate the individual rights and freedoms of their citizens.

By concluding with the hope that a more eutopian government that respects the individual rights and freedoms of its citizens can rise in the place of the recently deposed government, these works naturally lean towards Objectivism. However, we cannot—based solely on the negative depiction of the forms of government presented in these works—necessarily surmise that a specifically Objectivist government is the intended outcome in achieving a more eutopian society. Instead, it is the case that the protagonists of these trilogies hope that the new government will be congruent with the political ideals of Objectivism. This is evidenced when we examine the ethical frameworks of the protagonists, for it would be nonsensical that they would desire a government that is not consistent with their ethical beliefs. When we scrutinize the decision and motivations of the protagonists, we can conclude that they, as an individual, are fighting for a more Objectivist government and society.

As will be argued in Part III, the protagonists of these trilogies display strong leanings toward Objectivism in their ethical and political beliefs, suggesting that as individuals they are promoting a future that is more in-line with Objectivism. Furthermore, by understanding the Objectivist political and ethical philosophy inherent in these works, we gain a greater understanding of how each work provides an Objectivist solution to the predominant social concerns presented, and how they influence contemporary young adult readers to come to similarly Objectivist conclusions about how to deal with these same issues in American society.

## **Part III – A is A: Individual Morality**

## **Introduction – The Moral Angle**

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Whereas Part II of this thesis examined the nature of the dystopian governments in *The Hunger Games*, *The Testing*, the *Matched*, and the *Divergent* trilogies, how these governments are directly at odds with Objectivism, and began to address how these trilogies present Objectivist solutions to their dystopian worlds, in Part III I will examine the role of ethics in aiding to present an Objectivist solution to these works. Once the depictions of politics and ethics in these works are understood to promote Objectivist practices, then we will be able to address the cultural implications of these trilogies in Part IV.

In Part III of this work I will begin by addressing Ayn Rand's system of Objectivism as it pertains to morality, i.e., the individual. In doing so, I will present and explain some of the chief principles necessary to understand Rand's theory of Objective morality. Following this, much like in the last chapter, I will examine characters Rand herself created, specifically those in *Atlas Shrugged*, in order to demonstrate exactly what makes one a Randian hero. From here, I will enter a stage of analysis of the four concerned trilogies, in order to show how the chief protagonists of these works exhibit the qualities necessary to qualify as coming-of-age Randian heroines. Again, I use coming-of-age Randian heroine to denote a female character that begins the story as a young adult unsure of their moral standard and over the course of the work, or works, develops and exhibits a specifically Objectivist sense of morality. Because of the growth that is taking place within the individuals in these types of works, it is often the case that they do not initially always exhibit Objectivist morality, sometimes not acting in their own rational self-interest or displaying

altruistic tendencies. However, it is the case in all of these works that by the end the protagonists can be seen as ethically Objectivist.

## Chapter 1 – Atlas Hugged

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### Rand's Theory of Morality

In addition to her thoughts on government, Rand's philosophical work *The Virtue of Selfishness* contains a detailed manifesto of her Objectivist theory of morality. According to Rand, "The standard of value of the Objectivist ethics—the standard by which one judges what is good or evil—is man's life, or: that which is required for man's survival qua man" (25). A value being "that which one acts to gain and/or keep," Rand's statement could be more easily understood to be saying that in making rational decisions individuals must use their life as a measure to judge if a decision is good or evil, right or wrong (16). Thus, "reason is man's basic means of survival, that which is proper to the life of a rational being is the good; that which negates, opposes or destroys it is the evil" (25). By reason being "man's basic means of survival," Rand means that since man, unlike plants and animals, cannot survive on instinct alone, it is his/her ability to think that is his/her primary tool to surviving. If we accept this as true, then we can begin to enter a discussion concerning what makes a decision rational and where the limits are regarding what actions are acceptable for man's survival.

The ethical system of Objectivism is one of rational self-interest, i.e., an "actor must always be the beneficiary of his action" (X). However, acting in rational self-interest "is applicable only in the context of a rational, objectively demonstrated and validated code of moral principles which define and determine his actual self-interest. It is not a license 'to do as he pleases'" (X). Rand states that, on a social level, this means:

The basic social principle of the Objectivist ethics is that just as life is an end in itself, so every living human being is an end in himself, not the means to the ends or the welfare of others—and, therefore, that

man must live for his own sake, neither sacrificing himself to others nor sacrificing others to himself. To live for his own sake means that the achievement of his own happiness is man's highest moral purpose. (30)

While this might seem to imply that there is no room for helping others in the Objectivist system, because “man must live for his own sake,” this is not the case. There are two specific instances where Rand makes exceptions: when acting to save a loved one and when helping others by choice.

In *The Virtue of Selfishness*, in a chapter called “The Ethics of Emergencies,” Rand goes into sufficient detail to explain that what we commonly call self-sacrifice is not always an unethical act, nor is it actually a sacrifice. The root of Rand's argument is found in her definition of the word “sacrifice.” According to Rand, “‘Sacrifice’ is the surrender of a greater value for the sake of a lesser one or a nonvalue,” and that an individual should “always act in accordance with the hierarchy of [their] values, and never sacrifice a greater value to a lesser one” (50). Her definition of “sacrifice” and her belief in not giving greater value to a lesser one allows her to deduce that many of the things we commonly call self-sacrifice are not sacrifices at all. Using the example of a drowning person, Rand argues that if trying to save a stranger puts the rescuer in a position where they might lose their life in trying to aid the stranger then the act would be unethical because the rescuer has placed the value of the stranger's life above his own; this would be self-sacrifice (52). However, if the drowning person is a loved one, and the rescuer acts “for the selfish reason that life without the loved person could be unbearable,” then it would be a moral act and could not be called a sacrifice because they are not trading a greater value for a lesser one.

With regards to helping a stranger, Rand states, “Only individual men have the right to decide when or whether they wish to help others; society—as an organized

political system—has no rights in the matter at all” (93). What Rand means here is that, within Objectivism, any individual has the right to help others if they wish to do so; however, an organized political system, i.e., government, cannot coerce or require an individual to help others. For Rand, this statement was specifically targeting government aid programs and the fact that all persons with an income are taxed to pay for services for others that cannot afford them. While we as readers might disagree with Rand concerning a mixed economy and the stability that comes with some social safety nets, the issue she takes with social safety nets is that instead of a voluntary system, individuals are required to pay into them via taxation. Alternatively, Rand favors a system of charity in which individuals give because they want to, not because they are forced to. This system extends beyond monetary aid to others, such as helping disadvantaged groups with time or even helping someone you know move. The key comes back to the fact that Objectivism requires individuals to not sacrifice themselves to others, i.e., exchange a higher value for a lower or non-value. If a person chooses to give all of their money to charity while they are still living and would need it, this would not be morally virtuous because doing so would be at the detriment to the individual giving because they will have nothing to support themselves. Likewise, giving time to help a friend move would not be morally virtuous if giving up the time would be disadvantageous to the individual. However, individuals are free to give their money and time to others so long as it is not self-sacrificial and the decision to do so comes from reason. This means that the individual has rationally come to the conclusion that they can afford to give their time and money and that they gain something from it, which in cases of charity—be it through time or money—is usually the self-satisfaction of having helped.

While there are a great number of specific moral issues that could be explored through an Objectivist lens of ethics, the issues discussed above provide sufficient information for analyzing most ethical questions through an Objectivist lens. That said, we can further refine our understanding by examining particular events in *Atlas Shrugged*, exploring examples that are matched with Rand's own answers to ethical questions. Specifically, I will be looking at events surrounding three of the characters in this novel: John Galt, Hank Rearden, and Dagny Taggart. In looking at these characters, my aim is twofold. First, to show a wider range of what Rand believed to be moral in a social setting. Second, to establish the type of ethical decisions that are expected of the Randian hero in order to carry this knowledge into a reading of the protagonists of these YA critical dystopias.

## **Randian Heroes in *Atlas Shrugged***

### ***John Galt***

John Galt is by far the most famous of Rand's heroes. A topic of discussion for much of the book, rather than an active character on its pages, Galt does not appear until late in *Atlas Shrugged*. But, when he eventually does appear, he absolutely dominates the third part of the novel. Furthermore, and as we learn near the end of the novel, he has—despite his seeming absence—actually been present and responsible for many of the events that have taken place. The primary examples of his presence are: the fact that he is the man stopping the engine of the world by providing a eutopian refuge for the captains of industry; that he is the one whose name is metaphorically referenced by characters when they cannot explain something; and that he was the employee that created the power source at the Twentieth Century Motor Company. However, there is also the scene where Galt leaves the Twentieth Century Motor Company, which proves an ideal starting point for seeing Rand's

theory of normative ethics at work in fiction. Furthermore, this will establish precedents for what makes a decision Objective and how a literary Randian hero is expected to act.

The vast majority of our knowledge about the Twentieth Century Motor Company comes from a former shop foreman turned tramp, who is discovered hitching a ride on Dagny's train in Chapter X of Part II. Taking pity on the man, Dagny invites him to dine in her private car as her guest and begins to question him about how he came to be in such a situation. As he explains his situation, and the failure of factories across the country, he becomes agitated and says, "Oh God, who is—," and Dagny finishes, "—John Galt?" (*Atlas Shrugged* 660). It is from this opening that he explains his belief that it might have been him and the other six thousand employees at the Twentieth Century Motor Company that coined this phrase. He then provides Dagny with the full story of the company: that the owner had died; that his children had taken control and implemented a new social plan for the company; that the system was not sustainable; that one man walked out on the company when the new plan was democratically approved by the employees; and that "his name was John Galt" (672). Without going into a deep analysis of the entirety of the events that are described over twelve pages of dialogue from the tramp, I will focus on the specifics of this plan, how it failed, and conclude by looking at Galt's decision to walk out.

We learn from the tramp that the employees were bullied and guilt tripped into approving the plan, "if anybody had doubts, he felt guilty and kept his mouth shut—because they made it sound like anyone who'd oppose the plan was a child killer at heart and less than a human being" (661). Given that anyone who disagreed with the plan would have been an outcast among the other employees, this amounts to

emotional and social coercion. While this is a clear violation of Objectivism due to the use of coercion, the employees are also guilty of violating Objectivism because they used only their emotions to make their decision and not reason. The plan held the principle: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need" (661). This is to say, that people would work the jobs and hours that met with their ability; those with more skill, strength, and time would work harder jobs and longer hours. Then people would be paid in accordance with what they needed, those with large families and more bills to pay would be allotted more than those with no family and fewer bills, all without considering the amount of work performed by the given individual. Furthermore, the needs and abilities of the individuals were voted on by the rest of the employees, leading many to hide their ability and forcing them to beg for the money they needed.

The main problem that Objectivism has with this plan is the fact that it is a form of non-market socialism, while Objectivism obviously advocates for free-market capitalism. However, this is not just a difference in economic systems. Both systems are rooted in differing ethical beliefs. For Objectivism, the fact that some employees must work harder to support others is an ethical violation because it amounts to one individual sacrificing themselves for others, working for the sake of others and not themselves. As one of the heirs to the company openly stated, "Remember that none of us may now leave this place, for each of us belongs to all the others by the moral law which we all accept!" (671). Under such a plan, no individual has a right to their own life; they are enslaved to the company and the other employees. While it is perfectly possible for a system like this to work if they had all bought into "the moral law" of it, not everyone did, and instead of adhering to the system people quickly looked for a way to cheat it. However, there was one man that was not willing to be a

part of this, for when the above statement was made he proudly stood and announced that he did not accept the moral law espoused by the company. Of course, the man who walked out was John Galt, the entire reason Dagny wanted to hear this story in the first place. While one can argue that one of Galt's reasons for walking out was simply the foresight of drawing such a plan to its logical conclusion if people ever began to take advantage of the system, his primary reason for walking out is because he believed that even if people held to the plan and were honest it was still immoral in principle.

In determining Galt's motivations for his decision, we must recognize that he had two options: he could either stay and work at the Twentieth Century Motor Company or he could leave. For Galt, staying would mean accepting the moral law professed by the company. In leaving, Galt shows that he denies this alleged moral law and believes in a different moral law. Furthermore, since we know Galt is a rational Objectivist actor, we can assume that his choice was governed by the principle of not sacrificing a higher value for a lesser or non-value, meaning that he held his ethical-economic principles in higher value than his job. While this alone does not mean that he must be an Objectivist, which he very obviously is, it does show that his decisions are congruent with Objectivism.

It is in his refusal to accept the company's moral law that Galt establishes himself as morally principled according to Objectivism, and thus, a Randian hero. In walking out of the company, Galt proclaims a refusal to violate his sense of morality. Furthermore, what will ultimately make him a full Randian hero is the fact that he will not stand for this type of immoral act to plague others, as evidenced when he states, "I will put an end to this, once and for all [...] I will stop the motor of the world" (671). So it is, that when Galt does in fact stop the motor of the world by

removing all of the captains of industry, allowing the economy to crumble, that he becomes the greatest of Randian heroes not only because he held to his Objectivist principles but because he effectively brought an end to what was a dystopian society. However, bringing an end to a dystopian society is not a prerequisite to being a Randian hero, it is simply what sets Galt apart from other Randian heroes in *Atlas Shrugged*.

### ***Hank Rearden***

Hank Rearden spends a great majority of *Atlas Shrugged* performing acts that would deem him a Randian hero; likewise, he also performs many acts that are not in keeping with a Randian hero. His inability to consistently act like a Randian hero explains why he is one of the last captains of industry to be selected to depart society, for it is only when he has proven himself to be an Objectivist thinker that he is taken to Galt's Gulch. Similar to the protagonists of the four concerned trilogies, Hank is more of a coming-of-age Randian hero because he must undertake a journey of self-discovery over the course of the novel in order to embrace his own Objectivist ethical beliefs. One of Hank's most Randian heroic moments in the novel takes place when he is put on trial for violating government regulations for selling his product as he sees fit.

The charge Hank faces is for violating the Fair Share Law, which "give[s] every customer who [wants] it an equal supply of Rearden Metal" (*Atlas Shrugged* 299). This law, like all the laws being passed by the bureaucracy that has taken over the United States government in *Atlas Shrugged*, violates the principles of Objectivism because it forces individuals and their companies to sacrifice themselves for the alleged greater good. Instead of being able to sell whatever amount of their product they wish, to whomever they wish, companies are forced to offer the same

amount to anyone who wants it. Despite this law, Hank sells Ken Danagger, the owner of the largest coal mine in Pennsylvania, additional Rearden Metal that is needed to prevent cave-ins at the mine, Hank's reasoning being that if the mines cave-in then Ken cannot sell Hank the coal he needs to make his products. However, the government gets wind of their illegal transaction, attempts to use it to blackmail Hank into selling them Rearden Metal and, when Hank still refuses, take him to court.

In court, Hank does not cooperate with the judges, refuses to enter a plea, and rejects the authority of the court. Dumbfounded and struggling to gain any traction, one of the judges claims that the law Hank has violated and is "denouncing is based on the highest principle—the principle of the public good" (477). Hank replies:

Who is the public? What does it hold as its good? There was a time when men believed that 'the good' was a concept to be defined by a code of moral values and that no man had the right to seek his good through the violation of the rights of another. If it is now believed that my fellow men may sacrifice me in any manner they please for the sake of whatever they deem to be their own good, if they believe that they may seize my property simply because they need it—well, so does any burglar. There is only this difference: the burglar does not ask me to sanction his act.

Hank provides further arguments in his defense during the rest of his trial; however, the crux of his argument and the defining factor in his acting as a Randian hero are sufficiently presented in the above citation. Hank's argument is that if the court and the law are acting based on a moral principle it is not an Objective moral principle, because the court and the law require Hank to sacrifice himself for the sake of others.

Immediately after the charges are read against Hank, his options are seemingly limited to declaring his guilt or innocence; however, Hank forces a third option by refusing to recognize the court. While in reality this approach would result only in Hank being held in contempt of court, in Rand's fictional world his ability to hold such a position helps illustrate his moral code. In choosing to defy the court, and in

his refusal to accept its legitimacy, Hank informs us that he, much like Galt at the meeting of the Twentieth Century Motor Company, holds a defense of his moral code at a higher value than his welfare should the court seek to either imprison him, fine him, or both.

It is Hank's refusal to recognize the law, the court, and the moral principles in which they are said to uphold that, in part, make him a Randian hero in this moment. He later says that if they wish to impose this law or any decision made by the court on him that they must do so "at the point of a gun," daring them to show the reality of the law and the court, i.e., that they are forcing him to act against his own rational self-interest (479). The other factor that makes Hank a Randian hero in this moment is the moral code for which he is arguing, and his use of it in his argument. Hank argues both for and from the point of view of rational self-interest, and he comes to his conclusion through reason and by not violating the rights of others, i.e., he is upholding Objectivism, the most important quality in making one a Randian hero.

### ***Dagny Taggart***

Similar to Hank Rearden, Dagny Taggart is not consistently a Randian hero throughout the text, sometimes acting like a Randian hero and at other times not. Dagny's biggest flaw in being a fully realized Randian hero during the majority of *Atlas Shrugged* is her continued willingness to allow what Rand considers the "parasites" of society, particularly her brother James, to feed off of her success. However, it is her actions in being an Objectively moral agent in a non-Objectively moral world that allow us to see her as a Randian hero. One such moment is her building of the John Galt Line using Rearden Metal. In building the line, Dagny refuses to bend to the arguments of others and makes her decisions based on reason to protect that which she values, i.e., Taggart Transcontinental.

The first big moment that shows Dagny acting according to reason is the decision to focus on the line in the first place, and the recognition of the line as the highest priority for the company because it promises the highest return on investment. Unlike the San Sebastián Line that is motivated by James Taggart's belief that it is the duty of Taggart Transcontinental to aid the People's State of Mexico even if it is to their detriment, the John Galt Line is based on the fact that Ellis Wyatt is producing oil in Colorado and needs to transport his product, which will bring in revenue for Taggart Transcontinental. As we see in the text, the John Galt Line is primed to be a success because the use of Rearden Metal allows Taggart Transcontinental to run trains at a faster speed without the fear of the trains or the rail breaking down, until the unforeseeable moment when Wyatt disappears and his oil fields are set ablaze. Meanwhile, the San Sebastián Line is doomed at the point of conception. The lack of recognized property rights in Mexico allows, as Dagny foresaw, for the nationalization both the San Sebastián Mines and the San Sebastián Railroad, two properties that the Mexican government believed to be profitable (72). While Jim is clearly inept at his job, it does not take a master of industry like Dagny to anticipate what was going to happen. Jim's failure is not because he is incapable of understanding what was clearly going to happen, it is because he based his actions only on his emotions and what he believed others wanted him to do, not on reason. Dagny, on the other hand, makes her decisions based on reason, not on her emotions or what others want, allowing her to display the qualities necessary to be a Randian hero.

When James and his friends, through the implementation of the Anti-dog-eat-dog Rule, force the Phoenix-Durango out of Colorado, it requires Wyatt to use Taggart Transcontinental to transport his oil. While Dagny had no role in creating the

rule and morally disagrees with it, she cannot change it, and is determined to make the best of the situation. While she could act as James would prefer, wait for Orren Boyle of Associated Steel to eventually deliver the steel to repair the track, Dagny instead decides to use Rearden Metal. The option of waiting on Boyle would require Dagny to hold friendships, i.e., nepotism, as her highest value. On the other hand, the decision to use Rearden Metal would suggest that Dagny holds quality, efficiency, and profit for her company as higher values, a fact that Rand makes explicit in the text. Thus, in this situation, Dagny's decisions support her classification as a Randian hero.

Examining some of the decisions made by these three Randian heroes in *Atlas Shrugged* provides us with a standard to measure characters in other works. Once the values and motivations of the protagonists in these four trilogies are analyzed, it will confirm that their actions are congruent with Objectivism. Recognition of the fact that by the end of these works the protagonists are fully realized Randian heroines in conjunction with their promotion of Objectivist political philosophy will aid in determining the message being sent to young adult readers as examined in Part IV.

## **Chapter 2 – The Hunger Games Trilogy**

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*The Hunger Games* trilogy provides ample evidence of Katniss's propensity for Objectivism very early on in the trilogy. In the first book we see her thinking, acting, and making decisions in-line with Objectivism when she volunteers for Prim at the reaping, when she forms alliances with both Rue and Peeta, and during the finale at the 74<sup>th</sup> Hunger Games. We see more of this in the later two novels when she tries to save Peeta from the 75<sup>th</sup> Hunger Games and in the aftermath of the war between the Capitol and the Districts. Though she is only a coming-of-age Randian heroine at the start of *The Hunger Games*, by the time the war comes to and end in *Mockingjay*, Katniss is a fully realized Randian heroine. Her actions and decisions, which are directly responsible for bringing an end to the dystopian government, in conjunction with recognizing the Objectivist rationality behind them, will help us understand how this trilogy presents an Objectivist solution to its primary social concern of socioeconomic inequality.

### **The Hunger Games**

#### ***The Reaping***

The reaping presents an early example of Katniss's moral code and the extent to which she displays Objectivist tendencies. In this scene, all the "Twelve- through eighteen-year-olds are herded into roped areas marked off by ages" in the district square (*The Hunger Games* 16). A stage has been erected in front of the Justice Building, banners have been hung, camera crews are present to broadcast the event across Panem, and most of the citizens are in attendance to see who is selected. Before the reaping, Katniss is confident that her sister Prim is safe from selection, given that her name is only in the drawing once. However, despite the odds being in

Prim's favor, when the female tribute is selected it is Prim's name that is called out. Katniss has only moments to react to this news, she moves through the crowd shouting Prim's name, and upon reaching her, Katniss pushes Prim behind her and shouts, "I volunteer! [...] I volunteer as tribute!" (22).

Before dealing with the question of Katniss's morals in this particular situation, we should begin by briefly readdressing the fact that the Capitol has, for Objectivism, no ethical right to hold the reaping in the first place. As addressed in Part II of this work, according to Objectivism a nation that violates the individual rights of its citizens has no national rights. Without national rights, the Capitol has no ethical authority to demand anything of its citizens, let alone a tribute of twenty-four young people that will fight to the death for entertainment. Because this particular situation deals with the lives of children, it is paramount to discuss the rights of children according to Objectivism.

Ayn Rand was virtually silent on the rights of children in her writings; however, Andrew Bissell, writing for The Atlas Society, notes that when asked at the Ford Hall Forum whether or not children had rights, Rand stated that they did not. Bissell goes on to suggest, from an Objectivist standpoint, that children, because they have not fully developed their ability to be rational thinkers, are in a state of non-rational dependence and that "it is difficult or impossible to distinguish the precise moment that a child matures beyond the state of non-rational dependence" (Bissell). It is because of this non-rational dependence that children Objectively do not have the same rights as adults, but "they deserve to have their right to live and not suffer violent attack respected in virtue of their status as biologically independent human beings with the potential to develop into fully rational and socially independent adults." William R. Thomas, also writing for The Atlas Society, holds a similar view

stating, “I think it tricky to speak of children having ‘rights’ in the full sense of the term Objectivists use, but I am nevertheless for rather broad legal protections of children.” Thomas explains:

Objectivism holds that people have rights in virtue of their rational faculty, which enables them to live as independent producers and traders. This creates a harmony of interests between rational people. But children aren't rational in this sense, and can't live as independent producers and traders. So the standard Objectivist argument for rights doesn't apply to them.

He also states that “the rights of children are more delimited and different from the rights of adults.” If we are to take an Objectivist understanding of children’s rights from Bissell and Thomas, then we can conclude that Prim, a child of twelve, has some rights but not the same rights that belong to an adult. Included in her delimited rights is the “right to live and not suffer violent attack” (Bissell). Because being selected for the Hunger Games seriously infringes on Prim’s “right to live and not suffer violent attack,” it can be concluded that according to Objectivism, at least from Bissell’s and Thomas’s perspective, that Prim does have a right to not be selected, as too does every other citizen in Panem; child or adult.

The fact that Prim is only a child does not only affect her rights but also the way Katniss responds to Prim’s selection. Katniss explains that following her father’s death her mother became so emotionally distraught that she was an absentee parent, resulting in Katniss being the sole provider for the family. Even after their mother emerged from her state of depression, Katniss has been unable to trust her mother and has felt responsible for Prim’s safety and well-being. This sense of maternal responsibility is a factor that one could assume subconsciously motivates Katniss into volunteering in place of Prim. Allowing her sense of maternal obligation to factor into the logic of her decision-making does not make Katniss’s decision unethical. Bissell states:

Ethically, Objectivism is opposed to any unchosen or undeserved duties. In this context, however, Objectivists generally acknowledge that parents, in creating (or adopting) a dependent child, choose for themselves the obligation to raise that child to a healthy adulthood with the power to exercise his rational faculty (if he so chooses). This obligation implies that the parents must undertake certain tasks at least to some minimal standard, including feeding and clothing the child and providing him with a basic education.

Thomas agrees with this sense of obligation and notes, “In the Objectivist view, when a couple has a child, they take on the obligation to support and care for the child.”

The moment Katniss decided to essentially adopt Prim; she took on the obligation to take care of her. There does not seem to be a legal minimal standard of parental obligation in Panem, yet it would be reasonable to assume from an Objectivist perspective that it is part of Katniss’s parental obligation to protect Prim’s “right to live and not suffer violent attack” (Bissell). If this parental obligation was the only factor responsible for Katniss’s decision, it would teeter between ethical and unethical; however, Katniss’s decision is more complex than the mere detached logic of Objectivist parental obligation, it also involves Katniss’s personal happiness.

As previously mentioned, Rand’s Objectivism is notorious for stating that an individual living their life for the sake of another is unethical, which might lead many to conclude that Katniss’s decision to “sacrifice” herself for Prim is an immoral act. However, doing so would be a mistake brought about by a failure to understand Objectivism in its entirety. With obvious changes to the setting of events in the above-mentioned section, Rand’s ideas about when it is acceptable to save someone and risk your own life is exactly what we see occurring when Katniss volunteers to take Prim’s place as tribute. Katniss is not sacrificing her life (greater value) for Prim’s (lesser value), she is being selfish by risking her own life (lesser value) in the hope that if she wins the Hunger Games she will be able to continue her life with

Prim in it (greater value). So it is, that Katniss's decision to take Prim's place is morally Objective.

### *Peeta's Defiant Attitude*

In an article for *The Objectivist Standard*, Ari Armstrong uses a scene that takes place the night before the Games as part of an argument as to why "*The Hunger Games* is a worthy addition to the corpus of dystopian works." In this scene, Katniss, unable to sleep, has found a similarly restless Peeta on the roof of the training center, observing the giant party taking place in the Capitol streets to celebrate the coming of the Hunger Games. Earlier in the evening, following Peeta's admission of his love for Katniss, she pushed him in anger, resulting in him crashing into an urn and cutting his hands. On the roof, Katniss apologizes for the fact that his hands have been hurt, which will decrease his chances of survival in the Games. However, Peeta is unfazed by the injury, noting "It doesn't matter, Katniss [...] I've never been a contender in these Games anyway" (141). Following this, Peeta displays what Armstrong calls a "defiant attitude" in responding to the Games.

Katniss attempts to cheer Peeta up by telling him "That's no way to be thinking;" however, Peeta realizes the reality of the situation he is in, which allows him to display a defiant attitude worthy of a near-Randian Hero.

"I don't know how to say it exactly. Only...I want to die as myself. Does that make any sense?" he asks. I shake my head. How could he die as anyone but himself? "I don't want them to change me in there. Turn me into some kind of monster that I'm not."

I bite my lip, feeling inferior. While I've been ruminating on the availability of trees, Peeta has been struggling with how to maintain his identity. His purity of self. "Do you mean you won't kill anyone?" I ask.

"No, when the time comes, I'm sure I'll kill just like everybody else. I can't go down without a fight. Only I keep wishing I could think of a way to...to show the Capitol they don't own me. That I'm more than just a piece in their Games," says Peeta. (141-2)

While Peeta's admission is not a full-fledged Objectivist statement, he is showing signs of what could be considered Objectivist thought. Most importantly, he has recognized that his identity, his personhood, and his being, belong only to himself. While he cannot avoid the Games, he wants to enter them on his own terms. He recognizes the immorality and the reality of the Games, he does not want to be a killer but is fully aware that he will have to kill if he is to survive, which is likely why he decides to later form an alliance with the career tributes, bringing us to our second point.

It is more than likely by this point that Peeta has already decided to focus his efforts on protecting Katniss, or rather trying to ensure that she wins. Like Katniss during the reaping ceremony, this is not a sacrifice. So, to take stock of what we know thus far: we know Peeta is in love with Katniss; we know that he admitted his love for her because he knew it would help her gain sponsorship; we know that she scored higher than him in the assessment; and we know that she is a popular tribute because she volunteered, all of which Peeta also knows. For Peeta, Katniss is a higher value than himself; life is not worth living without her. It is also worth noting that later on, when it is announced that two tributes can win, Peeta is adamant about Katniss not sacrificing her chances of winning for him, and that he wants her to win so she can live her life and return to her family. We can only speculate on when exactly Peeta comes to this conclusion; however, his behavior prior to the start of the Games suggests that it is something he felt even before entering the arena.

In the arena, Peeta decides to join the career tributes, even aiding them in tracking her, which would suggest that he is only looking out for himself. However, this theory goes against everything we have learned about Peeta and his feelings for Katniss. Aside from the narrative need for him to be present when the tracker jackers

attack, in order to help Katniss escape, it would not be inconceivable that his interest in working with the careers was not simply to prolong his life, but to ensure that he might be able to aid her when the careers eventually found her, which they would have done with or without his help. This is Peeta's defiant attitude personified; his refusal to play the Games according to the rules they expect him to play by, "to show the Capitol they don't own" him (142). In this scene, Collins presents us with a character, Peeta, that bears a striking similarity to Rand's Hank Rearden during the courtroom scene in *Atlas Shrugged*. Ultimately, Peeta is able to maintain his ethical integrity by helping Katniss. His actions are, in fact, Objectivist in two ways: first, he recognizes that, to him, Katniss is a higher value, and second, he refuses to live, even in the face of death, according to anyone else's code but his own.

### ***Forming Alliances***

While an Objectivist sense of ethics in Katniss's early decisions to hunt in the Meadow and volunteer for Prim are predicated upon the Capitol's lack of ethicality and on the little information we know about the nature of Katniss and Prim's relationship, as the text continues we learn more about Katniss as an individual, her logic, reasoning, values, and the motivations behind some of her decisions. Katniss spends much of the early part of *The Hunger Games* thinking about the Capitol and her disgust with the fanfare surrounding the Games; however, her preparation for the Games themselves provides a vital insight to her ethical beliefs.

One aspect of her morality surrounds her failure to enter into any legitimate alliance with any of the other tributes prior to the start of the Games. Once in the Capitol and preparing for the Hunger Games, Katniss is presented with the option to form alliances with other tributes, an option that will continue to present itself

throughout the Games. When it comes to forming alliances in *The Hunger Games*, Andrew Zimmerman Jones explains:

By forming an alliance (cooperating), the tributes gain a temporary benefit: an increase in their overall prospects for survival. But this cooperation strategy can't continue indefinitely. The rules dictate that if both survive long enough, at some point a betrayal strategy must be implemented by one of the participants. (245)

In a way, these alliances are like temporary friendships. Rand notes, "The practical implementation of friendship, affection and love consists of incorporating the welfare (the rational welfare) of the person involved into one's own hierarchy of values, then acting accordingly" (*VOS* 53). This act of incorporating the rational welfare of another person into one's own hierarchy of values becomes a difficult task when both individuals involved know that the friendship cannot last.

Perhaps this is why Katniss chooses not to enter into any alliances prior to the start of the Games. The closest thing to an alliance that she comes to forming with another tribute is with Peeta, but even that does not come to fruition when Peeta requests to be coached separately just prior to the interview stage. Upon hearing this news, Katniss thinks to herself:

Betrayal. That's the first thing I feel, which is ludicrous. For there to be betrayal, there would have to have been trust first. Between Peeta and me. And trust has not been part of the agreement. We're tributes. But the boy who risked a beating to give me bread, the one who steadied me in the chariot, who covered for me with the redheaded Avox girl, who insisted Haymitch know my hunting skills . . . was there some part of me that couldn't help trusting him?

On the other hand, I'm relieved that we can stop the pretense of being friends. Obviously, whatever thin connection we'd foolishly formed has been severed. And high time, too. The Games begin in two days, and trust will only be a weakness. (*The Hunger Games* 114)

In this instance, Katniss is being extremely rational considering the given circumstances. She recognizes that no alliance can last indefinitely and that trying to kill someone that you have created an emotional bond with would make the task

infinitely more difficult. Peeta ultimately makes this decision for Katniss; however, she is personally responsible for not seeking any other potential alliances. Because Katniss has come to a rational and logical conclusion in deciding that she does not want to form alliances with any other tributes, her decision cannot be anything but ethical. As far as Katniss is concerned, the prospect of having to kill is bad enough, but the prospect of having to kill someone she has a connection with is much worse. Although she is unlikely to garner any happiness from killing any of the other tributes, if we accept varying degrees of immorality, having to kill one that is her ally would bring her more unhappiness, and would thus be more immoral than killing a random tribute.

Once in the arena, Peeta forms an alliance with the career tributes, an alliance Katniss initially presumes he makes in order to better his chances of survival; however, she later comes to the conclusion that his alliance with the career tributes was done in an attempt to protect her. Katniss, on the other hand, avoids making any alliances until she discovers that Rue has been shadowing her ever since the tracker jacker incident. Katniss proposes that the two form an alliance and Rue agrees.

Katniss and Rue enter into this alliance, despite the fact that they both know it will be temporary, because they gain value from each other. Katniss provides Rue with value in the forms of food, protection, and burn medicine, while Rue provides Katniss with value by showing her the herbs to alleviate her tracker jacker stings, providing her with information about which tributes remain, and where the career tributes are located. Despite not being sustainable and the potential for a disastrous outcome—one having to kill the other—this arrangement can be seen as ethical according to Objectivism.

The ethicality of the alliance formed between Katniss and Rue, from an Objectivist perspective, is dependent upon the means in which the alliance is formed. Because the formation of the alliance is based on exchanging value for value, the ethicality of the alliance is built on a foundation of fair trade. For Objectivism, “The principle of trade is the only rational ethical principle for all human relationships, personal and social, private and public, spiritual and material” (*VOS* 34). The arrangement between Katniss and Rue is clearly one between two traders, which would suggest it has the potential to be ethical, but even though “the principle of trade is the only rational ethical principle for all human relationships,” this does not mean that every trade is ethical. Rand explains how an individual should act as a trader:

A trader is a man who earns what he gets and does not give or take the undeserved. He does not treat men as masters or slaves, but as independent equals. He deals with men by means of a free, voluntary, unforced, uncoerced exchange—an exchange which benefits both parties by their own independent judgment. (34-5)

Katniss and Rue deal with each other by Rand’s stated means and treat each other as independent equals. Both individuals decide to accept the exchange based on a rational understanding of their own needs, what the other has to offer, and what it will cost to acquire it. Furthermore, neither individual sacrifices themselves or value for the sake of the other nor asks the other to do so for them. Because the alliance is formed by the means of free, logical, and rational agreement between two independent equals, the alliance is absolutely ethical from an Objectivist perspective, even if the arrangement is not sustainable.

As Katniss and Rue sit down to eat a bird Katniss has killed Rue admits, “I’ve never had a whole leg to myself before,” to which Katniss thinks to herself “I’ll bet she hasn’t. I’ll bet meat hardly ever comes her way,” and offers her the other leg as well (*The Hunger Games* 202). This exchange, a product of their alliance, reaffirms

the extreme poverty in the districts. Katniss is not shocked to learn of the poverty in Rue's district but it is mildly surprised.

“I'd have thought, in District Eleven, you'd have a bit more to eat than us. You know, since you grow the food,” I say.  
 Rue's eyes widen. “Oh, no, we're not allowed to eat the crops.”  
 “They arrest you or something?” I ask.  
 “They whip you and make everyone else watch,” says Rue.  
 “The mayor's very strict about it.” (202)

This conversation, taken in conjunction with Katniss's description of Rue and her District 11 counterpart, Thresh, as both being black, is clearly intended to evoke images of American slavery in the mind of the reader.<sup>57</sup> While direct slavery in Panem is never depicted in the trilogy, the slavery-like conditions suggest just how corrupt the Capitol and their mayoral minions are. Drawing a correlation between slavery and the way citizens are treated in the districts reinforces the unethical and tyrannical nature of the Capital government. This makes it all the more surprising that Katniss and Rue are willing to trust each other and act in good faith, given they live in a society where even the government cannot be trusted because of how they treat their citizens.

### ***The Finale***

The finale of *The Hunger Games* is rooted in Peeta's confession of love for Katniss during the interview stage before the Games begin. Peeta's decision to confess his love for Katniss at this specific moment is strategic, made in order to earn sponsorship; however, his confession sets off a series of alternating strategic decisions between the tributes and the Capitol. Willing to take advantage of Peeta's confession, the Capitol uses the star-crossed lovers theme to make the Games more interesting for the viewers in the Capitol.

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<sup>57</sup> The physical descriptions of Rue and Thresh can be found, respectively, on pages 98 and 126 of the cited edition.

Shortly after Rue's death, it is announced, "There's been a rule change in the Games" (244). The Game Announcer Claudius Templesmith explains that two tributes can now win so long as they are from the same district. The reason the Capitol makes this change is for entertainment; unlike Katniss, they know exactly how injured Peeta is and that it is bad enough that if she does seek him out to form an alliance that he will be more of a hindrance than an aid. Although cynical about the Capitol's motivation for this rule change—Katniss knows they must be trying to play up the star-crossed lovers theme—her initial reaction is to call out Peeta's name, suggesting that she might just care more about him than she realizes.

Although Katniss is unaware of how bad Peeta's injuries are, forming an alliance where cooperation can be guaranteed is too good for her to pass up. In considering the prospect of an alliance, Katniss initially muses, "Whatever doubts I've had about him dissipate because if either of us took the other's life now we'd be pariahs when we returned to District 12" (247). However, the situation no longer necessitates that one kill the other, at best Katniss would be leaving him to die of his wounds or at the hands of another tribute, yet not even making the effort to form an alliance would still likely result in her being a pariah. While this fear does contribute to her decision to form an alliance with Peeta, it is not the sole motivation for her decision. If this was the only thing she had considered in making her decision it would be unethical according to Objectivism because she would be acting in accordance with what she believes others think she should do, not with what she wants to do. Furthermore, depending on how injured Peeta is, she might find herself living, or more likely dying, for his sake and not her own. However, Katniss also reasons that "it just makes sense to protect each other. And in [her] case—being one of the star-crossed lovers from District 12—it's an absolute requirement if [she]

want[s] any more help from sympathetic sponsors” (247). These thoughts reveal a solid logic behind a decision to find Peeta; as a team they would be able to protect one another and work together to achieve a common goal. Because her decision is made with logic and based on her personal desires the decision is an ethical one. Recognizing that locating Peeta is in her self-interest, she sets off to find him.

When Katniss discovers Peeta near the stream he is camouflaged in mud and leaves, and knocking on death’s door (252). She is now faced with another decision; she can either leave him or stay by his side. Despite the fact that in his present condition he will not be able to aid her in winning the Games, and actually puts her in greater risk of losing/dying, she refuses to leave Peeta. Despite Katniss’s efforts to aid Peeta with her limited medical knowledge and by trying to convince sponsors to send medicine through acts of love, Katniss is forced to rely on direct intervention from the Gamemakers if she is to save his life. Unbeknownst to Katniss, all the other remaining tributes are also in need of something and, with the lack of action in the Games, the Capitol is eager to make the event more interesting. To provoke a confrontation by drawing the tributes together, the Capitol offers a feast, where the items needed by each tribute will be available if they are willing to face the possibility of a run-in with the other tributes. Although Katniss is unaware of what the others are in need of, she knows that if Peeta does not get medicine there is little chance that they will both make it out of the Games because she cannot simultaneously protect him and eliminate the other tributes.

The offer of a feast forces both Katniss and Peeta to face moral dilemmas. Peeta is vocally adamant that Katniss should not attend the feast, while Katniss is silently adamant that she will attend, going as far as to lie to Peeta about her intentions and to drug him in order to prevent him from trying to stop her. Both

characters' decisions stem from the same ethical root of love for the other individual. Peeta does not want Katniss to risk her life as, given the situation, he values her living more than he values his own life. However, this does not necessarily make Peeta's decision unethical from an Objectivist perspective because the only way he can ensure that he lives is by asking Katniss to risk her life to save his. Despite his reasoning being flawed—his motivation is Katniss living, not the fact that it would be unethical to ask her to risk her life—Peeta comes to the right conclusion Objectively speaking.

Katniss, on the other hand, is also capable of acting ethically by deciding to risk her life to get the medicine for Peeta. From Katniss's perspective, winning the Hunger Games by allowing Peeta to die when it is not an absolute necessity is morally unacceptable. Katniss's decision to attend the feast can be seen as ethical when the logic is based on Rand's "The Ethics of Emergencies." Rand states, "An emergency is an unchosen, unexpected event, limited in time, that creates conditions under which human survival is impossible" (*VOS* 54). To explain the difference between an emergency and normal conditions, Rand gives an example of a neighbor that "is ill and penniless," and notes that "Illness and poverty are not metaphysical emergencies, they are part of the normal risks of existence" (55). According to Rand, the plight of the ill and penniless neighbor is not an emergency, but she also notes that there is nothing wrong with helping the neighbor so long as it is done "as an act of good will, not of duty" (55). In regard to the above scene, the Hunger Games in and of itself is a metaphysical emergency for anyone unfortunate enough to find themselves as a participant because it "is an unchosen, unexpected event, limited in time, that creates conditions under which human survival is impossible" (54). Katniss's decision to risk her life to save Peeta's is not ethical simply because it is an

emergency; rather, it is the fact that it is an emergency that creates the exceptional circumstances where risking her life to adhere to her values becomes necessary. She acts ethically because she recognizes that, in her own value system, surviving the Hunger Games with Peeta is more important to her happiness than surviving it without him.

The Capitol's offer of much needed items is successful in attracting tributes from all four remaining districts. While attempting to retrieve the medicine Katniss is attacked by Clove, who taunts Katniss about her alliance with Rue and Rue's death. Suddenly, Thresh arrives, rips Clove off of Katniss and accosts her about her involvement in Rue's death. Unsatisfied with her answers, Thresh bashes her skull in with a rock. Turning to Katniss, Thresh asks what Clove meant about her and Rue being allies. Katniss explains and out of gratitude Thresh spares her life.

Katniss's alliance with Rue has literally saved both her and Peeta's lives. Considering that the object of the Game is to be the last tribute alive, Thresh's decision to allow Katniss to live seems rather irrational; however, his reasoning is sound. For Thresh, it is a moral moment that again allows the reader to sympathize with the tributes despite their murderous actions. When he decides to let Katniss live, he states, "Just this one time, I let you go. For the little girl. You and me, we're even then. No more owed. You understand?" (*The Hunger Games* 288). Despite his desire to win the Games, Thresh decides to make a move that is morally rewarding; he feels a debt is owed so he allows Katniss to live in order to pay that debt. His decision informs us that Katniss and Peeta are not the only tributes that have refused to abandon their humanity just because they have been placed in an impossible situation.

Once all the tributes save for Katniss and Peeta are eliminated, the Capitol makes their worst strategic decision of the Games, one that will be the catalyst for

many more poor decisions and ultimately the fall of the Capitol. Claudius

Templesmith announces to Katniss and Peeta:

Greetings to the final contestants of the Seventy-fourth Hunger Games. The earlier revision has been revoked. Closer examination of the rule book [*sic*] has disclosed that only one winner may be allowed... Good luck and may the odds be ever in your favor. (242)

The Capitol makes this decision using the same logic that it has used throughout the Games; tributes will kill each other simply to be the one who lives. However, they have not taken into account what has happened in this particular Hunger Games.

While the rule change to allow two victors aided in making the Games more exciting for the viewers, the Capitol has not taken into account Katniss's sense of morality or the psychological impact of her growing closer to Peeta.

Having only ever considered them as tributes for their entertainment as opposed to actual people, the Capitol has failed to notice several important facts about Katniss and Peeta. First, Peeta would never kill Katniss. He has had a crush on her for as long as he can remember and their interactions during the Games have only caused him to fall more in love with her. This should not be news to the Capitol; Peeta openly confessed his feelings during his pre-Games interview and the Capitol has been privy to every word Katniss and Peeta have spoken to each other in the arena. Second, Katniss has only killed other tributes unintentionally and when provoked. Although Katniss would likely fight Peeta if he were to attack her, simply out of self-defense, he is highly unlikely to do so because he loves her. The Capitol unwisely assumes that living is enough of an incentive for one of them to kill the other, and this line of thought is based simply on the Capitol's need for a victor, not on logic or recognizing that their tributes are human.

While arguing about who should live, Peeta, determined to hold on to his identity and unwilling to allow the Games and the Capitol to change him (141-2),

explains to Katniss: “We both know they have to have a victor” and goes on to beg her to let him die for her (343-4). Just like in the scene when Peeta refuses to allow Katniss to go to the feast to get the medicine he needs, Peeta is basing his decision on the fact that he values living with Katniss more than he values living without her, that he would rather die than be alone. Katniss, however, comes to understand a greater meaning to Peeta’s words and replies, “Yes, they have to have a victor. Without a victor, the whole thing would blow up in the Gamemakers’ faces. They’d have failed the Capitol,” which gives her an idea (344). She decides to make a very dangerous decision—a bluff—that could spare both their lives or result in both their deaths; she threatens dual suicide via the poisonous berries Peeta collected earlier that resulted in the unintentional death of Foxface. Katniss assumes that having two victors is more preferable to the Capitol than no victors, and her gamble pays off when they are immediately announced as co-victors (345).

## **Catching Fire**

### *Peeta and Haymitch*

To announce the theme of the Third Quarter Quell President Snow makes a nation-wide address. Watching it live from her television, Katniss notes:

Whoever devised the Quarter Quell system had prepared for centuries of Hunger Games. The president removes an envelope clearly marked with a 75 [...] Without hesitation, he reads, “On the seventy-fifth anniversary, as a reminder to the rebels that even the strongest among them cannot overcome the power of the Capitol, the male and female tributes will be reaped from their existing pool of victors.” (*Catching Fire* 172)

Although momentarily baffled at this announcement, Katniss quickly puts two and two together and realizes that no matter what she will be “going back into the arena” (173). Understandably, Katniss has an immediate panic attack and runs out of her house to seek solitude. When she finally relaxes and begins to think about the

situation, she quickly comes to the conclusion that this particular theme for the Quarter Quell seems a little too perfect given the political situation in Panem and the fact that Snow wants her dead. Reflecting on how much easier it will be for her in the arena because she won only last year and is not friends with the other victors, she remembers that someone else will have to join her from District 12, either Peeta or Haymitch.

Thinking on this, Katniss admits, “There’s no situation in which I would ever kill Peeta or Haymitch” (176). We know that Katniss is not opposed to physical violence, so this admission reveals that, at least in a situation when one must kill the other, she holds Peeta and even Haymitch as higher values than herself. She also realizes that “Peeta will ask Haymitch to let him go into the arena with [her] no matter what. For [her] sake. To protect [her].” Katniss realizes that Peeta holds her life as a higher value than his own, for Peeta life without her is not worth living, he will do whatever it takes to ensure that she lives. Hoping to prevent Peeta from also entering the arena, Katniss goes to Haymitch’s house.

When she arrives, Haymitch informs her that Peeta has already stopped by, “He was here before I could snap the seal on a bottle. Begging me for another chance to go in,” proving that Peeta will do anything to protect her (177). Despite being an alcoholic, Haymitch is not stupid. He knows full well why Katniss is at his house and mimics her voice stating, “Take his place, Haymitch, because all things being equal, I’d rather Peeta had a crack at the rest of his life than you.” Ashamed because she realizes that is exactly why she is there, Katniss instead says she has come for a drink.

As they talk, Haymitch explains his thoughts on the situation. On the one hand, “since last time I tried to keep *you* alive...seems like I’m obligated to save the

boy this time.”<sup>58</sup> Haymitch’s use of the word “obligated” suggests that this is not what he wants to do, but what he thinks others expect from him, which does not mean much considering he has never been one to do what others expect him to do. On the other hand, he explains that “Peeta’s argument is that since I chose you, I now owe him. Anything he wants. And what he wants is the chance to go in again to protect you” (178). Still unsure what he will do, Haymitch reminds Katniss that if his name is drawn there is nothing he can do to stop Peeta from volunteering to take his place, which is exactly what happens. Finally, Katniss figures out what she wants to ask of Haymitch, “If it is Peeta and me in the Games, this time we try to keep *him* alive.”<sup>59</sup>

Despite Peeta’s wishes, Katniss argues, “it’s his turn to be saved. We both owe him that.” While Rand and Objectivism would be averse to the exact phrases Katniss is using, particularly “his turn” and “owe him,” both the logic and reason behind them are Objectively sound. In saying it is Peeta’s turn to be saved, she is simply recognizing that they need to work together to try and save Peeta and that she holds him as a higher value. Even Haymitch notes that she “could live a hundred lifetimes and not deserve him” (178). Her choice to use the term “turn” is less of a statement and more of a plea to get Haymitch to do what she wants. In stating that they “both owe him,” Katniss is again trying to guilt Haymitch into helping her achieve her goal, while not very Objectivist in her guilt tripping, the result she is trying to obtain is. Again, Katniss recognizes, be it consciously or not, that Peeta is a higher value to her, likely a subconscious recognition of her feelings for him.

In this scene, we see all three characters acting, in some fashion, in accordance with Objectivism, some more than others. Haymitch is simply being logical about his situation and although he agrees to work according to Katniss’s wishes, his agreement

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<sup>58</sup> Original emphasis.

<sup>59</sup> Original emphasis.

is rather halfhearted. Katniss occupies the middle ground, her actions are Objectivist, which is to say that she is trying to obtain a higher value; however, her way of doing it is not exactly reasoned or ethical in the means in which she tries to obtain it.

Finally, Peeta is the one acting most in-line with Objectivism. Katniss has been a higher value to Peeta since the last Hunger Games, and he is simply proving that by his willingness to enter the arena again.

## **Mockingjay**

In *Mockingjay* the narrative allows for only a few moments of Randian heroism. In this work, Katniss is essentially a prisoner of District 13. While she does command a certain amount of clout in dealing with the district—mostly allowing her to achieve her own desires as she works for Coin and company—she has little choice in helping them in the first place. If Katniss refuses to help District 13 unite the districts against the Capitol, she will presumably still have to do something in the district to earn her keep—seeing as she is not allowed to leave—and this would likely result in her being a soldier. Her inability to refuse being a pawn, in one way or another, in this war, places her in a constant state of coercion, making Objectively ethical decisions virtually impossible.

An interesting comparison can be drawn between Katniss and the Randian hero archetype John Galt. In *Atlas Shrugged*, Galt also finds himself as a prisoner of a government that has less than pure motives. Being the Randian hero that he is, Galt refuses to aid the government in fixing the problems they themselves have created. He is tortured and willing to die if necessary in the name of his values and his conviction. The major difference is that the only thing that the government can use to coerce Galt is his life, whereas Katniss is in a much more difficult situation, one that is far more likely to be experienced by real people. In *Atlas Shrugged*, the government is unaware

of anyone that is important to Galt as he has been mostly off the grid and is able to maintain a high level of privacy. However, Katniss is not so lucky. Her mother and sister are both living in District 13, as too are many of her friends and refugees of District 12. Her situation is not aided by the fact that the Capitol is holding Peeta and the other tributes. Had the government in *Atlas Shrugged* been aware of Galt's relationship with Dagny Taggart, he would have been in a situation more like Katniss's, one that makes it much harder to hold to Objectivism in every situation. Galt's situation is actually more closely related to that faced by Peeta in *Mockingjay* and, as we will explore later, they approach their situations similarly.

Katniss is more or less caught in a game of Prisoner's Dilemma.<sup>60</sup> In refusing to help, Katniss gains nothing; however, if she is willing to help she can gain some of the things she wants. Katniss must make a choice but as a rational decision-maker she is able to be guided by her logic and her values. This allows Katniss to trade a lower value for a higher value when she agrees to be the Mockingjay in exchange for pardons for Peeta and the other tributes. Despite the nature of the deal being ethically compromised because Coin and her government have forced Katniss to participate in one form or another, Katniss is able to act ethically in the negotiations according to Objectivism, i.e., she is not sacrificing.

As previously suggested, Peeta's situation in *Mockingjay* is more similar to that of Galt's in *Atlas Shrugged*. Like Galt, Peeta is being held by a corrupt and

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<sup>60</sup> A Prisoner's Dilemma is a model used in game theory to explain the benefit of cooperation between two rational individuals. Although there are various versions of the game, any model should depict a situation where cooperation between two individuals is more preferable than both individuals refusing to cooperate. In this particular case, Katniss does not want to work with Coin, however, she gains more from cooperation than noncooperation, as is the expected outcome in game theory. For more on game theory and its history, see Erickson. For more about game theory and literature, see Brams, specifically pp. 1-28 (full citations for both provided in the bibliography).

vicious government that is not above sacrificing someone to achieve their goals.

Peeta, like Galt, is being tortured by his captors and they hold no leverage over him save for his life. While the moments of Peeta's torture are never directly depicted in the text, its existence is not in doubt, with the text confirming that he and other tributes were receiving various forms of torture during their imprisonment.

Plutarch and Beetee explain that Peeta was abused, which could mean any number of types of physical torture, but they also explain that he was subject to a form of psychological torture known as hijacking (*Mockingjay* 180). Hijacking is essentially the Capitol equivalent to the Central Intelligence Agency's Project MKUltra, where drugs were used—particularly the psychedelic drug lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD)—in an attempt to control the minds of captives and force them to give up information, among other things.<sup>61</sup> As the character Beetee explains, tracker jacker venom is used to alter the mind and “The Capitol's very secret[ive] about this form of torture, and I believe the results are inconsistent” (180). He goes on to say that “Recall is made more difficult because memories can be changed [...] Brought to the forefront of your mind, altered, and saved again in revised form,” similar to some of the goals of Project MKUltra.

Despite this vicious and perverse method of torture, Peeta, like Galt, is able to hold to his ethical standards during this time. While Galt simply continues to refuse to aid the US government, Peeta actually fights against the reprogramming of his mind and is able to warn District 13 of an impending attack by the Capitol. For both Peeta and Galt, their situations do not allow for them to trade, work with, or come to a mutually beneficial agreement with their captors, as is the case in Katniss's situation. The part of Objectivism that both Peeta and Galt are able to adhere to is sticking to

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<sup>61</sup> For more on Project MKUltra, see “Project MKUltra, The CIA's Program of Research in Behavioral Modification [...]” (full citation provided in bibliography).

one's convictions, philosophy, and code of morality. After Peeta is rescued and receiving therapy for his psychological torture, he is still capable of holding to his moral code and his values. This is highly evident in two places in the text: first, when he acknowledges the risk he places the rest of the team in when the Star Squad is in the Capitol; and second, when he presents his position about the prospect of holding a final Hunger Games.

After the deaths of several members of the squad, one of which Peeta is in partly responsible for—the death of Mitchell during a moment of insanity triggered by his hijacking—the squad is unsure what to do next and Peeta states, “Our next move...is to kill me” (289). While this might seem melodramatic or irrational on Peeta's part because he did not have full control of his actions, it is in fact rational because Peeta recognizes that he cannot control himself, that “It's only a matter of time before [he] kill[s] someone else” (290). Moreover, Peeta recognizes the higher value he has held since *The Hunger Games*, that life with Katniss is more important than life without her and she could be his next victim. Although the squad decides against killing Peeta, his reasoning for suggesting his own execution is sound. Again, he shows his rational judgment when he agrees that he should not be involved in the final assault on President Snow's mansion but will instead attempt to make a diversion so that the mission will be successful.

Finally, there are his actions when Coin suggests a final Hunger Games. Coin states, “Today we execute Snow. In the previous weeks, hundreds of his accomplices in the oppression of Panem have been tried and now await their own deaths. However, the suffering in the districts has been so extreme that these measures appear insufficient to the victims” (368). She goes on to explain, “What has been proposed is that in lieu of eliminating the entire Capitol population, we have a final, symbolic

Hunger Games, using the children directly related to those who held the most power” (369). It is up to the living seven victors to make this decision. Unsurprisingly, Johanna and Enobaria fully support this idea. Katniss also votes to have a final Hunger Games, her decision motivated by the loss of her sister in the final battle. Haymitch also agrees but this seems more out of sympathy for Katniss’s loss than anything else. However, Peeta, Beetee, and Annie all vote against.

While the others are seeking vengeance, Annie seems to just want the killing to stop. Beetee is only concerned with image, arguing that “It would set a bad precedent. We have to stop viewing one another as enemies. At this point, unity is essential for our survival” (370). Peeta is the only one showing his Objectivist side, he reminds them, “This is why we rebelled!” For Peeta, it is not simply a case of repeating a past mistake that brought them to this point or a recognition that the thirst for vengeance they seek is unquenchable, but the immorality of the idea. The fact that Peeta “bursts out” his response immediately after Coin invites them to cast their votes, his reiteration, “I vote no, of course! We can’t have another Hunger Games!” and the fact that everything he says during his vote is punctuated with an exclamation point suggests both a moral and emotional response (369). The fact that his vote is partly guided by emotion does not prevent it from being Objective. In Objectivism, the two are not mutually exclusive, Rand explains:

Man has no choice about his capacity to feel that something is good for him or evil, but what he will consider good or evil, what will give him joy or pain, what he will love or hate, desire or fear, depends on his standard of value. If he chooses irrational values, he switches his emotional mechanism from the role of his guardian to the role of his destroyer. (*VOS* 31)

Summarizing Rand’s argument, of which only part is cited above, our capacity to feel is an automatic response but why we feel the way we do is based on our values.

Therefore, Peeta’s response, while partially emotional, reveals his moral judgment

about the possibility of a final Hunger Games. If his prior value judgments are anything to base this assessment on, then we can conclude that Peeta does not want another Hunger Games because he values human life, does not want to cause harm to others, and does not want to sacrifice individuals for the sake of others need for vengeance, all of which makes him a Randian hero.

### ***Katniss's Final Thoughts***

After killing Coin, Katniss is imprisoned in the training center. Although Katniss believes that she was morally justified for taking Coin's life given the fact that she was well on her way to becoming no better than Snow, she believes that she will be executed for her crime. As she waits for her punishment, Katniss contemplates suicide and how she could achieve it while locked in a room under constant surveillance with no means to do so. As addressed in Part II, Chapter 4 of this work, Objectivism does allow for an individual to commit suicide, so Katniss's desire to kill herself, while highly "inadvisable," is not inherently immoral Objectively. Furthermore, her desire to take her own life is rational because she believes that whoever takes over as the leader of Panem will find "A new way to remake, train, and use" her for political purposes, something Katniss refuses to allow to happen because she will not be a tool of men (*Mockingjay* 377).

Though Katniss is ultimately pardoned for killing Coin and does not have to kill herself, her time locked in the room allows her contemplate the nature of her society and humanity in general. Katniss informs the reader:

I think Peeta was onto something about us destroying one another and letting some decent species take over. Because something is significantly wrong with a creature that sacrifices its children's lives to settle its differences. You can spin it any way you like. Snow thought the Hunger Games were an efficient means of control. Coin thought the parachutes would expedite the war. But in the end, who does it

benefit? No one. The truth is, it benefits no one to live in a world where these things happen.

It is at this moment that Katniss completes her journey as a coming-of-age Randian heroine, becoming a full-fledged Randian heroine. Katniss has come to learn that even when morally justified violence in self-defense has its limits and that even when morally justified in going to war a government can act immorally. Most importantly, Katniss realizes that people need a moral code, an ethical system, otherwise they will just act like savages and should let “some decent species take over.”

## Chapter 3 – The Testing Trilogy

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Of the four situations faced by the coming-of-age Randian heroines discussed in this thesis, Cia's is by far the most isolated. Unlike the other three trilogies where the majority of citizens are negatively effected by the actions of their governments, the only people we see directly suffering at the hands of the dystopian government in *The Testing* trilogy are those from the colonies that are selected for The Testing and those from Tosu City that are tested for entrance to the University. Although the number of individuals visually suffering at the hands of the government is significantly fewer than the other trilogies, this does not make Cia's actions or decisions any more or less moral than those made by the other coming-of-age Randian heroines. Cia displays her capacity to make Objective decisions from the moment she informs Tomas that The Testing has already begun while on their way to Tosu City. This continues once she arrives in Tosu City, and after being admitted to the University. As the narrative progresses, Cia's capacity to think, act, and make decisions that are in-line with Objectivism increases until she is a fully realized Randian heroine. After recognizing the Objective rationality that motivates her decisions and actions, coupled with the dystopian nature of The Testing, which is the element of her government that she wishes to bring an end to, we can subsequently see how this trilogy provides young adult readers with an Objectivist solution to its primary social issue: access to education.

### **The Testing**

#### ***Sharing Secrets***

While on their way to Tosu City, Cia and the other Five Lake candidates are notified that the Testing officials have set up a cabin outside one of the other colonies

so they can stop and have lunch during their long travel to Tosu City. As they finish their meal, Cia asks her escort, Michal, if she can go outside, giving the excuse that she wants to walk before sitting for a prolonged period of time. Cia informs the reader that the real reason she wanted to exit the cabin is freedom. Having spotted cameras in the transport vehicle and several inside the cabin, Cia knows they are all being watched and that The Testing has likely already begun. She notes that outside the cabin there are “No cameras. No judging. No worrying about saying or doing the wrong thing that might result in my failure” (56). When Tomas joins her outside, she is faced with a decision: she can either confide in him her knowledge of the cameras or she can remain silent.

In this situation, Cia must ascertain which option will result in the maximum reward. Before discovering the camera in the skimmer and stopping for lunch, Cia stated, “I want to tell [Tomas] what my father suspected—share the burden. Know that another pair of eyes will be on the watch for signs of danger,” (51) but she resisted because of her father’s warning: “trust no one” (46). Tomas recognizes that something is wrong with Cia and shows what seems to be legitimate concern about what is bothering her, assuring her that she can trust him, but Cia is not so sure she can. She thinks about their friendship over the years, “We’ve worked on school projects together, played games, and even danced in each other’s arms for one memorable hour at last year’s graduation party” (57). She also considers the fact that “Technically Tomas is [her] competition, which should make [her] shut him out” (57). Ultimately, she decides to trust him, noting: “If it is a mistake, it is my mistake. The consequences will be mine to live with,” and informs him that “There’s a camera hidden in the Skimmer” and “two more in the cabin” (58). When Tomas asks why

they are being watched already, Cia states that it is “Because [...] The Testing has already begun.”

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly why Cia decides to trust Thomas, the arguments on both sides are quite convincing. On the one hand, she has known him her entire life, it seems that he has never done anything to not deserve her trust, and she admittedly has romantic feelings about him. If he can be trusted, the knowledge “that another pair of eyes will be on the watch for signs of danger,” could be quite useful if her father’s suspicions are correct (51). On the other hand, as Cia has mentioned, he is her competition during The Testing. If Cia were to keep her knowledge to herself she would have a distinct advantage over Tomas assuming he is unaware of the cameras and does not discover them himself later. However, if she shares her knowledge with Tomas they might both benefit more by working together. It is also possible that she will tell Tomas simply because of her romantic feelings toward him. Nonetheless, the biggest question she faces is: is she willing to give up her advantage over Tomas to relieve herself of the burden and/or for a potentially greater advantage over the rest of the candidates? Based on her decision to tell Tomas, it is clear that either the increased potential advantage or the need to share the burden wins out, ultimately providing the greater reward. Even if her motivation had been only to relieve the burden, or out of her feelings for Tomas, the decision turns out to be a good one because their alliance proves mutually beneficial during The Testing.

After disclosing that they are being watched, Cia decides to inform Tomas about everything her father told her. Tomas takes her confession well, telling Cia, “It’s a good thing we’re in the same group. We’ll be able to look out for each other.” Surprised, Cia asks him if he thinks all of her father’s stories are true, to which he

replies: “I think it’s a good idea to be prepared for whatever might be coming. If they aren’t real, then we won’t be any worse off for keeping alert. If they are ...” Cia sees the logic in his statement; the worst-case scenario is that they are prepared for something that they will not face. The two agree to a partnership and, so long as both remain faithful to their exclusive partnership, they stand only to gain an advantage over their competition by working together. Unlike the alliances formed in *The Hunger Games*, the rules of The Testing do not “dictate that if both survive long enough, at some point a betrayal strategy must be implemented by one of the participants” because both Cia and Tomas know that more than one candidate can pass The Testing (Zimmerman Jones 245). Without the concern that only one of them can be successful in passing The Testing, the benefits of cooperation outweigh the benefits of betrayal, unless a better offer is presented or the conditions of The Testing change.

Cia’s decision to trust Tomas and form an alliance with him is Objectively ethical because she is exchanging a value for an equal or greater value. While Tomas gains the knowledge that they are being watched and that The Testing has likely already begun, they both gain from the formation of a partnership, and Cia personally gains by sharing the burden of her knowledge. While Tomas is arguably getting the better end of the deal, Cia is relieved of the stress of being the only one knowing that they are being watched, freeing her mind to focus on other areas of The Testing because she knows someone else is also on the lookout.

### ***Group Work***

The third stage of The Testing, the group test, provides Cia with another chance to show her Objective sense of morality. For the group test, all the candidates are placed into teams of five, save for Cia’s group that has only have four teammates.

Cia and her teammates, “Brick Barron, Roman Fry, and Annalise Walker” are escorted to a room where a Testing official explains:

Today’s test will evaluate your ability to work as a team. On the table in front of you are booklets filled with five sample questions. Each sample problem requires specific skills to solve. As a group, you must decide which team member has the skills best suited to solve which sample problem. [...] Once you have determined who the best person to solve each problem is, the person you have selected for the first problem will go through this door. [...] Everyone in the group will be given credit for all the correct solutions on the exam that are not only your own.<sup>62</sup> [...] Because there are only four of you in the group, one candidate will be responsible for solving at least two of the problems. [...] Any attempt to resolve an already completed problem will result in a penalty for the student making the second attempt to solve that problem. (120-1)

The rules seem fairly straight forward: figure out who will solve each problem, one person needs to complete two problems, only one person can go at a time, and resolving a problem will be penalized. However, the rules are vague enough to provide room for interpretation if one chooses to focus on the exact wording and not the assumed intent of the words.

With only his first answer being correct, Roman suggests that he go first because he assumes that the instructions meant that the problems had to be answered in order. Cia disagrees and informs them that “The Testing official didn’t say the problems have to be completed in order. We just have to determine the order the members of our group go in to solve the problems” (122-3). Although Cia is technically correct, in a literal reading of the rules, Annalise and Brick are not willing to risk it, and agree that Roman should go first.

Roman goes and completes his problem, and then it is Annalise’s turn. While Cia and Brick wait, Cia begins to think back on The Testing so far. She thinks about

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<sup>62</sup> Although quoted correctly, this sentence should read: “Everyone in the group will be given credit for all the correct solutions *that are on the exam, not only your own.*” (My emphasis to point out the improperly worded section)

the fact that Malachi, her colony mate that died in the second phase, was tripped by her now teammate Roman on the first night at the Testing Center:

Did Roman stick out his leg for spite? For fun? Did he think it would intimidate Malachi into doing less well on the exams, thereby giving Roman a better chance of Passing? Maybe. Roman only got one answer correct today. How smart can he be? The work he did on the final problem was so illogical I found it hard to believe he had made it through the first two tests. (125)

Suddenly, Cia realizes that Roman's ability to get this far combined with his poor performance on the sample problems does not make sense. She takes his booklet and begins scrutinizing his work and quickly realizes that he is clearly very intelligent, "Which is why his answers to the other questions make no sense. Gibberish fills those pages." Cia concludes that Roman "wasn't concerned with coming up with the right solutions. He was just wasting time" (126). Cia considers the very real possibility that Roman only got the first question correct in order to both go first and so that he could answer all five questions, forcing his teammates to receive a penalty for trying to complete their assigned problem. The possibility that "Roman evaluated [the] group perfectly and has set the rest of [them] up to walk into a trap," presents Cia with two difficult decisions: should she tell Brick and should she answer her question?

In order to act according to Objectivism, Cia is obligated to inform Brick about Roman's possible deception. While Cia would gain value by Brick answering his question if, in fact, Roman has not answered it already, not informing him of her skepticism might result in his death. Acting in accordance with her sense of morality, Cia decides to explain her theory to Brick but he does not want to hear it, stating, "We said we would answer the agreed-upon questions" (127). Before she leaves to make her decision about whether or not to answer her question, Cia makes a last attempt to persuade Brick by telling him to "look at Roman's booklet and think about who has the most to gain by betraying the others" (128).

In making her decision about whether or not to answer her question, Cia is essentially forced to make a risk/reward analysis. She must decide if the reward, credit for a correct answer for her team, is worth the risk, receiving a penalty if it has already been completed. She has ample evidence that suggests that Roman might be up to something, but must decide if it is enough to risk not answering the question, which if not completed could result in her and her teammates being eliminated. Ultimately Cia decides to not answer her assigned problem, risking an unsolved question and possible elimination against receiving a penalty. The text suggests that the primary motivation factor in her decision-making is her fear of a penalty. Before she leaves Brick, he asks her, “Why do you care what I do?” and she replies, “Because I don’t want anyone else to die;” evidence of her acting morally according to Objectivism because she would rather fail than let another person die for the sake of an answer (128). For Cia, possible elimination is more preferable than a possible penalty because she has seen what kind of penalties can be levied on the candidates, specifically Malachi catching a nail in the eye during the second stage (111). As far as Cia is aware, elimination only results in being sent home, so going home alive is much more preferable than going home in a body bag. It is vital to recall that Cia would never have considered not solving her problem had she not looked at Roman’s booklet. The primary motivation factor—fear of penalty—is informed by an inherent mistrust in Roman and an awareness of how far some candidates are willing to go to succeed.

### *Practical Exams*

Cia makes many decisions during the practical examination, from the moment it is announced until the moment she crosses the finish line, almost all of which could

be described as Objectivist. For the practical examination, Dr. Barnes informs the candidates:

You will travel to a nonrevitalized part of the country and be placed in a designated starting location. When the test begins, you must then find your way from that location back to Tosu City. Those who return will be given a passing grade and will qualify for the final evaluation. [...] You may choose to team up with other candidates. You may choose to impair the progress of your fellow candidates in order to ensure that you obtain a passing grade before them. What choices you make during the test will be considered in your final evaluations. (134-5)

Thomas tells Cia that “The starting point is Chicago,” (136) and it is later revealed that Tosu City is near what was once Wichita, Kansas, making the journey approximately 700 miles (177). Candidates are dismissed one at a time, giving Cia and Tomas a moment to speak about strategy:

Tomas is one step ahead of me. Talking quietly in my ear, he tells me to find the tallest building still standing. Go there. He’ll meet me. If we don’t find each other in the first twenty-four hours, I’m to travel due west until I reach the fencing that is the northern boundary of the test. (136)

Tomas supplies the plan, but both he and Cia have the same strategy in mind, continue their partnership. It would be difficult to conclude which decision Cia makes in the practical examination is the best or most important, but deciding to continue her morally Objective partnership with Tomas is certainly significant to her survival and success.

While Cia is skeptical about the Testing officials and their intentions, Tomas is primarily skeptical about all other candidates, a skepticism Cia does not always share because of her trusting nature. This is not to say that Cia trusts all other candidates, she does remember her experience with Roman during the group test and the crossbow shooter at the start of the practical examination, but she is more likely to trust someone until they give her a reason not to instead of initially assuming they are

untrustworthy. When Tomas tells her that she is the only one he told about meeting up, she asks, “What happens if we run into Zandri or the others along the way?” and thinks to herself, “Will we leave them to fend for themselves? Do we allow them to join us? Can we just walk away from people we call our friends?” (161). Tomas provides no definitive answer but it is clear that he would rather not come in contact with any other candidates if he can help it. Rightly so, Tomas understands that trust is a difficult thing to come by when the head of The Testing has openly informed the candidates that they can “impair the progress of [their] fellow candidates” (134). It is likely that all candidates are, to some extent, armed with deadly weapons, and impairment could result in death. However, trusting that The Testing officials want to see everyone succeed can be equally deadly.

When Cia and Tomas discover a patch of greenery, they are both initially excited because if there is green there must be a water source. Yet, the closer they get the more concerned Cia becomes that this might be a trap placed by The Testing officials. Despite Cia’s protests, Tomas believes The Testing officials must have placed the oasis there for their benefit, but when he approaches the oasis it explodes. Luckily Tomas survives the explosion but learning not to trust The Testing officials has come at a cost, he now has a tree branch embedded in his buttocks. Cia is able to remove it but it will cost them time and speed, which may result in their failing this final test.

Cia is not Objectively obligated to aid Tomas just because they are in a partnership, the final phase of The Testing is dangerous and helping him could be detrimental to both her chances of finishing and living. However, her motivations for helping him are Objectively sound. Not only is Tomas important to Cia in a romantic way, but he has knowledge, skills, and other attributes that could be highly beneficial

to her success in the final phase. Despite the time she will lose tending to Tomas's wound and because they will have to move slower, she recognizes that the benefits he provides—emotionally and in regard to the final phase—are of a higher value than the time that will be lost, thus making her decision Objectively moral.

Despite Tomas's injury, they reach the final miles of the practical exam where they are attacked several times. During one of the attacks they are saved by Will, whom they partnered with briefly in the middle of the journey. During another attack from a female candidate, Cia's bicycle is damaged and Tomas volunteers to walk the rest of the way with her. Tomas tells Will, "I guess this is where we part company again. Cia and I wouldn't want to hold you back," to which Will replies, "Funny, but I was going to say the same thing" and raises his gun and fires (279). Cia attempts to push Tomas out of the way but her effort is too little too late and he is struck in the abdomen. Cia and Will have a standoff which ends with Cia putting several bullets in Will; however, he is able to get on his skimmer and escape. Left with a severely injured Tomas and only one working bicycle, Cia is forced to make a decision: risk spending time finding a way to get Tomas back or leave him and finish the test.

Cia is quick to come to a decision that is both in-line with her values and Objective: she will help Tomas. Her decision is motivated by two primary factors: guilt and love, even if love is not expressly stated in her thought process. They attempt to walk the rest of the way but it is quickly clear that Tomas will not be able to walk the distance. Cia's guilt is revealed when Tomas attempts to convince her to finish for the both of them and she says, "I can't. This is my fault. I told you to trust Will. I have to make this right" (282). Her love is suggested when she kisses him immediately after admitting her guilt. Although motivated by guilt and love, Cia's decision is an act of selfishness in the Objective sense of the word. Despite the fact

that all memories of her Testing will be erased, she could not live with herself if she were to leave Tomas behind. Because of her Objective selfishness, Cia decides to save Tomas and helps him get to the finish.

## **Independent Study**

### *Induction*

Cia makes a series of Objective decisions in quick succession during her Induction to Government Studies. Part of the Induction process involves the students working in groups to complete tasks and collect four markers, one from each task, as proof of completion. Just as in The Testing, the performance of the teams will be monitored and analyzed, and the team that is last to finish will be penalized. A further stipulation is presented as any member of a team that, for whatever reason, finishes after the rest of their team will be forced out of the University. Cia's team, of which she is the leader, is comprised of Will and two Tosu City students, Enzo and Damone. As the team is about to leave the old zoo, the location of the first task, one of the other teams trigger an explosion after providing the wrong answer for the task.

Following the explosion, Cia immediately runs to aid her fellow students despite the fact they are on a different team. One of the members of the other team is a Tosu City student named Raffé who has sustained a burn from the blast on his arm. Cia cuts away the burnt fabric, cleans the wound, and applies anti-infection ointment provided by her teammate Enzo. When she is done, Raffé thanks her and says, "You didn't have to come back and help," to which she responds, "Yes [...] Yes I did" (*Independent Study* 111). Objectively speaking, there is no moral requirement for Cia to aid Raffé, and in doing so it does cost her time in the competition. Cia has two decisions to choose from: either aid Raffé and lose time, or leave him be and gain time on his group. By choosing to aid Raffé, we can see that Cia is motivated by a

desire to help someone in need, suggesting that she values helping someone that is injured over gaining an advantage over them. However, this is not altruistic in an Objectivist sense as Rand defines it, it is a recognition of her value system given what is at stake. Cia informs the reader that “To do any less would be against everything my parents taught me. Would dishonor the colony I grew up in,” which shows that she has a firm grasp on the reality of the situation. While aiding Raffé does cost her time, the time it takes is not significant enough to realistically put her team’s chances of finishing in jeopardy. Furthermore, this act does build a bridge between Cia and Raffé, eventually leading to a friendship between them, something that will be incredibly important later in the text.

As Cia and her team are leaving the zoo to make their way to the old air force base, Will suggests sabotaging the vehicles meant for the two teams that have yet to finish at the zoo. While Damone immediately agrees, Cia is adamant about not intentionally hindering other teams, stating, “No. We don’t need to sabotage other teams to succeed [...] Anyone who has to cheat to win doesn’t deserve to be here. And they don’t belong on my team either” (*Independent Study* 112-13). From this we can clearly see the motivation behind Cia’s decision, it is based on her values, i.e., she would rather win because she is the best than because she has hindered her competition. This decision is fully in accordance with Objectivism because to sabotage the other team would be to sacrifice others for her own success. While half of her team does not agree with her moral decision, she does not bow to the pressure, giving them the ultimatum to either continue with her or, if they want to sabotage the vehicles, they can remain at the zoo, showing that she will not bend her sense of morality under the pressure of others.

### *Helping the Rebels and Accepting Raffe's Help*

Once classes have begun and the Government Studies students have received their internships, Cia begins poking around in search of the rebels and the truth behind The Testing. One night, when she is supposed to meet up with Tomas to see what is taking place at the old air force base, Cia is confronted by Damone. The two exchange insults and Damone attempts to apprehend Cia. When a struggle breaks out, Damone begins to strangle Cia and is very close to killing her until someone Cia cannot see plunges a knife into Damone. Cia is surprised to discover that the person that saved her is not Tomas, but her fellow Government Studies student, Raffe. When Raffe attempts to finish off Damone by pushing him into the ravine, Cia protests and Raffe leaves the decision to her.

In assessing her options, Cia immediately recognizes that the options are “Save Damone or [herself]. Kill or be killed,” because if she is discovered her possessions will be searched and her intentions will be revealed, likely resulting in redirection or death, which, as Cia knows, is essentially the same thing. She acknowledges that “All my life I’ve been taught to respect each and every life. To do whatever is necessary to preserve it.” However, she also admits to telling herself that “Damone has lost too much blood to be helped. That no matter the choice I make, he will die. Both are true. But I know in my heart the real reason behind my choice. Choosing to attempt to save Damone’s life means ending my own” (273).

It is easy to see that this is a difficult decision for Cia, and that it presents several moral conflicts. Before examining this situation from an Objectivist perspective, we must remember that we are not operating in a world that follows Objective or objective law; if Cia seeks aid for Damone, she and Raffe will not be considered innocent until proven guilty, they will not receive a fair trial, and their

punishment is not likely to reflect the “crime” of murder in self-defense. As much as Cia wants to get aid for Damone—as just stated—this is not a society that will be forgiving, regardless of the circumstances, forcing her to decide between killing or being killed. As Cia points out, Damone is going to die regardless of the decision she makes, leaving only two motivations for her decision: a desire to help someone, or a desire to remain among the living. Given the reality of the situation Cia’s decision to allow Raffé to push Damone into the ravine is the only morally Objectivist option. This then reveals that her motivation is to remain alive, and that she values her own life over a sense of duty to help those in need—especially given that no amount of aid will help Damone.

While this situation is a far cry from the ideal example on how to make a morally Objectivist decision, it does show how complicated and difficult it is to act in accordance with Objectivism when living under an unethical government. Cia, like any sane person, would rather not have to make this decision and/or be placed in such a situation. However, Cia must face the reality of the world she lives in and act accordingly. If she is to use her life as her standard of value, this must be done with a recognition of the world she inhabits. It will come as no surprise to anyone that reality is not always kind, but in order for one to act Objectively they must recognize it, especially if they are living in a dystopian world where the government—or as Cia believes at this point in the text, the University—is free to violate the rights of its citizens/students. The reality of Cia’s society, just like the reality of any existing society, does not change the pillars of Objectivist ethics. Instead, it simply provides a different set of circumstances that the individual must navigate.

## **Graduation Day**

### ***To Kill or Not to Kill***

As addressed in the section on *Graduation Day* in Part II, Chapter 3, the reality of the situation surrounding The Testing, the government, President Collindar, and Dr. Barnes, becomes clear only in the final pages of *Graduation Day*. In her final meeting with Dr. Barnes, Cia is forced to reconsider everything she believes to be true about The Testing, Dr. Barnes, and President Collindar. If Dr. Barnes is to be believed,

Over the years, The Testing has proven to be an effective tool, which is why President Collindar is now insisting that all applicants for the University, including the ones from Tosu City, be required to take part in it. (*Graduation Day* 263)

This is the opposite of what Cia believes to be true based on the information she has gathered, specifically the information that has come from Collindar. However, when she thinks back, she notes, “Never once did [Collindar] actually say she intended to eliminate The Testing itself” (264). After Dr. Barnes finishes his explanation he requests that Cia kill him, as his death by Cia’s hand is required according to the deal he has made with Collindar.

Cia begins to consider all of the alleged facts she has in order to make a decision. Unfortunately, the situation does not provide her with enough time to come to a full conclusion, as Symon Dean enters the room and holds Cia at gunpoint. As events unfold—Dr. Barnes shooting Symon and Symon shooting Dr. Barnes—Cia flees. While this might seem like Cia willfully deciding not to kill Dr. Barnes, I would argue that is not the case. Foremost, Cia’s fleeing is not an act of avoiding a decision or deciding not to kill him, it is an act of self-preservation. Recognizing how important her decision is, and how these new facts complicate the issue, Cia wants to make an informed rational decision, not an impulsive decision. Although she is on the

brink of making a decision and shooting Dr. Barnes, Symon's appearance, and the shootout that takes place, prevents her from having a chance to follow through.

We can see Cia's actions are in-line with Objectivism because she has made rational decisions. First, her choice to kill Dr. Barnes, though interrupted, is rational. Dr. Barnes has already placed the value of ending The Testing above his own life, and because Cia wants to preserve the lives of future candidates and University students, the only rational thing to do is to kill him. Second, her choice to flee shows that she values her own life above trying to kill Dr. Barnes. Despite fleeing, Cia has not left the battlefield so to speak, she has simply moved to a safe place to plan her next move. Alas, this is not necessary, for as in the chaos Will kills Dr. Barnes, and when President Collindar arrives he gives Cia the credit.

It is in the aftermath of all of these events that Cia becomes a full Randian heroine. Immediately, she pressures Collindar to announce an end to The Testing and to investigate the genetic testing in Decatur Colony. After things have calmed down, she visits her home and despite having the option to stay, which on a purely emotional level she admits to wanting, she instead decides to return to the University, "Because the only way to be sure The Testing we had to survive never happens again is not to trust our leaders. It is to be one of them" (291). Cia's decision is both rational and selfish in an Objective sense, she does not want to become a leader to sacrifice herself to her country, she wants to be a leader to make her country a better and moral place, one that she can accept. Finally, her ability to recognize what she wants, her values, her motivations, and to act rationally and morally in doing so are what allow Cia to become a Randian heroine.

## Chapter 4 – The Matched Trilogy

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When the *Matched* trilogy begins, Cassia is perfectly content in the seemingly utopian Society; it is only when she sees Ky's picture on her match's microcard instead of Xander's, that she begins to question the perfection of the Society. Though she begins to think, act, and make decisions that are in-line with Objectivism over the course of *Matched*, the events that take place serve to awaken her Objective nature and start her down the road to becoming a Randian heroine. Cassia is truly a coming-of-age Randian heroine in *Crossed*, as she goes in search of Ky and the Rising. Finally, she becomes a fully realized Randian heroine in *Reached*, when she embraces the ideal of self-determination and the belief that it should be extended to all individuals. Though Cassia is not single-handedly responsible for bringing an end to the Society, recognizing her capacity for thinking, acting, and making decisions that are in-line with Objectivism, combined with her reasons for wanting to bring an end to the Society, helps inform us how this trilogy presents an Objectivist solution to its primary social concern of creative censorship.

### Matched

There are two events in *Matched* where Cassia shows evidence of acting Objectively moral. While there are many minor moments when Cassia displays Objective thinking in regard to moral issues, her decisions to hold preference for Ky over Xander, and to keep the poems given to her by her grandfather—a figurative keeping, given that she commits them to memory and destroys the physical copy—provide the most substance for analysis because of the significant amount of narrative time she spends making these decisions. Cassia's decision to hold a preference for Ky is something that spans nearly the entire novel, and even in the following two novels

she does, on occasion, entertain the thought of being with Xander. Cassia's decision to keep the poems—a clear violation of the Society's laws—occurs chronologically in the middle of her decision about Ky, and is, in part, both motivated by her feelings for him and encouraged by him. Subsequently, I will begin by addressing Cassia's decision to keep the poems because the details discussed within will inform a later analysis of her decision to pick Ky given his influence on her decision.

### *Keeping the Poems*

The poems, “Do not go gentle into that good night” by Dylan Thomas and “Crossing the Bar” by Alfred, Lord Tennyson, were technically given to Cassia on her seventeenth birthday, which also just so happens to be the day she was Matched, by her grandfather. However, Cassia was unaware of the existence of the poems because they had been hidden within her birthday present, a golden compact. It is on the day of her grandfather's Final Banquet, i.e., euthanization, that Cassia is made aware of the poems when her grandfather asks to see the compact and opens a hidden compartment where the poems had been stashed. Initially, Cassia is unaware of what is on the paper but she does acknowledge that it is “*dangerous*” given that it is clearly a piece of old paper with words hand written on it (*Matched* 83).<sup>63</sup> When she does finally look at the paper while hiking, she immediately recognizes that it is poetry, but notes, “What poems could be worth losing everything for?” (96). Yet, in spite of the potential danger, Cassia holds on to the poems for a while, looks at them regularly, and commits their words to memory before finally destroying them.

It is not Cassia's decision to keep the poems in her memory that is the morally Objective decision per se, but her decision to keep them secret from the Society. Although committing the poems to memory is morally Objective—Cassia has a

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<sup>63</sup> Original emphasis.

natural right to remember whatever she pleases, though not in this particular dystopian society as evidenced by the fact that the Society uses the red pill to remove the last twelve hours of memory from people—doing so has no impact on any other individual. However, destroying the paper in secret and not reporting the poems' existence to the Society is both morally Objective and impacts other individuals, even if one of them is already dead.

In the Society, Cassia, like any other citizen, is legally required to report any infraction to the Society's laws. In this particular case, the infractions are both the possession of the physical old type of paper and of poems not included in the Society's official Hundred Poems. Although the exact punishment for this crime is not expressly stated, possible harsh punishments include: Cassia and perhaps her entire family being reclassified from Citizens to Aberrations—which would revoke Cassia's right to be Matched—and the family being relocated outside of their present colony. Given the possible punishments for even reporting the existence of the paper and the poems, it is in Cassia's best interest to attempt to destroy their physical form and keep them secret to protect herself and her family.

The fact that Cassia both considers the option of destroying the paper and poems and follows through with it clearly suggests that she does not think about things in the manner in which the Society wishes, instead she acts antithetically. Cassia's thoughts and actions are purely selfish in the Objectivist sense; she is only concerned with her own welfare and the welfare of those she cares about, not about the Society and its rules. We know this by using reduction. Cassia's options consist of reporting the existence of the paper and poems or destroying them. Reporting would suggest her subservience to the Society, whereas destroying suggests an inability to conform to the Society's standards. Given her options and her choice, we can

reasonably confirm that the motivation behind her decision is selfishness, not blind adherence to the rules of the Society.

While the reasoning behind Cassia's decision is never suggested to be genetic, rather, it is suggested to be her ability to use free will, she does come from a family with a history of exercising their free will in conflict with the Society. We know that Cassia's great-grandmother originally kept and preserved the poems, her grandfather then continued to protect them and requested that his son, Cassia's father, destroy his DNA sample, and Cassia's father followed through with this request. This legacy of rule breakers suggests that Cassia is not alone in questioning the Society, and that she is likely not the only one to think the way she does, ideas that are confirmed in the later novels.

### ***Deciding to Love Ky***

Cassia's path to falling in love with Ky is far from the conventional way people fall in love in the Society, with standard procedure, i.e., the Matching, and Societal rules preventing what we would consider the traditional method of falling in love in Western society. Interestingly, Cassia is fully on board with finding a mate in the manner prescribed by the Society, but, when Ky's face is momentarily displayed instead of Xander's when she views her microcard, the seed of doubt is planted in her mind. Despite being reassured by an Official that this was nothing more than a cruel joke, Cassia continues to question the Matching and begins spending time with Ky.

Over the course of *Matched*, Cassia and Ky begin to fall in love with one another; however, her decision to be with Ky is not fully cemented until the final novel. The delay in a final decision is two-fold: first, Cassia does not want to hurt Xander, and second, the rebellion that takes place is far more important than who she will spend the rest of her life with. Despite the final decision taking place in *Reached*,

it is clear at the end of *Matched* that Cassia strongly favors Ky. Part of Cassia's attraction to Ky is the fact that he can write—a skill lost to technology—and his willingness to teach her how to do so. This ability to write provides a potential way for Cassia to keep, and possibly reproduce, the poems given to her by her grandfather. There is also the aspect of Ky being, in a way, an enigma, whose past is shrouded in questions. While Xander fulfills many aspects of what Cassia wants in a partner, it is ultimately who Ky is as a person that makes her choose him.

Be it Xander or Ky, Cassia's decision will have repercussions beyond which individual she will be with when the story ends. Picking Xander means following the rules of the Society, allowing them to dictate who she is with, and how she lives her life. Picking Ky means defying the Society, which in this case has no certain outcome. Clearly the role the Society plays in her decision plays the largest part, given that she shows a clear preference for Ky, yet it is not until she is aware of what would happen if she picked Ky does she actually make her decision or act on it. Ky being sent to what should be his certain death confirms that a life with him means living outside the Society, which could result in a sooner than preferred death or simply a very difficult life.

Given Cassia's decision, we can deduce that her motivation for this decision is based on love, yet she is cautious not to make it until she has an idea of what the potential repercussions would be. Had picking Ky meant that they would have both been executed or imprisoned indefinitely, it is possible Cassia would have made a different decision. While not making the decision purely based on who she wants to be with might appear heartless to some, the fact that she considers the implications of her options—leading her to wait until she has a more certain understanding of what picking Ky would mean—means that she is being a rational decision maker. The act

of basing her decision on both love and fact, not love and hope or wishful thinking, makes Cassia's thought process consistent with Objectivism. Picking Ky when the outcome of such a decision is so uncertain would violate a great deal of Objectivist ethics, whereas waiting until the repercussions of said decision are clear prevents Cassia from doing so.

## **Crossed**

### ***Going in Search of Ky***

*Crossed* begins shortly after the events of *Matched*. We find Cassia at her penultimate work location before her work assignment ends and she is no closer to finding Ky than she was when her work assignment began. However, her search begins to pick up speed when she is visited by Xander, which provides her with the chance to trade with an Archivist. This trade gives Cassia her first glimpse of the Rising when she is given a story instead of the map she requested. The story is that of the Pilot, and from it she is informed, “*The Pilot leads the Rising—the rebellion against the Society—and the Pilot never dies. When one Pilot’s time has finished, another comes to lead (Crossed 55),*” confirming that there has been a long-lasting rebellion against the Society.<sup>64</sup> Cassia is excited to learn about the Rising, as it means “*Ky and [her] are not alone,*”<sup>65</sup> and her desire to join the Rising is almost immediate because it provides an alternative and possible solution to the Society.

Her discovery of the Rising and the possibilities it could bring encourages Cassia to continue searching for Ky. At this point in time, being with Ky is Cassia's highest priority, so it is, with the information about the Rising, that Cassia forces her way onto a ship with other girls heading to the Outer Provinces. Although part of

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<sup>64</sup> Original emphasis.

<sup>65</sup> Original emphasis.

Cassia's decision is motivated by a faith that the Rising does actually exist, her primary reason is a desire to be with Ky, Rising or no Rising. This desire dictates her actions during the first half of the text, leading her to flee the death village she has been sent to and to enter the Carving. However, along her way, and once she reunites with Ky, her knowledge of the Rising grows, as too does her dislike for the Society. With every bit of information she gathers about the Rising, and every truth she discovers about the Society, Cassia's values begin to shift. At the start of *Crossed*, being with Ky is her highest value, but when it is time to make a decision about searching for the Rising, it is the rebellion against the Society that has become her highest value. The shift in what Cassia deems to be her highest value is proof of her maturing as an individual over the course of the trilogy, it is not just love she is concerned with but the quality of life she will have with the person she chooses to spend her life with. This is an important step for Cassia, as the direction of all her future actions will be dictated by the fact that bringing an end to the Society is her highest value and priority.

### ***The Rising***

Although Cassia has no information about the particulars concerning the Rising, she knows that it is a rebellion against the Society, and given her current situation and intention of being with Ky, the Rising is a viable alternative to living under the rules of the Society. When examining Cassia's decision to join the Rising at the end of *Crossed*, we can see that Ky is not the most important motivating factor in her decision—she is willing to join even after he initially refuses—it is actually her desire to end the Society that motivates her to join. While joining only because of her desire to be with Ky would not have been irrational, Ky is not her top value, her top value at this time is bigger than one single decision over who she spends her life with,

and her recognition of this is part of what makes her decision to join rational. Cassia is not simply acting based on emotion nor by ignoring facts; she has considered all the factors related to her decision and is acting according to her values.

This shift in values illustrates Cassia maturing as a person. While she is partly motivated by a desire to eliminate the Society because of how it treats its people, she is primarily concerned with how the Society prevents her from living the life she wants to live, one where she is allowed to make her own decisions and be with who she wants. In many ways, this reasoning displays Cassia's ability to grasp the bigger picture of rational decision-making, something Ky, who she often looks up to, has yet to understand. Cassia understands that while running away might provide her with a chance to be with Ky and make her own decisions about her life, changing the system by rebelling against the Society allows her to do all that and more. While fleeing the Society might have given Cassia the opportunity to be with Ky, it would have forced her to abandon her family, live a life of hardship, and likely hold a vocation other than the one she wants. By ending the Society's rule, Cassia has a chance at getting everything she wants, as she would not have to relinquish her other values in order to be with Ky.

## **Reached**

### ***The Right to Choose***

Cassia's evolution as an Objectivist is supported in *Reached* by her belief that individuals should be given the right to choose for themselves. While Cassia actually makes very few important decisions concerning her own future, save for solidifying her desire to be with Ky over Xander, she is privy to the decisions of others. The knowledge of these experiences, particularly the votes at Endstone and Cassia's father's decision to not join the Rising when asked to by her grandfather, cement her

belief that although individuals do not always make the right or rational decisions, that they should be given the right to choose.

The voting in Endstone, where they will decide which cure or cures they will attempt to use, is the first experience Cassia has of observing something like democracy within a society. At the first vote Cassia is able to witness, she is also allowed to vote, a completely foreign experience to her given that she has always been told how her Society will operate, not asked about how it should. To simplify the voting, individuals are asked to vote with either Oker, a former Society scientist, or Leyna, a leader in Endstone. A vote for Oker would mean using only his camassia cure, and a vote for Leyna would mean trying a variety of cures, though the term “cures” is a bit of a misnomer given that none of these methods have been tested. In an extreme moment of maturity, Cassia decides not to vote, noting, “I’m not ready to vote yet. I don’t know enough about the choice I’d be making. Maybe for the next vote I’ll be ready, if I’m still here” (*Reached* 379). While voting with Oker would seem like a logical decision given his experience, Cassia is convinced she has missed something while sorting the data, giving her doubt that any current cure would work.

Though many would argue that refusing to vote when given the right to do so is illogical, there are clearly times when abstention is logical. Similar to Hank Rearden’s decision in *Atlas Shrugged* to refuse to enter a plea in his court case, refusing to vote can be an act of extreme courage; however, this does not always have to be an act in which the individual does not recognize the authority of the voting system or those holding the vote. In this moment, Cassia recognizes that she does not have the necessary information to make an informed vote, voting either way means putting her trust in one of two people that she barely knows. Deciding not to vote then

becomes a rational decision because she has used reason to recognize that she does not really understand what she would be voting for.

The second round of votes that Cassia observes is to decide the fate of Hunter and Xander. It has been discovered that Hunter was disconnecting medical bags from those infected with the mutated plague and Xander was caught destroying all of Oker's cure. Having already decided to exile Hunter, the people of Endstone begin to vote on Xander's fate. Just as the first person casts his vote, Cassia has an epiphany, "Suddenly, I see the other side of choice. Of all of us having it. *Sometimes we will choose wrong*" (422).<sup>66</sup> Although this thought is interrupted by the Pilot arriving at Endstone, the realization that sometimes people make the wrong choice when voting does not deter her from believing that they should still have the right to vote, as evidenced by her support for the election of a new leader taking place at the end of the novel.

Another situation in which Cassia learns that people deserve the right to choose for themselves and that others should respect their choice, takes place between Cassia's father and grandfather. Although Cassia was not present for the discussion between her father and grandfather, she is able to learn about it through her mother. Soon after awaking from a coma caused by the mutated plague, Cassia's mother asks to view the microcard that gives the history of Cassia's grandfather's life. When it reaches the moment when her grandfather gives his favorite memories of his surviving relatives, Cassia pauses it and asks why her grandfather's favorite memory of her father "was the day they had their first real argument" (454). Her mother explains that Cassia's grandfather had tried to get her father to join the Rising but he refused, which caused an argument between them. However, over time, Cassia's

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<sup>66</sup> Original emphasis.

grandfather came to respect that his son had to choose “his own path, and he admired him for it” (456). More than anything, learning of this experience teaches Cassia to respect the choices of others, to understand that they do not always have the same values that she does, and that those values, though different, can still be rationally obtained.

In many ways, this is the final lesson Cassia needed to learn as a coming-of-age Randian heroine. At the start of the trilogy, Cassia naturally thinks logically and rationally in an Objectivist sense; however, it still requires all of the events of the trilogy for her to become a truly Objectivist thinker. In the beginning, she does not see a problem with the Society, but the single event of seeing Ky’s face on the microcard meant to be about Xander gives her the first shove toward discovering how wrong she is about the Society.

Analysis of the major decisions made by Cassia over the course of the trilogy confirm that she is a coming-of-age Randian heroine. While thinking logically comes natural to Cassia—she is after all, initially training to be a sorter, a job that requires a high degree of logical thinking skills—the journey she undertakes during the trilogy is necessary for her to become a true Randian heroine. Unlike the Society or even the Rising, Cassia has come to understand how important it is to allow people to make their own decisions, and that, for her, it is paramount that these be made rationally.

## Chapter 5 – The Divergent Trilogy

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We see Tris thinking, acting, and making decisions in-line with Objectivism from the moment she chooses to join Dauntless. This continues while she is undergoing initiation, during the battle against the Abnegation, when she kills Will, when she surrenders to Erudite, and when she stops the Bureau from using memory serum on the city. While she begins the trilogy as a coming-of-age Randian heroine, by the time she enters the weapons lab in *Allegiant*, Tris is a fully realized Randian heroine. By recognizing the Objectivist rationality which drives her decisions, and the vital role that the resulting actions play in the fall of a dystopian government, we can better understand how the *Divergent* trilogy provides an Objectivist solution to its primary social concern: identity politics.

### **Divergent**

#### ***Choosing a Faction***

At the Choosing Ceremony, when her “blood sizzles on the coals,” we know that Tris has chosen to switch from her faction of birth, Abnegation, to Dauntless (*Divergent* 47). As this occurs she notes, “I am selfish. I am brave,” but is she rational? Was her decision to choose Dauntless logical? Although this scene occurs early in the text, the reader has ample information about Tris to answer these questions, and the knowledge gained from later in the text only seems to confirm that this is a decision consistent with Objectivist ethics.

In choosing a faction, Tris is faced with five options: Dauntless, Abnegation, Erudite, Candor, and Amity. The only explanation Tris gives for not choosing Amity is that “joining them has never been an option for me” (42). It is unclear if this is because it was not one of the three factions she showed aptitude for—Erudite,

Abnegation, and Dauntless—or because of some other reason, but despite the fact that “they seem kind, loving, [and] free” she is not interested in Amity. All Tris has to say about Candor is “I have never liked Candor,” which is fitting considering it was also ruled out during her aptitude test (43). Of the three factions she showed aptitude for, Tris admits that “Ruling out Erudite was the only part of my choice that was easy” (42). This is reasonable given her father’s experiences with Jeanine Matthews, the leader of Erudite, and her personal experience with being pushed to the ground on the day of the aptitude test by a boy from Erudite. Despite only two factions remaining, both of which she shows aptitude for, her decision remains complex and difficult.

Tris’s primary motivation for considering Abnegation has nothing to do with the results of her aptitude test; it is based solely on a sense of duty and expectation. From the opening page of the text, she begins stating how she does not fit in with Abnegation. As her mother finishes cutting her hair she looks in the mirror, noting that her mother “is well-practiced in the art of losing herself. I can’t say the same of myself” (1). She goes on to constantly remind the reader that she is not Abnegation enough, and that being selfless does not come naturally to her like it does her brother Caleb (3). It is exceedingly clear that she does not want to be part of Abnegation; however, when it is her turn to choose her faction the fact that her brother has just transferred to Erudite makes her feel obliged to make the choice that she believes her parents would want her to make. Tris feels that with Caleb transferring, it is now her responsibility to “be the child that stays,” she notes, “I have to do this for my parents. I have to” (47). Yet, despite her feeling of obligation to her parents, she acts selfishly and chooses Dauntless.

Completely uncertain of which choice she will make even up to the point when she has already cut her hand, her decision could be read as impulsive and

therefore irrational. However, this assumes that impulse is innately irrational.

Jumping out of the way of an oncoming train is impulsive, and incredibly rational. It

cannot be forgotten that Tris has an aptitude for Dauntless and has long admired

them. Tris admits:

I pause by a window in the E wing and wait for the Dauntless to arrive. I do this every morning. At exactly 7:25, the Dauntless prove their bravery by jumping from a moving train.

[...]

They should perplex me. I should wonder what courage—which is the virtue they most value—has to do with a metal ring through your nostril. Instead my eyes cling to them wherever they go.

(7)

Her decision to choose Dauntless might well be impulsive, but there is no denying

that it is rational. Joining Dauntless is what she wants out of life: to be brave, act

selfishly, and not to conform to a stringent lifestyle. It is irrelevant if the Dauntless

really are brave, selfish, and nonconformist, that is what Tris believes them to be. Her

choosing Dauntless because she believes they represent the lifestyle she wants to live

is completely rational, even if it turns out to not be true.

In addition to being rational, Tris's decision to join Dauntless is also

Objective. While there is nothing inherently wrong with Abnegation or Dauntless in

regard to the lifestyle they afford, choosing to be part of one when it conflicts with

your values is Objectively wrong. Although the nature of selflessness would suggest

that Abnegation is not morally Objective, the extent to which they are selfless is never

fully explained. It could be a case of them simply liking to help people, which is

acceptable if they gain value—happiness—from doing so and do not sacrifice their

own well-being for others; however, if they are sacrificing themselves for others then

it would not be acceptable according to Objectivism. Likewise, the lifestyle that

Dauntless offers, serving as the police and physical security for the city, is

Objectively acceptable, so long as the individuals choosing Dauntless value those tasks.

The Objectivity of Tris's decision to choose Dauntless relies on why she makes this decision. It is clear from what we already know of Tris through her actions and her narration that Dauntless would be her preferred choice of faction if her parents were not part of the equation; however, they are in the equation, so we must look at how they affect her choice. The only reason Tris considers Abnegation is because it is what her parents want her to choose, because it would keep her close to them. While Tris does value her family, she does not value the lifestyle of Abnegation. To pick Abnegation would be to sacrifice her happiness for that of her parents, to live her life for their sake. Whereas in picking Dauntless, Tris is living for her own sake, a higher value, despite giving up her family, a lower value. Because Tris does not sacrifice her life for others and does not give a higher value for a lesser or non-value, her decision to switch to Dauntless is rational and moral according to Objectivism.

### ***Faction Initiation***

Faction initiation is a requirement to become a full member of a faction following the Choosing Ceremony, regardless of an individual's faction of birth. The difficulty and length of initiation is dependent on the faction; for Abnegation it is rather simple, but for Dauntless it is both physically and mentally demanding. For those wishing to become full members of Dauntless, they must face the high standards put in place by Dauntless leadership and compete against each other for a place in the faction, meaning that a passing grade will not be enough. The first major decision that Tris faces on her way to becoming a member of Dauntless takes place even before she is aware of how the initiation system works, when the initiates are

asked to jump off a building into a hole in order to get into the Dauntless compound. Max, one of the Dauntless leaders, addresses them, “Several stories below us is the members’ entrance to our compound. If you can’t muster the will to jump off, you don’t belong here. Our initiates have the privilege of going first” (57). While the other initiates are either in shock or trying to act casual, Tris notes, “I am proud,” and steps forward to go first.

Although this decision might seem anti-Objectivist given that jumping off a building into a hole is likely to result in death, and therefore giving up man’s highest standard of value—his life—Tris quickly realizes that this is a test of courage, the virtue most valued by Dauntless (7). Although the Dauntless appear to have no problem with people dying during initiation, as evidenced by the very limited reaction to Rita’s death when she is unsuccessful in making the jump from the train to the roof (55-6), it would be irrational for them to create a scenario where they ask the “bravest” of their initiates to leap to their death, i.e., unlike *The Testing*, they have no desire in eliminating the best among them. As Max puts it, “If you can’t muster the will to jump off, you don’t belong here,” clearly suggesting that this situation has been created to test their courage, not to get an initiate to commit suicide (57). Tris informs the reader that she fully comprehends the exercise by stating, “This is a scare tactic. I will land safely at the bottom” (58). Although she might be motivated by pride to go first, it is her rational calculated assessment of the situation that tells her it is safe to give in to her pride.

Tris’s decision to go first is within the bounds of Objectivism, not only has she rationally come to the conclusion that she will not die from making the jump, but she has a rational reason for wanting to go first. While pride is a primary motivator, it is not a case of vanity. Tris recognizes that if she wants to be truly accepted into

Dauntless, her goal and highest value at the moment, she must not only pass the initiation, but must also prove to them that she can shed her Abnegation past. By going first, Tris is able to make an immediate and impactful statement about where her allegiances lie, which will aid in her acceptance in Dauntless. Therefore, volunteering to go first is Objectively moral.

### ***The Battle***

As discussed in Part II, Chapter 5 of this work, the morning after Tris and her fellow initiates complete their initiation and become full members of Dauntless, Tris awakes to find everyone walking around the compound like drones and preparing for war, except for Max and Eric. Knowing exactly what is about to take place, an invasion on the Abnegation sector to take control of the city, Tris must make a decision on what she will do about this. Recognizing that acting any different from anyone else will get her caught, she pretends to be under the influence of the simulation so she can exit the compound. After picking up a gun, Tris informs the reader of her thoughts and her plan:

I can't wage war against Abnegation, against my family. I would rather die. My fear landscape proved that. My list of options narrows, and I see the path I must take. I will pretend long enough to get to the Abnegation sector of the city. I will save my family. And whatever happens after that doesn't matter. (418-9)

Taking into account what Tris has just told us and what we already know about her as a character, we can determine that her decision to enter the battlefield is Objectively moral.

There are three parts of Tris's decision: first, she will not aid in the attack of Abnegation; second, she wants to save her family; and third, she is willing to use violence if necessary, as evidenced by her decision to pick up the gun. All of these decisions are Objectively moral given the situation she finds herself in. Tris's

unwillingness to “wage war against Abnegation” is Objectively justified because the Abnegation have done nothing to warrant her or anyone else using physical force against them. Her decision to save her family, even if the attempt might result in her death, is Objectively moral because this situation would be classified as an emergency according to Objectivism. Despite switching to Dauntless, Tris proves throughout the trilogy that her family is incredibly important to her, making her willingness to risk her life to save them morally acceptable. Finally, and slightly more complex, is her willingness to use physical force to achieve her goal. As previously noted, Objectivism argues that it is immoral to initiate physical force, it should only be used in self-defense or the defense of others. Given the fact that Dauntless is threatening the use of physical force to remove Abnegation from power, Tris’s willingness to use physical force is Objectively justified. This justification applies to all of Tris’s actions during the battle, including her decision to shoot Will, as explained in the next section.

## **Insurgent**

### ***Killing Will***

One of the major decisions Tris is forced to deal with in *Insurgent* is one that was actually made in *Divergent*: her decision to kill her friend Will. While on the run from the simulation induced Dauntless soldiers in *Divergent*, Tris’s mother Natalie gives her life to cause a distraction, which gives Tris a chance to escape. Pursued now by only three soldiers, Tris fires blindly and kills two of them, then stands to face the final soldier only to discover it is her friend Will:

Dull-eyed and mindless, but still Will. He stops running and mirrors me, his feet planted and his gun up. In an instant, I see his finger poised over the trigger and hear the bullet slide into the chamber, and I fire. My eyes squeezed shut. Can’t breathe.

The bullet hit him in the head. I know because that's where I aimed it. (*Divergent* 446)

In this situation, Tris realistically has only two options: shoot Will or be shot by Will. Any other option, like running away or just wounding him, was not really on the table for Tris as she had only a split second to make a choice and either of those two choices would have still likely resulted in her death, given that Will would have just shot her in the back or fired back after being injured. From her decision, we can deduce that shooting Will was not an act of malice for Tris but an act of survival, as she states, "It was him or me" (446). Her motivation in this decision was her survival, which reveals that she valued her own life more than she valued Will's. Although in such blunt terms this makes Tris seem like a cold-hearted killer, it is evident in both *Divergent* and *Insurgent* that she is emotionally traumatized by the event, not because she killed someone, but because the person she had to kill was her friend.

When we look at this situation from an Objectivist perspective, it is clear that Tris's decision was made in her rational self-interest and that she did not violate Objectivism. Most importantly, Tris did not want to kill Will, she was not out on the hunt looking to violate the rights of others. Secondly, she acted in self-defense. While at no fault of their own, given that they were under the control of the simulation serum, the Dauntless soldiers had made it clear that they would kill anyone that stood in their way of completing their mission, as evidenced when they killed Natalie. Finally, Tris did not sacrifice a higher value for a lesser or non-value; in fact, in this situation, she was forced to measure her decision based on the standard value in which Rand says an individual must measure their actions, i.e., that individual's life. In doing so, Tris did not violate any aspect of Objectivism and her decision was reasoned and rational.

### *Surrender to Erudite*

The other major decision that takes center stage in *Insurgent* is Tris's decision to surrender to Erudite. After the remaining Dauntless that have not sided with Erudite return to the Dauntless compound, Jeanine and the Erudite activate a simulation that takes over the minds of three young Dauntless members, forcing them to give a warning to Tris and the other Dauntless before forcing them to attempt suicide, of which two succeed and the third is saved by Tris. In the warning, one of the young Dauntless, Marlene, informs the Divergent among them that "Every two days until one of you delivers yourself to Erudite headquarters, this will happen again," "this" being three people being forced to kill themselves (*Insurgent* 299). At this point Tris, and all the other Divergent present, some of which are her close friends, are forced to make a decision: either one of them surrenders or they allow more people to die.

Despite giving the impression that she has not yet made a decision, it is not a difficult decision for Tris to make. Immediately after the warning is given, and two of the children die, Tris informs the reader that she will surrender to Erudite. It is quite clear that Tris really only has two options: surrender or not. The hope of someone else volunteering cannot really be considered an option because there is no guarantee that they will. In deciding to surrender, it is clear that Tris's motivation is to save the lives of those that might be taken over by the simulation serum and forced to commit suicide. Although Tris does later admit in *Allegiant* that "I volunteered to go to Erudite headquarters, knowing that death waited for me there. But it wasn't because I was selfless, or because I was brave. It was because I was guilty and a part of me wanted to lose everything; a grieving, ailing part of me wanted to die," this is only part of her reason, and is said immediately after her brother, Caleb, has volunteered to

go on a suicide mission (*Allegiant* 411). It is clear that this utterance takes place during an emotional moment for Tris. Furthermore, had she been acting selflessly in volunteering—giving a higher value for a lesser or non-value—, which she confirms she was not, then her decision would be at odds with Objectivism. Nonetheless, in making this decision, given that there is a serious possibility that whoever surrenders might be killed, Tris's value judgments must be such that the lives of others are higher than her own life, something that typically would be considered a violation of Objectivism.

As explained earlier, while “The Ethics of Emergencies” does provide guidance in situations where it would be ethical for an individual to risk their life to save another individual, this requires the risking individual to rationally decide that the possibility of life without the individual in need of saving would be unbearable. In Tris's case, she is unaware of whom she might be saving, it could be one of her close friends like Christina, or it could be a complete stranger, making it hard to argue that she is acting in accordance with “The Ethics of Emergencies.” However, Rand does make an exception in regard to people risking their lives in this sense in the form of voluntary military service. First, it is imperative for Rand, and by extension, Objectivism, that the military is “a voluntary, not conscripted, army” (*Ayn Rand Answers* 23). According to Objectivism, it is absolutely moral for an individual to serve in the military so long as it is voluntary and that the individual is doing so because they wish to uphold their Objective values, namely the protection of individuals' rights, which includes their right to their life. Objectively, so long as the service member is rationally aware that their occupation could result in their death then the decision to be a service member is moral. When Tris decides to surrender to the Erudite this is not a sacrifice, exchanging a higher value for a lesser or non-value,

because in surrendering she is protecting the rights, i.e., the right to life, of the other members of her faction. Just like members of a volunteer military, Tris is not being altruistic by risking her life; rather, she is defending the rights of others, which include the people she cares about. Furthermore, it is a decision on Tris's part, for no one is forcing her to surrender. Thus, although it might initially appear that Tris is sacrificing a higher value, her life, for a lesser or non-value, the lives of people she may or may not care about, she is actually voluntarily defending the rights of these people, making her choice mostly in-line with Objectivism. However, given the fact that she admits that part of her decision was motivated by irrational emotions, it must be conceded that her decision was not fully Objectivist. This reveals, that at this point in the narrative, that Tris has not become a fully-fledged Objectivist, and is still developing and learning to make fully Objective decisions.

## **Allegiant**

### ***The Death Serum***

The predominant decision Tris faces in *Allegiant* is how she will act once she has gathered all of the information necessary to understand the full context of what has happened in her world, i.e., that Chicago is an experiment, that David and the Bureau of Genetic Welfare are responsible for the original simulation serum, and that David is planning on releasing a memory serum in Chicago to avert the coming war and save the experiment. The first decision that Tris makes is to act in order to prevent David from releasing the serum. Tris is motivated to stop David not because he would prevent the war in Chicago, but because she finds it morally repulsive that he would strip all of the inhabitants of their memories. While neither Tris nor her compatriots come out and directly state this, it is clearly implied that they feel that erasing the memories of the people would be a violation of their rights given the fact

they have no say in the matter. In making the decision to act, we can see that her motivation is to protect the rights of others, and that her values are not compromised because she is not risking a higher value for a lesser or non-value. However, this comes into question when it is revealed that either Tris or one of her friends will have to conduct a suicide mission to prevent the memory serum from being deployed.

The plan to prevent David from releasing the memory serum and to stop the Bureau of Genetic Welfare for good is to break into the Weapons Lab and release the serum on the people working at the Bureau. While this is, in itself, morally questionable, given that they will erase the memories of all the people working at the Bureau's compound, this is an act of self-defense because the Bureau has been violating the rights of the people in Chicago as covered in Part II, Chapter 5 of this work. Initially, it is Caleb that volunteers for the mission, partly out of the fact that everyone in the group wants him to be the one who dies, partly to atone for his previous decision to side with Jeanine Matthews, and partly because of "plenty of reasons" that he does not elaborate on (*Allegiant* 410). However, at the last moment Tris takes his place and enters the Weapons Lab.

It is in this moment, when she takes Caleb's place, that Tris makes a fully Objective decision and also becomes a full Randian heroine. Her decision is not motivated only by emotion, or some death wish, but by a rational weighing of her values. Tris informs the reader that in this moment she realizes:

I don't belong to Abnegation, or Dauntless, or even the Divergent. I don't belong to the Bureau or the experiment or the fringe. I belong to the people I love, and they belong to me—they, and the love and loyalty I give them, form my identity far more than any word or group ever could. (455)

Furthermore, as she argues with Caleb over taking his place, she notes that she "might survive the death serum" that is in the Weapons Lab because she is "good at fighting

off serums. There's a chance [she'll] survive. There's no chance [he] would survive.” From this information, we can see her motivations and her values clearly presented. In stating what really makes up her identity as a person, Tris recognizes what is important to her, i.e., what her values are, not labels or social groups, but the people she cares about. Her motivation is not to save a bunch of people she does not know, but to protect those that she does know. In this case, she is operating on the “Ethics of Emergencies,” she recognizes that if she enters the Weapons Lab her chances of dying are lower than if Caleb were to do so, and that she values her life with Caleb in it more than she does the possibility of it without him. Entering the Weapons Lab is not a sacrifice for Tris on many levels; she is not giving a higher value for a lesser or non-value because she is taking the risk for the people she loves and for the rights of those in her community of Chicago. What Tris is willing to risk her life for is to uphold her moral principles, that people should be valued as people, not rats in an experiment, that men should not be the tools of men (*Atlas Shrugged* 415).

The tragedy in Tris entering the Weapons Lab is that she is able to fight off the death serum, suggesting that she could have survived, yet is killed by David when he shoots her. Despite the tragic nature of her death, Tris dies as a Randian heroine, for she died fighting for her moral principles. While Tris spends a great deal of the trilogy alternating between Objective and non-Objective decisions, in her final act she has come to the realization of her moral values, values that are congruent with Objectivism.

### **Conclusion of Part III**

In looking at the motivations for the decisions made by characters in these trilogies, it is revealed that the protagonists of these YA critical dystopias, and in some cases their compatriots, are making decisions congruent with Objectivism.

While the nature of their predicaments often requires these characters to make quick decisions, these decisions are, in fact, rational. Though rationality is a major factor in a decision being considered Objective, it is also the recognition of the specific motivating factors that determine if a character's decisions are Objective, i.e., reason and logic. In nearly every instance, we see that the protagonists of these trilogies make decisions that are in their rational self-interest, which do not result in them sacrificing others to achieve their goals, and that they do not sacrifice themselves for others. That is not to say that the protagonists do not, on occasion, make decisions that are Objectively questionable. But given that these individuals are coming-of-age and their moral philosophies are still developing, they must be granted a certain amount of leniency.

It is because of this developmental factor that, for the majority of each trilogy, the chief protagonist is a coming-of-age Randian heroine, not a full-fledged Randian heroine. While some of the protagonists are slightly more Objective at the start of the text than others, they all seem to be equally Objectivist by the end of the text. In recognizing that these coming-of-age Randian heroines are making willful and rational Objective decisions in their fights against their respective dystopian governments, we can deduce that they are, at least on a personal level, fighting for a more Objective government.

## **Part IV – The Objectivist Solution**

## Introduction

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By concluding with an Objectivist eutopian enclave or the hope that an Objectivist eutopia will manifest, these YA critical dystopias also provide young adult readers with Objectivist solutions to the principal social issues they present. As argued by Peter Swirski, the idea “That we learn from stories is a truism. Moreover, it is a truism held for so long and by so many that, like falling apples or the vector of time, it has wormed its way into our collective subconscious” (5). These works present governments that operate according to particular political philosophies that are directly responsible for either creating and/or maintaining social injustices, yet they are ultimately defeated and the social issue eliminated. Because the protagonists of these stories are operating according to a particular ethical system, these works encourage young adult readers to concur with the trilogies’ conclusion.

Swirski states that “literary narratives lie on a continuum with philosophical thought experiments, differing from them not in kind but only in degree,” suggesting that, just like the philosophical thought experiment, something relevant to the real world can be illustrated by and learned from considering literary narratives as thought experiments. The obvious question in relation to these YA critical dystopias then becomes: What issue or issues are these literary thought experiments questioning? As previously mentioned, the principal social issues presented in these YA critical dystopias are: socioeconomic inequality in *The Hunger Games*, access to education in *The Testing*, creative censorship in *Matched*, and identity politics in *Divergent*. As established in Part II of this thesis, it is the case in all four of these trilogies that these dystopian governments are inherently anti-Objectivist. Part III demonstrates that the protagonists of these narratives, who are seeking to reform their respective societies,

display the qualities of coming-of-age Randian heroines, unlike the leaders of these societies. Thus, Part IV will argue that these YA critical dystopias ultimately imply that Objectivism is an ideal philosophical system, both politically and ethically. Furthermore, these works suggest that Objectivism can provide a solution to the given social issue as it is eliminated by the end of each trilogy.

## Chapter 1 – The Hunger Games Trilogy: Socioeconomic Inequality

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Socioeconomic inequality is not something that is unique to Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* trilogy. While the presence of socioeconomic inequality in the trilogy allows for many of the dystopian elements to exist, particularly the government of Panem, it is also a contemporaneous social issue in America. In presenting young adult readers with an Objectivist resolution to socioeconomic inequality, the trilogy provides an easy solution for these readers to apply to their own worlds.

The political situation in Panem allows the social system to take the form necessary for an event like the Hunger Games to exist. Socially, Panem is comprised of two types of citizens—Capitol and District. Those in the Capitol live lives of luxury at the expense of those in the districts. The social difference between those in the Capitol and those in the districts echoes the system of feudalism. The districts are always subject to decisions made by the Capitol, be it increased production or limited electricity, and have no say or representation in the government. Although each district has a mayor, these individuals are appointed by the Capitol and serve to represent the Capitol's interests, not those of the people in their districts. Citizens are not permitted to leave their given district or even the Capitol unless they are conducting official government business, which is far more detrimental to the district citizens than it is to the Capitol citizens. Limited to the jobs available in their districts, without any form of political representation, and being forced to produce for the Capitol, leaves many district citizens in abject poverty.

Closely related to the political and social conditions, the economic situation is the final step that allows the Hunger Games to take place. Although this chapter uses

the term ‘socioeconomic,’ it is paramount to remember that the socioeconomic conditions would not be possible without the political policies that exist in the text. It is because of these political and social practices that so many of the citizens suffer economically, thereby forcing them to become dependent on the Capitol. The lack of political representation, which is a social byproduct of the political system, ensures that economic conditions are unlikely to change. Because so many of the district citizens are worried about getting enough food, they are unlikely to respond aggressively to a Capitol that can easily make their economic conditions worse. Fear, created by the political, developed by the social, and implemented by the economical, rules the districts, and they are unlikely—as 73 previous years of Hunger Games have shown—to challenge the Capitol. That is, until Katniss Everdeen dares to question the Capitol’s authority.

### **Socioeconomic Inequality in Panem**

While broader inequality manifests itself in many forms in *The Hunger Games* trilogy, particularly in regard to the Games themselves, socioeconomic inequality is paramount in allowing other forms of inequality to exist. When compared to contemporary American society, the details surrounding socioeconomic inequality in *The Hunger Games* appear to be far worse than modern America.<sup>67</sup> However, I would argue that despite being far more extreme, the ways in which socioeconomic inequality exists in *The Hunger Games* are not entirely dissimilar to the ways it exists within the United States. Socioeconomic inequality in America is an incredibly complex social issue, yet the way socioeconomic inequality it is depicted in *The Hunger Games* trilogy, and the Objectivist solution presented to it, are incredibly

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<sup>67</sup> For other examples of the parallels between Panem and the United States, see Tan and Clemente (full citations for both provided in the bibliography).

simple. The primary means by which socioeconomic inequality is presented in *The Hunger Games* is through a state-created class structure.

Long before Katniss enters the arena for the 74<sup>th</sup> Hunger Games, the text reveals that the real Hunger Games are taking place all across the nation of Panem and not in the arena. Panem is a place where an individual's future socioeconomic status is dependent on the socioeconomic status of their birth, a condition, as discussed in the next section, which is shared by many in contemporary America. However, in Panem there is no real social mobility. The best anyone can hope for is a quality of life equal to that of his or her parents, regardless of natural ability or individual determination; an idea that is in direct contention with the principals of Objectivism. Of course, this is not a problem for those born into the wealth of the Capitol, but for those born into the impoverished districts it is a guarantee that life will never get better. The only chance of escape is by winning the Hunger Games, as the victor will be showered with gifts, given a beautiful home, and granted a life of ease. Unfortunately, those born into the greatest poverty are malnourished, lack training, have little knowledge of survival skills, and thus stand little chance of success in the Games. For the poor, the tournament is more than an unrealistic option to improve their socioeconomic status; it is a death sentence.

*The Hunger Games* begins in District 12 on the morning of the annual reaping of tributes for the Games. As the reader is introduced to the physical surroundings of the district, it becomes apparent that things are dark in District 12, and not just because of the permanent layer of coal dust. District 12 is the epitome of poverty, an example of existing while not truly living. The district is essentially an old Appalachian mining town that has fallen into disrepair from years of neglect. However, District 12 is clearly not abandoned because it is the home to some 8,000

residents, ranging from coal miners to government officials (*The Hunger Games* 28). Although the areas of production are compartmentalized into districts—District 12, mining; District 11, agriculture; District 10, livestock; etc.—each district has its own class structure, much like most cities in contemporary America. One of the most obvious issues encountered as we follow Katniss on her morning routine is that even those at the top of the socioeconomic pyramid in District 12 live in relative poverty when compared to those who live in the Capitol and even many of the other districts.

At first glance, the socioeconomic class structure depicted in District 12 appears to be comprised of the standard upper, middle, and lower groups. However, as we gain more information about this society we realize this is not actually the case. Instead of an upper class comprised of successful industrialists and businesspersons—as Rand and her theory of Objectivism would have it—the upper class is almost exclusively composed of government officials. The rest of the upper class in District 12 is comprised of a small group of peacekeepers and the District's single reluctant celebrity Haymitch Abernathy—victor of the 50<sup>th</sup> Hunger Games. The middle class is made up of merchants like the baker and his son Peeta Mellark, who alongside Katniss is also selected as tribute for the 74<sup>th</sup> Hunger Games. Finally, the lower class consists of coal miners and their families. The socioeconomic makeup of District 12 is quite literally pyramidal; as the poverty level increases, so does the size of the group. On a national socioeconomic level, many classes are compartmentalized in the text by district. While we might like to imagine that this is not the case in contemporary America, primarily because there is no regulation stating where individuals of various socioeconomic classes must live, the perception of a mixed class system is far less real than many would like to believe.

## Socioeconomic Inequality in America

While many young adult readers may not be familiar with the intricacies of American socioeconomic inequality, most will be aware of its existence given that today's youth is far more socially aware than previous generations in large part due to the internet and social media. The most simplistic analysis of income inequality in America can be reached by examining data from the United States Census Bureau. According to data collected from 1967 to 2014 on household income of all races, in 2014 dollars the mean income of the bottom quintile of Americans had only increased by 17.73 percent since 1967, whereas the mean income of the top quintile had grown by 75.65 percent over the same period (U.S. Census Bureau, *Table H-3*). Even more staggering is the fact that the top five percent of mean income earners has risen by 90.71 percent over this period. When the difference in household income is expressed in dollars, the divide is even more difficult to deny. In 1967, the difference in income between the bottom quintile and the top quintile was \$100,561. By 2014, the difference between these two groups was \$182,377. When we examine this data in a closed space, it becomes painfully evident that income inequality between the bottom and top quintiles has dramatically increased in America since 1967, and even more striking conclusions can be made about income inequality when further data sets are examined.

A study conducted in 2006 using data from the United States National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (USNLSY) revealed that 42.2 percent of sons born to fathers in the bottom quintile of income distribution remained in the bottom quintile (Jäntti et al. 33). Although this would appear to suggest a lack of income mobility, the fact remains that 57.8 percent of sons born to fathers in the bottom quintile do experience some upward mobility. Yet, 66.7 percent of these individuals are unlikely

to make it past the second quintile, i.e., a mean household income of \$31,087 in 2014 (U.S. Census Bureau, *Table H-3*), which is \$44,651 below the 2014 mean household income (U.S. Census Bureau, *Table H-6*). However, these figures assume that an individual's income is static and does not consider that household income tends to fluctuate over the course of one's life.

Another study, published in 2015, examined the lifetime income mobility of American households. In this study researchers found “that there is substantial fluidity in top-level income over ages 25 to 60” (Hirschl and Rank 8). While many American households might spend most of their lifetimes in the same quintile,

[...] by age 60, 69.8 percent of the population will have experienced at least one year within the top 20<sup>th</sup> percentile, 53.1 percent will have experienced at least one year within the top 10<sup>th</sup> percentile, 36.4 percent will have encountered one year within the top 5<sup>th</sup> percentile, and 11.1 percent will have experienced one year within the top 1<sup>st</sup> percentile. (Hirschl and Rank 5)

However, the statistical probability of maintaining consecutive or many total years at these levels decreases with time. Furthermore, the percentage of households reaching these income levels increases as the household's age increases, supporting the idea that increased household affluence is more likely to occur after many years of continued work. Nonetheless, the study does prove that “a static image of top-level income tenure is at odds with the empirics of how people live out their life course” (Hirschl and Rank 8).

The facts and figures revealed by analyzing the data provided by the U.S. Census Bureau—the continued distancing between lower and higher income earners—is brought to a logical conclusion in the *Hunger Games* trilogy. Those in the Capitol have reached a new zenith of wealth while those in District 12 have reached a new nadir of poverty. Although we are only really exposed to the Capitol and District 12 in *The Hunger Games*, it is clearly communicated that income mobility has been

virtually swept away. Furthermore, income fluidity seems to be nonexistent in this society as many of the jobs available to the citizens are government jobs that provide a relatively fixed wage. The foundation of income inequality that the text is built on borrows from existing income inequalities in contemporary America and removes many of the positive factors that exist in the American economy.

### **The Eutopian Enclave & the Hope of Eutopia**

*The Hunger Games* trilogy concludes with the elimination of a dystopian authority that institutionalized socioeconomic inequality; however, in doing so the trilogy also suggests that the society in its entirety has the potential to become eutopian because the whole government has been removed and neither Snow nor Coin are in power. The development of such a eutopian enclave is evidenced in Katniss's complete change of heart in regard to having children and getting married. Katniss's concerns about socioeconomic inequality are abundant in the trilogy, but several key moments are presented in regard to her thoughts about both marriage and children. In the opening chapter of *The Hunger Games*, while hunting with Gale, Katniss proclaims, "I never want to have kids," her reasoning that because it is already hard enough to feed her family, kids would mean even more mouths to feed (9). Later, while in the arena, she reiterates to the reader her feelings on having a family:

I know I'll never marry, never risk bringing a child into the world. Because if there's one thing being a victor doesn't guarantee, it's your children's safety. My kids' names would go right into the reaping balls with everyone else's. And I swear I'll never let that happen. (311)

In this moment, Katniss recognizes that if she were to win the Hunger Games she would be able to afford children; however, even with this new-found wealth, part of the system that enables socioeconomic inequality—the Hunger Games—still exists, so despite the fact that her children would have food to eat they would still be at risk

of being selected for the Games. Even when she returns from the Capitol after winning the Games, Katniss notes, “To see all those hungry kids in the Seam running around [...] To know that once a month for a year they would all receive another parcel. That was one of the few times I actually felt good about winning the Games” (*Catching Fire* 25). When Katniss tells us about this experience we learn that her concerns over socioeconomic inequality go beyond her own family and the prospect of her having children, and actually extend to all of those that are suffering because of the government’s policies and practices. In *Mockingjay* she comments that after District 12 moves to District 13 as refugees, “we’re starting to look healthier, particularly the kids” (35). Yet, despite the safety of District 13, with a full-scale rebellion in place Katniss has no thoughts about getting married or having kids herself. When it is announced that there will be a wedding, Katniss is sickened by the thought until she is told that it is not her wedding but that of her friends Finnick and Annie (224). It is only in the epilogue, some twenty years later, that Katniss informs us that it took fifteen years for Peeta to convince Katniss that it was safe to have children.

Although conditions for Katniss and those from District 12 temporarily improve when she and Peeta win the Hunger Games, and again when they arrive in District 13 as refugees, Katniss still refuses to consider marriage and a family. This is because, despite their personal situation improving, socioeconomic inequality still runs wild in Panem, and although the Hunger Games are not currently taking place, this is only because Panem is caught in a civil war. When she finally accepts that the old Panem is gone, we too, as readers, accept the presence of a eutopian enclave, that socioeconomic inequality has been eliminated, and that there exists the possibility for the entire society to become eutopian.

## The Objectivist Solution

At the most basic level, in providing young adult readers with an Objectivist solution to the problem of socioeconomic inequality, both in direct relation to the world of *The Hunger Games* trilogy and the readers' own world, the trilogy is quite clear: change the government. However, the trilogy also provides more nuanced approaches to eliminating socioeconomic inequality. While in the same vein as "change the government," *The Hunger Games* trilogy provides ample opportunity for the reader to understand exactly what causes a government to be both dystopian and capable of institutionalizing socioeconomic inequality. It begins in *The Hunger Games* with the illegality of hunting, foraging, or even stepping beyond the perimeter fence surrounding District 12. Then we are presented with the differences in perception of the Hunger Games for the two classes of citizens, themselves a byproduct of the Games and its rules. In *Catching Fire*, we are introduced to the heartless dictator, President Snow, and his willingness to kill or have killed those that would dare to defy him. Prior to Katniss's return to the arena for the 75<sup>th</sup> Hunger Games, we are made aware of the detestable state the districts have been willfully plunged into by the Capitol and the policies that are literally killing the citizens, forcing them to rebel. Finally, in *Mockingjay*, we are asked to question if District 13 and its leader, President Coin, are any better than the Capitol and Snow. Given Katniss's actions at the end of *Mockingjay*, killing Coin to prevent her from becoming the new leader of Panem, the trilogy suggests that fundamentally changing the government is the only solution. However, the United States is not Panem, and changes can still be achieved without violent rebellion. So it is that in recognizing Katniss's Objectivist ethical beliefs, that we can see the trilogy as not so much advocating for young adult readers to start a full-blown rebellion in the United States

in order to solve its problems, but for reform and a change in the way we think about those problems before the United States becomes itself a dystopia.

At its most basic level, the trilogy informs young adult readers that if they want to bring about changes in their society, they can do so by acting like Katniss. This is not in the sense that they need to be the catalyst for a rebellion that becomes a civil war, nor that they need to murder any political leaders, for the dystopian society in *The Hunger Games* trilogy is far worse than its contemporary counterpart and subsequently requires a different scale of response. In order to ensure that young adults readers easily understand this difference, Katniss states:

You can spin it any way you like. Snow thought the Hunger Games were an efficient means of control. Coin thought the parachutes would expedite the war. But in the end, who does it benefit? No one. The truth is, it benefits no one to live in a world where these things happen. (*Mockingjay* 377)

This statement makes it clear that Katniss and, by extension, the trilogy and its author, are not advocating violence; in fact, they are actively discouraging the use of violence. Instead, the trilogy suggests that applying the same ethical framework that Katniss uses—an Objectivist framework—can bring about change and that if everyone did so then there would be no need for the kind of indiscriminate violence that dominates the trilogy.

From her decision at the reaping to volunteer for Prim in *The Hunger Games* to her desire to save the other tributes in *Mockingjay*, the vast majority of Katniss's decisions are congruent with Objectivist ethics. She volunteers for Prim because she recognizes that she would rather risk her own life than risk living a life without Prim, motivated by a rational understanding that she stands a far better chance of winning the Games than Prim does. Her decision to form an alliance with Rue is based on a mutually beneficial exchange of value and the equal knowledge that the alliance

cannot last forever. The alliance formed with Peeta, while initially predicated on her fear of being judged by her district if she were to survive and Peeta were to die, is maintained by her growing romantic feelings for him. Furthermore, her willingness to risk her life by threatening to eat the poisonous berries in the finale of the Games is motivated by a recognition of love for Peeta. Evidence of her love for Peeta is seen again in *Catching Fire* when, after the initial shock of being informed that she is going back into the arena wears off and she is capable of thinking rationally again, she begs Haymitch to volunteer for Peeta so that they can save his life. Finally, her decision in *Mockingjay* to be the symbol of rebellion in exchange for the safety of the other tributes, and her recognition that violence is not the right ethical means for meaningful change, solidifies her status as a Randian heroine. In presenting her as a protagonist and a positive role model, the trilogy promotes her Objectivist way of thinking and informs young adult readers that they too can bring about meaningful change to their societies by thinking like Katniss.

## Chapter 2 – The Testing Trilogy: Access to Education

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*The Testing* trilogy acknowledges many of the fears and anxieties experienced by students, parents, teachers, administrators, and governments in regard to access to post-secondary education. The first novel, *The Testing*, focuses entirely on access to higher education; *Independent Study*, focuses on many of the difficulties faced once in higher education; and *Graduation Day*, focuses on bringing an end to a negative admission system in higher education. By focusing on the endeavors faced by the novel's protagonist, Cia Vale, and her fellow candidates, the critical aspects of the trilogy emerge through the allegories of those endeavors to the modern world. By primarily focusing the narrative on the social issue of access to higher education and the difficulties that surround it, albeit in a fictional dystopian manner, the trilogy creates a space and opportunity for a conversation about access to higher education in contemporary society.

In *The Testing* trilogy, it is the structure of the government that allows for a dystopian representation of access to higher education to take place. Because the government officials in Tosu City—including Dr. Barnes, whose complete autonomy even the President cannot override—have near absolute power over the way in which the society is run, they are able to maintain the nation's perverse system of higher education. Those wishing to attend cannot apply, and are instead chosen according to unknown requirements at the will of the Education Department. Those from the colonies that are selected must face *The Testing* and the many life or death situations it presents. Those from Tosu City face only a written exam, and their chances to gain admission to the University are greatly influenced by nepotism. Even after entering the University, students must face deadly initiation tasks. With the selection of Cia for

The Testing, a wager is placed between Dr. Barnes and President Collindar on whether or not Cia can pass and perform certain tasks, with the winner deciding the future of access to education.

### **Access to Higher Education in the United Commonwealth**

In a deviation from the contemporary process whereby individuals submit an application to be either admitted or rejected from a given university, *The Testing* presents a situation where every graduating student from the colonies is eligible and could be considered for The Testing—whether they want to or not. The selection criteria and the exact conditions of what takes place during the testing is highly secretive, giving no student the ability to knowingly increase their likelihood for being selected or to be successful in The Testing. Although this might initially seem like an inclusive and eutopic attribute to this society, in reality it amounts to academic conscription and the absence of self-determination. The inferred reasoning for this system, at least in regards to colony citizens, is that only society's most suitable individuals should progress to higher education. The pretext being that, because society is rebuilding after a series of catastrophic wars and environmental disasters, it is the duty of every citizen to act in the best interest of the society as a whole.

The United Commonwealth, the nation that has risen from the ashes of the United States, has only a single university located in its capitol in Tosu City, formerly Wichita, Kansas. Like contemporary academic institutions, space at the university is limited. If a student is not selected there is no appeals process and they must find a place in their colony where they can contribute to the society. If a student is selected for The Testing they have no choice but to go, refusal is considered treason and punishable by death.

Yet, even if a colony student is successful in being selected for The Testing, they face extreme conditions on their way to university, and not only from The Testing itself but from other candidates. The desire to succeed is so high and the fear of failure so great, that many candidates will actively seek to obstruct each other, as is the case with Roman during the group test, or otherwise attempt to eliminate their competition, as is the case with Will during the practical exam. However, by the time we reach the practical exam, all of The Testing candidates, particularly Cia and Tomas, are exceedingly aware that some candidates are willing to kill to ensure their place at the University. This is not the case, however, when they initially arrive at The Testing center in Tosu City and Cia is assigned a roommate.

Arriving at the Testing Center, Cia is assigned a room with a girl named Ryme from Dixon Colony (*The Testing* 69). Though Ryme, like all other candidates, will have to do well on the exams and tests in order to pass The Testing, she also attempts to actively remove her competition through psychological intimidation. Ryme falsely brags about how easy she has found the tests and how anyone experiencing any difficulty should not have been invited in the first place, the goal being to make Cia think she did poorly on the exams in order to cause her more stress so as to affect her performance. Ryme's tactic is initially successful in that Cia becomes more concerned with her performance on the exams. However, while at dinner Cia takes a strategic risk and admits to her friends that she was not capable of finishing either of that day's tests, to which everyone admits the same. This gives Cia reassurance about her performance and she realizes what Ryme is doing. Cia's interactions with Ryme reflect the real stress students face in attempting to gain admission to, and while at, institutions of higher education; while the exact nature of the situation is far worse in *The Testing* trilogy, the fear of failure or rejection in contemporary society can

manifest itself in the same ways, with students attempting to intimidate one another as a means to deal with their own fear or as a means to eliminate their competition.

Other representations of the stress felt by students once in higher education are presented in the second novel in *The Testing* trilogy, pointedly titled *Independent Study*. Having survived, completed, and passed The Testing, the novel begins with Cia and her fellow classmates feverishly studying for their exams. Unlike the exams experienced during The Testing, these are typical pencil and paper exams that any university student would experience. Although there is no known direct threat of death or serious bodily harm, many of the students have prepared as if the exams are a matter of life and death, not unlike university students today.

For this round of exams, eight hours of testing in a single day, Cia and her classmates are being tested on their general knowledge. Following The Testing, Cia's class of twenty has been taking preliminary classes, what this society calls Early Studies, for six months. Cia explains that after the exams they will all be "sorted into the fields of study that will serve as the focus for the rest of [their] lives" (*Independent Study* 1). In many ways, this six months of Early Studies is very similar to the core curriculum for liberal arts degrees at many American universities, where students take a wide array of classes across several disciplines before deciding on an area of specialization. The key difference that Cia and her classmates experience is that they have no choice in what they will specialize in and the options are far less plentiful than the options at contemporary institutions. While students in the United States enjoy an endless list of potential majors, those at Tosu University will be "directed into: Education, Biological Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Medicine, or Government. All five fields of study [that] are necessary to continue the revitalization of [their] land, [their] technology, and [their] citizens" (8). Despite the

difference in how one obtains a major, or area of specialization, the stress placed on the students remains very similar. Cia notes that “the smudges of fatigue under [her] eyes mark [her] as an entry-level University student” and that her “fellow classmates show similar signs of having studied late into the night” (1). The reality of this same predicament existing on contemporary university campuses can be observed simply by visiting any academic institution during exam time.

After these exams, when Cia moves from Early Studies to Government, she discovers another anxiety shared by many contemporary university students, a massive workload. When she receives her schedule from the head of her department, Professor Holt, she is informed, “Because of [her] high examination marks, [her] class list is more challenging than the others” (70). Looking at her schedule she discovers that it “has [her] attending nine” classes (71).

After starting her classes Cia notices, “That the upper-year students look less tense, which leads [her] to believe the first-year course work is designed to test not only [their] knowledge, but [their] ability to cope with stress and adversity” (204). Despite her ability to cope with the workload, Cia is chastised by her study guide, a final-year student named Ian, for isolating herself in order to complete all her work. He explains that because of the Government Studies’ emphasis on leadership “it’s not enough to get passing grades. [She] also [has] to look like everyone else while doing it” (205). Again, this scene depicts aspects of competition and psychological warfare between students. Although this is not a direct reflection of university in the United States, it bears a resemblance to it. The psychological game is one that involves showing that you are dedicated to studying but not allowing others to see if it is difficult for you.

While the means of gaining admission into university are drastically different in *The Testing* trilogy from those in the United States, the fears and anxieties faced by students remain exceedingly similar. Though contemporary students have more options and a greater sense of control over their likelihood of being admitted, the situation in *The Testing* trilogy represents the way many students feel in contemporary society. However, once at the University, the academic tasks faced by those in the trilogy are remarkably similar to those faced by contemporary students, and accurately represent the fears many students have in regard to their studies.

### **Access to Higher Education in America**

As noted by Noftsinger and Newbold, access to higher education in the United States “through legislative initiatives at both the state and federal levels [...] has improved for individuals who historically were excluded from the opportunity to participate in the pursuit of higher learning” (3). In fact, the percentages of those attaining degrees at all levels, regardless of sex or ethnicity have increased in the United States (Snyder et al. 43-5). In writing “An Overview of American Higher Education,” researchers note:

A half-century ago, college was not seen as the natural next step for most American young people who finished high school. American factories were thriving, unions were strong, and a high school graduate could reasonably expect to move right into a stable job that would support a family and allow the purchase of a car and a house. (Baum et al. 19)

This was the so-called American dream in post-WWII America, that with just a high school diploma one could obtain a good job, afford a house and a car, and could start a family. However, these jobs, and the stability that they provided, have ceased to exist. While opportunities to attend institutions of higher learning have increased in the United States, so has the necessity of attaining a university degree. As the

attainment of a bachelor's degree becomes more and more common, so too does the expectation that people attain a degree.

Despite increased enrollment at both 2-year and 4-year institutions of higher learning, rising from 45.1 percent of high school graduates in 1960 to 69.2 percent in 2015, and an increased percentage of people with university degrees, the ability to afford to attend one of these institutions is becoming increasingly difficult with the rise of fees, housing, and general cost of living (Snyder et al. 413). Adjusted for inflation in 2015-16 dollars, "the price for undergraduate tuition, fees, room, and board at public institutions rose 34 percent, and prices at private nonprofit institutions rose 26 percent" from 2005-06 to 2015-16 (403). Researchers from New York University that surveyed 1,500 high school students in 2016 note that 46 percent "acknowledge some concerns" about the cost of higher education and 21 percent "have major concerns" (Wolniak et al. 5). With the increase in cost, the ability to attain a degree that has become more vital to obtaining a job with a living wage is becoming increasingly difficult.

Stress about the cost of attending a university aside, the stress of getting into university remains widespread despite increased access, enrollment, and degree attainment. While in high school, "Roughly one third of students characterize 'pressure to do well in school,' 'pressure to do well on standardized tests,' and 'pressure to get into college' as major problems in their lives (35, 31, and 28%, respectively)" (Wolniak et al. 20). This is only those students that find these to be "major problems," when looking at these same areas of stress, a further 40, 40, and 39 percent respectively cite these areas as minor problems. This means that 75, 71, and 67 percent of students report to be dealing with stress in these three respective areas (22). This is compared to other, more traditional areas of stress, where only 46

percent of students report stress about the pressure to be popular and 37 percent about the pressure to have sex. In fact, when asked about levels of stress in fifteen different areas, pressure to do well in school, pressure to do well on standardized tests, and pressure to get into college, were the three highest areas of stress according to students, both as major and minor problems. The next highest major problem area was “personal financial concerns” at 21 percent, and the next highest minor problem area was tied at 38 percent between “concerns about your personal safety” and “relating to your peers.” From this data set, we can conclude that, of those students surveyed, the highest area of concern was related to academics. However, the reported source of stress in these areas comes mostly from the students themselves.

When asked about the source or sources of their stress, the majority of students that found pressure to do well on standardized tests and pressure to get into college, as major problems listed themselves as a source (23). Specifically, 62 percent listed themselves as one of the sources of pressure to do well on standardized tests, and 47 percent listed their parents as a source. In regard to pressure to get into college, 65 percent listed themselves and 58 percent listed their parents as sources. The only area where parents were more frequently listed as a source than the students themselves was pressure to do well in school, where they were 66 percent and 63 percent respectively. While there is no qualitative element to the data, i.e., the students do not explain why they feel stress in a particular area, be it from society, what they believe their parents want, etc., it is clear that students are immensely concerned about their futures, particularly with regards to academic performance and getting into university.

When measuring stress levels not particular to any one source, the data shows that 26 percent of these same students report “a great deal” of stress and 44 percent

report “some” stress (25). In how they are coping with the stress, 20 percent report “very well,” 41 percent “fairly well,” 28 percent “somewhat well,” 8 percent “not that well,” and 3 percent “not well at all.” While 89 percent answer in the positive, 11 percent answer in the negative, which—at over one in ten students—is cause for serious concern. What can be deduced from all of this data is the reality that high school students are under a great deal of pressure to do well academically and move on to university, which is, in fact, causing them serious stress. Although the majority of students report coping in the positive, only 6 percent of students feel no stress. While a certain level of stress can be good—demonstrating that students care and want to succeed, and might motivate them to try harder—this stress, if not dealt with properly and/or productively, can have disastrous effects.

It is undeniable that access to higher education in the United States has improved over its history, particularly post-WWII; this is clearly shown by the fact that the percentage of people attending university, across all demographics, has increased over that time period. Furthermore, the percentages of people attaining degrees have also increased over the same period of time. However, the cost of attending these institutions, particularly 4-year institutions, have increased significantly over the same period of time even when adjusted for inflation. This increased cost was a major factor for 59 percent of those students surveyed by NYU researchers that decided “not enroll in college,” whereas 33 percent listed not having the grades necessary as a major factor (34). The desire to succeed academically and move on to university is also the major cause of concern for high school students, which is in turn causing a significant amount of stress. While the majority of this stress comes from the students themselves, followed closely by stress

from their parents, it is likely, though not verifiable, that this stress has origins in the belief that in order to succeed in life one must attend university and get a degree.

Though the start of *The Testing* is immediately concerned with the prospect of even having a chance to be admitted to the University, i.e., concerned with being selected as a candidate for The Testing, the rest of the novel focuses on the concern of doing well on standardized tests and practical exams, the same concerns faced by today's high school students. While the events that take place in *The Testing* in relation to Ryme are fictional and dramatized, the idea of a student taking their own life out of fear of failure is not unheard of in the United States. The events in *Independent Study* and *Graduation Day* depict the difficulties faced by university students and bring about an Objectivist eutopian enclave, respectively. However, the primary social concern that this trilogy deals with is access to higher education in the sense of the concerns and stresses facing prospective students.

### **The Eutopian Enclave**

By its close, *The Testing* trilogy presents a eutopian enclave. President Collindar has made an announcement to the nation that The Testing will cease to exist, and the selection process for future university students will no longer involve The Testing. However, it is not the case that an entire dystopian system has been replaced by a eutopian system; after all, it was Collindar that wanted to require all prospective students to undertake The Testing, and she remains president of the United Commonwealth. *The Testing* provides moments where Cia communicates her feelings about The Testing being wrong, at least in its methods, particularly when Malachi dies and while trying to get back to Tosu City in the final practical exam. However, her thoughts about ending The Testing are limited because she is so

concerned with staying alive and passing. It is only in *Independent Study* and *Graduation Day* that Cia actively seeks to end The Testing for future generations.

Although things do not go exactly according to plan in the final chapters of *Graduation Day*, Cia's mission is ultimately successful. The revelation that Dr. Barnes was a kind of anti-hero who sought to end The Testing and that it was actually Collindar that wished to subject more young adults to The Testing prevents the narrative from ending in a complete eutopia. By presenting only the eutopian enclave that The Testing will no longer take place, the trilogy reveals that its primary social concern is not the betterment of the entire society, but the ending of one particular practice. Unlike *The Hunger Games* trilogy, where the government's policy of institutionalized socioeconomic inequality affects nearly all of the citizens necessitating a radical change in the entire government, The Testing only affects a very limited number of citizens. By providing an Objectivist solution to this particular social problem, the ushering in of a possible eutopia is rendered unnecessary.

### **The Objectivist Solution**

In providing an Objectivist solution to the social concern of access to education, it might appear that *The Testing* trilogy is advocating that assassination is an effective means of bringing about change. While true to the extent that it does indeed eliminate the individuals responsible for creating/maintaining the problem, the trilogy is not actively advocating assassination, but instead the notion that those responsible for creating and/or maintaining such policies must be removed from office if progress is to be made. Thanks in large part to his deal with Collindar, Dr. Barnes does not just run The Testing, he represents it; if you want to end The Testing you must end him. So, in providing an Objectivist solution to the inaccessibility of education, the message to young adult readers is, in part, that you must remove those

responsible. However, this is only one element of the political solution the trilogy provides.

The trilogy supplies the young adult reader with a plethora of reasons why The Testing is wrong and should end, chief among these being state induced violence against its citizens and the unnecessarily stressful nature of The Testing. It does not take a philosopher to recognize that acceptance to a university should not involve life or death situations. In giving an Objectivist political solution, the trilogy suggests that reform must take place, not just the removal of those responsible for bad policies. We see this happening when Cia informs us that “The president and her office will work closely with the Education Department to create a new selection system for the University, one that will be the same for both Tosu City and colony students” (*Graduation Day* 288). In doing so, the trilogy informs the reader that access must be equal. While the reasons for unequal access in the United States differ from those in the United Commonwealth, an equal system of access is paramount to any Objectivist solution, and this solution can only be achieved within the United Commonwealth because of Cia’s actions, which are motivated by a desire for change that is in-line with Objectivism.

As Dr. Barnes explains to Cia during his confession, she was his choice as the subject of his deal with Collindar, noting that she “is unlike the type of leader President Collindar and the rest of the Testing committee insists will be necessary for [their] country to survive the future” (266). It is particularly because of how she thinks and why she makes decisions that Dr. Barnes chose Cia to be his and Collindar’s test subject. The point being communicated to young adult readers is that it takes a particular ethical system to bring about positive change. We see this ethical system on display throughout the trilogy, from Cia’s decision to trust Tomas to her

willingness to accept her mission from Collindar. Cia never wants to commit violence against another person, however, she is willing to do so in self-defense and to defend others when physical violence, or the threat of physical violence, is used. In presenting a protagonist that thinks in this particularly Objectivist way and is capable of bringing about meaningful change, the trilogy promotes Objectivism and Objectivist solutions to social concerns, particularly in relation to higher education.

## Chapter 3 – The Matched Trilogy: Creative Censorship

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The *Matched* trilogy presents many dystopian social issues, all rooted in the government's control over the lives of its citizens; however, the one that is most influential to the narrative is creative censorship. As Cassia notes early in *Matched*, the Society "decided our culture was too cluttered. They created commissions to choose the hundred best of everything: Hundred Songs, Hundred Paintings, Hundred Stories, Hundred Poems. The rest were eliminated. Gone forever" (29). At this point in the trilogy even Cassia agrees with this decision because she believes nothing can be fully appreciated when there are so many options to choose from. In the Society the number always remains at one hundred for any given creative outlet; none are ever removed, and none are ever created. The creation of new material is prevented by two major means: no one being assigned jobs like writer, painter, poet, etc., and by it being illegal to perform any of these tasks in one's private time, for even private time is never really private.

Despite the government outlawing creativity, there are those willing to be creative or possess creative materials outside the Hundreds. This includes Cassia's grandfather, who passes on the Thomas and Tennyson poems to Cassia, and all of those that are aware of the story of the pilot, a reimagining of the story of Sisyphus. Nonetheless, if the Society were to discover any of these things it could result in the individual or individuals being reclassified from full citizen to Aberration. However, because of the actions of Cassia and the members of the Rising, an Objectivist solution is presented with a eutopian enclave in which creativity will be allowed again, and the hope that the dystopia can become a eutopia.

## Creative Censorship in the Society

Creative censorship in the Society is absolute, nothing new is allowed to be created and possession of anything new or anything discovered from the past is a punishable offence; however, creativity does still exist in some forms. While the *Matched* trilogy is never explicit as to why creativity is not allowed, there are moments that suggest that part of the reason is rooted in a concern of anything that could be seen to undermine the Society and a concern for people valuing material possessions. While the Society's concern over any dissenting behavior is rather self-evident in their obsession with control over the daily lives of their citizens, the concern over material possessions is evident in the fact that no one owns or can buy distinctive personal objects, save for one artifact that may be passed down from one person to the next in a family. This is how Cassia comes to be in possession of the poems, they were saved and hidden by her great grandmother and passed down to her grandfather who gave them to Cassia when her father refused to keep them. The fear of reclassification is effective, leading Cassia to destroy the poems, but not before committing them to memory.

Cassia's knowledge of the poems is not the only secret creativity being preserved in the Society; Ky is also in possession of the story of the pilot and the ability to write. Despite the story of the pilot being a tool to spread knowledge of the Rising's existence, it remains a creative object and a form of art, even if its existence is not physical. Knowledge of an artistic expression, especially one that can be passed orally is ideal in the Society because it lacks any physicality. However, the ability to write, by hand, is another way for creativity to exist, though this is far more dangerous because it requires the individual being in physical possession of the

creative object. Nonetheless, as Cassia and Ky's relationship begins, he teaches her how to write and presses her to express herself creatively.

Escaping from the society in her search for Ky allows Cassia's creativity to flourish and upon returning to the Society on the orders of the Rising, she aids in creating a hidden art gallery that encourages others to embrace their creativity. Because the Society is so busy trying to control the plague and combat the Rising, Cassia's efforts are successful for a time. However, with the end of the war between the Society and the Rising, the trilogy presents a eutopian enclave. Now that the Society no longer controls the citizens' actions, at least not to the same extent as they did before, creativity will again be allowed to flourish.

### **Creative Censorship in America**

Creative censorship in America is nowhere near the dystopian level that we see taking place in the *Matched* trilogy. Yet, there is no denying that it has taken place, and, given the current political environment, there is reason to fear it might happen again. According to the ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union), "American society has always been deeply ambivalent about" whether or not the government should "ever have the authority to dictate to its citizens what they may or may not listen to, read, or watch" ("Freedom of Expression"). A list of "Notable First Amendment Court Cases" compiled by the American Library Association (ALA) places all of the most notable cases within the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.<sup>68</sup> As the ACLU notes, the 1873 Comstock Law was one of the biggest overt acts of government censorship in the United States, and it is because of the Comstock Law that many of the cases listed by the ALA needed to be brought to court. The Comstock Law, taking its name from its chief proponent Anthony Comstock, was a law of moral censorship,

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<sup>68</sup> Source listed in the bibliography under "Notable First Amendment Court Cases."

the vagueness of which allowed for the prohibition of the sale and/or possession of a vast array of items that did not fall under Anthony Comstock's Victorian interpretation of morality. In contemporary America, however, the First Amendment along with the legal precedent set down by the challenges to the Comstock Law, prevents moral censorship in regard to artistic expression. Instead, censorship in America is mostly limited to that which is self-imposed or group-imposed.

The ACLU lists two principals when determining the right to freedom of expression: content neutrality and/or if the expression would "cause direct and imminent harm." While the latter is rather self-explanatory, and often explained by the example that one cannot shout "fire" in a crowded building unless there is a fire, it also extends to individuals or groups that call for violence to be conducted against other individuals or groups. Content neutrality prevents the government from limiting expression "because any listener, or even the majority of a community, is offended by its content." While both principals are important, given the current American political environment, content neutrality has come to the forefront as a major concern; however, the concern is not necessarily that the government will pass laws that directly limit expression, but that individuals or groups will limit other individuals or groups through coercion and fear.

Despite strong legal precedent preventing the infringement of freedom of expression, there is still fear that the government, other groups, or individuals will silence people or prevent them from expressing themselves. This is nowhere more prevalent in the United States than in the present political environment. From nearly the moment he announced his candidacy for President of the United States on June 16, 2015, Donald Trump has been at war with most of the press. In his campaign against "Fake News," the then candidate and now President has made hundreds of

accusations, complaints, and comments about what he deems to be “Fake News.” Constantly defending themselves whenever any particular journalist or media organization was dubbed “Fake News,” a large-scale media protest was staged on August 16, 2018 (Bauder). Online and television media sources reported that nearly 350 newspapers across the United States took part in the protest by plastering their editorial pages with articles defending the freedom of the press and criticizing the President’s treatment of the media. In response, Trump took to twitter to attack the media in a series of tweets, in one he stated: “THE FAKE NEWS MEDIA IS THE OPPOSITION PARTY. It is very bad for our Great Country...BUT WE ARE WINNING!” (@realDonaldTrump).<sup>69</sup> While the entire composition of the so-called “Fake News Media” is not immediately clear, previous tweets have singled out *The New York Times*, *MSNBC*, *CNN*, and many others. However, one particular Trump tweet from May 9, 2018 read in part: “91% of the Network News about me is negative (Fake). Why do we work so hard in working with the media when it is corrupt? Take away credentials?” (@realDonaldTrump).<sup>70</sup> Based on the use of parentheses surrounding the word “Fake” immediately following the word “negative,” Trump is clearly suggesting that all media about him that is negative is inherently “Fake.”

In addition to making the entire world question the meaning of the word “Fake,” and a very probable misunderstanding between journalism, punditry, fact, and opinion, Trump gives many a reason to fear that the freedom of expression in the United States might be under attack. Although he has yet to take any serious action to prevent his unapproved outlets from reporting, his tweets suggest that he is willing to

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<sup>69</sup> Original use of the ellipsis and excessive capitalization (full citation provided in the bibliography).

<sup>70</sup> All original grammar (full citation provided in the bibliography).

consider doing so. Furthermore, as a Quinnipiac University Poll from August 14, 2018 reported, 51% of Republican voters believe “that the media is the enemy of the people rather than an important part of democracy” and that “44% of American voters are concerned that President Trump’s criticism of the news media will lead to violence against people who work in the media” (Quinnipiac University). With statistics like those, it would be hard to deny that there is both a fear of, and desires for, censorship in the United States.

### **The Eutopian Enclave & the Hope of Eutopia**

The eutopian enclave in the *Matched* trilogy is realized when the war between the Society and the Rising ends and a cure to the mutated plague is discovered. Perhaps not surprisingly, it is, in a way, creativity, that is responsible for a cure being found. It is only when looking at a book of flowers painted by Anna and a picture of a flower drawn by Cassia’s mother, that Cassia realizes that the flower has been counted twice in the possible ingredients for a cure. When the data is adjusted to count the flower, a sego lily, only once, it is listed as the most likely ingredient. So it is, in a way, the creativity of Anna and Cassia’s mother that are responsible for them finding a cure, ending the plague, and ending what remains of the war.

Yet, the presentation of the eutopian enclave comes when the reader is informed that everyone will be allowed to vote on who the new leader will be, giving everyone a voice on what form of government they will have in the future. While one particular type of government is not guaranteed, it is clear that people will gain a significant number of new freedoms previously denied to them by the Society. By concluding before a new leader is announced and with Cassia and Ky both admitting that they voted for Anna, the *Matched* trilogy also presents the possibility that a eutopian government might eventually take the place of the Society.

## The Objectivist Solution

The Objectivist solution presented in the *Matched* trilogy is a returning of individual freedoms to the people. In presenting a society where individual freedom is almost entirely removed, the trilogy warns of what could become of a society when they begin surrendering their freedoms for security. Furthermore, it suggests that relinquishing even the seemingly smallest of freedoms can have disastrous effects because if we lose our creative freedom, then we will also lose the ability to invent and progress. Losing the ability to create is a problem for many political and ethical philosophies; however, Objectivism takes particular issue with censorship, so in presenting a solution that involves the end of government censorship of creative expression, the *Matched* trilogy is presenting an Objectivist solution.

While people in contemporary America do not actively face creative censorship on a regular basis, the present political environment gives reason to fear that other forms of censorship might be on the horizon. The *Matched* trilogy does not provide young adult readers with a direct solution specific to America's present problem, but it does provide a solution to dealing with problems of censorship in general. If the reader takes Cassia to be a role model for their actions, the young adult reader is taught to act and think Objectively, given that Cassia acts and thinks like an Objectivist. The reader is taught to never relinquish freedom, to respect the importance of creativity, and to respect the creativity of others. Moreover, the trilogy informs the reader that if their freedoms are under attack or taken from them that they should rise up and challenge their government. In presenting Cassia, a protagonist that thinks in an Objectivist way—that individual freedom is paramount to an ideal society—the trilogy promotes Objectivism.

## Chapter 4 – The Divergent Trilogy: Identity Politics

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The entirety of society is consumed by identity politics in the *Divergent* trilogy, by which I mean the act of defining individuals based on their shared differences from other individuals or groups. In the first two novels, *Divergent* and *Insurgent*, these identity politics are localized in the city of Chicago, and are manifest in the faction system. In the final novel, *Allegiant*, we are informed that the same symptom that is responsible for the need to have factions, damaged genetics, has also given way for identity politics in the rest of what remains of the United States. In revealing to young adult readers that a war had taken place based on genetic purity, i.e., a war about individuals' genetic identity—an uncontrollable factor of birth—the trilogy warns them of the dangers of a type of identity politics that only stresses difference and how that can lead to extreme conflict. However, the trilogy does not discredit the importance of individual identity, how one defines themselves and what makes them different from other people. Instead, the trilogy warns about the potentially dangerous effects of groupthink, the blind acceptance of a leader's ideas because you share an element of your identity, and the horrors that can be brought about when the character, quality, and worth of an individual or group is based only on how they define themselves or others define them.

In the *Divergent* trilogy, there are a host of individuals and organizations, including the United States government, that are responsible for creating and maintaining the dystopian state of society. The political decisions responsible for this dystopian society, made by these individuals and organizations, are all rooted in some form of identity politics as described above. In the city these identities take the form of the five factions, and in the outside world they are comprised of the genetically

pure and genetically damaged. Although people might be perfectly happy with the group they share an element of their individual identity with—or might have a sense of pride in that element of their identity—the fact remains that they are forced by the society to be a member of a particular identity group. In presenting this social issue, the *Divergent* trilogy asks the reader to question this type of identity politics, and by means of supplying the hope that a eutopian society will emerge, provides an Objectivist solution to identity politics that are divisive.

### **Identity Politics in the *Divergent* Trilogy**

There are two primary forms of identity displayed in the *Divergent* trilogy, those that are chosen and those that are given, or, to put it another way, forms of identity based on how one defines themselves and how others define them. Individuals living in the city are allowed to pick their faction, which will form the major basis of their identity, or form how they see themselves and how others see them. This is compared to those that live outside the city, who are assigned their identity, pure or damaged, based on their genes. While one's ability to choose their identity, or how they define themselves, initially seems marginally more preferable, the trilogy shows that when a source of identity has a body of politics surrounding it, both selected and assigned identity can be detrimental.

In the city, every person is a member of one of six groups: five factions and those without a faction, the factionless. Each of the five factions is based on a moral virtue: Abnegation, selflessness; Dauntless, bravery; Erudite, intelligence; Candor, honesty; and Amity, peacefulness. Individuals in this society define themselves and each other according to the moral virtue of their given faction. Furthermore, each faction performs specific roles in the society that are representative of their faction's virtue. Valuing selflessness, the Abnegation serve as the government, conduct

refurbishment projects for the city, and aid the impoverished factionless. The bravery of the Dauntless makes them ideal to serve as a police force and as guardians of the city walls. Intelligence makes the Erudite especially competent at being inventors and teachers. Because the Candor value honesty they work in law. The peacefulness of the members of Amity allows them to serve as ideal counselors and caretakers. The factionless are formed by people that have failed to live according to the rules of their original faction, often as a result of failing to pass their factions initiation. Not having any official social organization, the factionless are forced to fill the gaps in society and serve as bus drivers, train operators, and sanitation workers.

Children are raised according to their faction of birth, but they learn about all five during their education at a co-faction institution and through their daily interactions with one another. During this time, they also learn to fear becoming factionless. Once a year all of the 16-year-old students are administered an aptitude test that reveals the faction the individual is most suited for. The test is impossible to prepare for because it is forbidden to speak about the conditions of the test. Even if one did discover the nature of the test it is further complicated by being a simulation where the individual is unaware that they are in a simulation. People are not allowed to discuss the results of their aptitude tests or seek advisement on which faction they should choose. Of course, they could ask a parent or adult about a particular faction, but anything they would need to know to aid their decision has already been taught to them. Only having a day between the aptitude test and the Choosing Ceremony serves to reinforce the notion that they should trust the test; however, every individual is free to choose whatever faction they wish.

Because the society is unaware of any existence beyond their borders, they do not recognize themselves as members of the once-Chicago in relation to the greater

state of Illinois and so forth. To them their society is the entirety of existence and therefore the first identifying factor that separates the individual from the collective whole, i.e., makes individuals distinct from the society at large, is their membership in a faction. While positives come from the faction system, people appear happy and the society is productive, the focus on collective identity can have negative effects. These take the form of wide-sweeping and generalized stereotypes for people in each faction. Those in Abnegation are called “Stiff” because of their grey clothes and the perception that they are boring do-gooders. Those in Erudite are considered nerds that are only concerned with the pursuit of knowledge. Members of Dauntless are believed to be aggressive brutes with no sense of personal safety. Amity are considered too optimistic and lacking initiative. Candor are seen as obsessed with the truth, regardless of how that truth might affect someone. These stereotypes are responsible for a majority of the prejudices in the trilogy and lead to Jeanine believing that Erudite should rule. While the chosen identities in the city allow for significant issues to arise, the assigned identities outside the city also cause many issues to arise.

As previously noted, the two major identities outside the city are based on being genetically pure and genetically damaged, and the dichotomy of these identities is entirely responsible for the post-apocalyptic state of the United States. When Tris and her friends exit the city and find the Bureau of Genetic Welfare, Tris discovers the full truth behind the existence of her city. David explains:

[...] despite the peace and prosperity that had reigned in this country for nearly a century, it seemed advantageous to our ancestors to reduce the risk of these undesirable qualities showing up in our population by correcting them. In other words, by editing humanity. (*Allegiant* 121-2)

This decision to genetically edit humanity led to the purity war that wiped out nearly 50 percent of the nation's population, not necessarily because some people had

become more violent, though that would have helped, but because it was a war between two identities (123). Later this identity distinction gives rise to the Bureau treating those that are genetically damaged as second-class citizens. Although quality of life is dependent on one's assigned identity outside the city, they are free to think whatever they want, though the opinions and abilities of those that are genetically damaged are likely to be perceived as lesser than those that are genetically pure.

Those outside the city are condemned to their identity by the product of their birth, forever judged, be it positively or negatively, by society for something they had no control over. The people inside the city enjoy the freedom to choose their identity; however, they are forced to adhere to the conventions of their faction, both in how they act and how they think. While this is not a problem for many in the city because the vast majority are genetically damaged and will naturally align with one of the five factions and the way that faction thinks and behaves, it is a major problem for those that are Divergent like Tris. Being Divergent means that Tris's personality and way of thinking do not naturally favor one particular faction, so no matter which faction she chose, she would eventually diverge from that faction's dominant way of thinking.

As we learn in *Allegiant*, being Divergent is actually the natural state of humanity, implying to the young adult reader that the complexity of an individual is so great that humans cannot be reduced to a single defining trait, assigned or chosen. The dichotomy between those that live in the city and those that live in the rest of the fictional version of the United States is that identity groups in the city are chosen by the individuals whereas the identity groups outside the city are given to people by society. In the real United States, we see both types of identification taking place, where some people are, to some extent, able to choose the groups that they identify with while others are given labels by society.

## Identity Politics in the United States

The idea that the identities of an entire nation might be narrowed down to only two groups, or four, or five, is not distinctively dystopian. A small number of broad identity groups that are essential to how individuals see one another and how individuals self-identify are manifest in nearly every country in the world. Consider the fact that we measure a national population by various binary factors: citizens and non-citizens, native born and foreign born, and male and female. People are also categorized into groups where there are multiple identities, similar to the faction system, sometimes derivative of a larger group, and sometimes completely independent. Some forms of how an individual is defined by others or how they define themselves are chosen and others are assigned, but like those individuals in the text that are *Divergent*, real humans are much more complex than a single defining trait. However, it is often the case that a dominant aspect of one's identity, chosen or assigned, forms the basis of their politics, or their assumed politics.

While identity politics in the form of marginalized individuals grouping together in the United States can be used to achieve equality and combat great evils, the concerns of the *Divergent* trilogy are not about this type of identity politics, but the type of identity politics that stress difference with the intent of sowing division. This dangerous form of identity politics is not for the betterment of any one group, but for the detriment of another. Individuals or groups that utilize this type of identity politics often make assumptions about someone based on what they perceive to be their identity, i.e., stereotyping.

Identity politics of this nature, and the stereotypes they generate, eliminate the individual from the equation because they are assumed to share politics based on what others believe their identity to be. This is particularly prominent when looking at

identity politics in regard to race. As Walter Benn Michaels argues, “our current notion of cultural diversity—trumpeted as the repudiation of racism and biological essentialism—in fact grew out of and perpetuates the very concepts it congratulates itself on having escaped” (7). While this is, at its worse, a case of victim blaming, it is also an unfortunate possible negative side effect of a form of identity politics that seeks to achieve equality. While this form of identity politics seeks to improve the conditions of a particular group or groups—those effected by racism in the above cited quote—it also inadvertently gives those bigoted individuals or groups a target to point at if they feel that their privileges are being eradicated for the benefit of someone else.

In considering other negative effects that arise from a society obsession with identity, Mark Lilla<sup>71</sup> imagines a new university student in the United States with an interest in political questions:

She will first be taught that understanding herself depends on exploring the different aspects of her identity, something she now discovers she has. An identity that, she also learns, has already been largely shaped for her by various social and political forces. This is an important lesson, from which she is likely to draw the conclusion that the aim of education is not progressively to become a self – the task of a lifetime, Kierkegaard thought – through engagement with the wider world. Rather, one engages with the world and particularly politics for the limited aim of understanding and affirming what one already is.  
(Lilla)

For Lilla, the problem is not that this fictitious student has become aware of her shared experiences based on an identity, but that she is taught what her identity is.

Identity politics reduces this student to an identity that she has been assigned, not the identity she chooses or discovers. Lilla argues that this has led to a situation where “conversations that once might have begun, ‘I think A, and here is my argument,’

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<sup>71</sup> It should be noted that Lilla has become a controversial figure in both the academy and in the public political domain. For more about what has made Lilla controversial, see Conroy (fully citation provided in the bibliography).

now take the form: ‘Speaking as an X, I am offended that you claim B.’ This makes perfect sense if you believe that [assigned or taught] identity determines everything.” This kind of mindset, according to both Lilla and Michaels, ultimately results in the inability for individuals or groups to partake in productive conversations or debate with those of other identities, chosen or assigned because neither side is willing to accept the possibility that their adversary’s claim might hold some validity.

No longer is it the case where identity politics only reflects the political positions of one particular group for the betterment and equality of said group. Now identity politics can take the form of individuals grouping other individuals together as a means for politicians and the ignorant—the two are not mutually exclusive—to herd people into groups in order to score political points with voters or to provide a scapegoat. We might think back to the previous Chapter where it was noted that Donald Trump has placed 91% of the media into a group he has dubbed “Fake News” in order to both discredit those that dare to criticize him and to score points with his political base. Likewise, during the 2016 American Presidential Election, former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright stated at an event held for Hillary Clinton that “There’s a special place in hell for women who don’t help each other!” clearly lumping all women into a single group with the intent of pressuring them into supporting Clinton (McCarthy). This is to say, identity politics does not only exist as the politics of *an* identity but also as the politics *of* identity.

### **The Eutopian Enclave & the Hope of Eutopia**

The eutopian enclave of an end to identity politics is presented in the final chapters of *Allegiant* when Four informs the reader about what happened after Tris’s death. We learn that the experiment has ended, that the factions no longer exist, and that the city is open to everyone. However, this eutopian enclave, like the hope of a

eutopia manifesting in place of the dystopian society, is limited to the city of Chicago. While people no longer chose an identity by picking a faction, nor are they assigned one by the state of their genetic profile, this eutopian element only exists in Chicago; the rest of the United States, to the best of our knowledge, remains the same.

With the absence of the faction system and no concern over peoples' genetics, the people of Chicago can focus on other matters, like rebuilding their city. The time once spent testing for factions, selecting a faction, and completing initiation can be put to other uses. While the trilogy does not suggest that all bias and prejudices have been eliminated, it does imply that the society is better off now than it was, even before Jeanine took control of the government. However, it is the change in government and the removal of the Bureau's influence on the city that has allowed for the city to exist in such a way, suggesting that there might be hope for this seemingly eutopian society to spread throughout the rest of the United States.

### **The Objectivist Solution**

The Objectivist solution, evident by the eutopian enclave and hope for a eutopia, is the product of Tris's actions. In providing an Objectivist solution to the issue of identity politics, the *Divergent* trilogy advocates the promotion of the individual over the group. This idea is mainly rooted in the depiction of Tris as a character, her actions, and the motivations behind her actions; however, it is also represented in the government sanctioning of identity groups. Both inside and outside the city, these dominant identity groups determine what one can do, what jobs they can hold, who they can socialize with, and how they are viewed by the rest of society, suggesting to the young adult reader how identity groups can be detrimental to society. In the city, this leads to those that do not perfectly fit the mold of their faction, usually a Divergent, to end up factionless, meaning that they will live in

poverty and be considered an outcast of society. In the rest of the United States, having damaged genes will result in much the same thing, as those without genetic purity are considered second-class citizens. The Objectivist solution to this problem, though only realized within the city, is to eliminate the existence of these dominant identity groups and judge individuals based on their own actions and beliefs, not those associated with their identity group.

As previously mentioned, the push for this reform is primarily communicated to the young adult reader by and through Tris. Tris, who the reader is intended to empathize and associate with, is literally genetically incapable of conforming to a singular identity; so too would be the case if the reader were in Tris's place given that being Divergent means being human without genetic alterations. The reader is meant to sympathize with Tris's plight of not knowing their place in the world given that they are both coming-of-age, discovering themselves, and do not want to be defined by what others think they are or should be. From her decision to join Dauntless in *Divergent* to her decision to stop the Bureau from releasing memory serum in *Allegiant*, Tris fights for people to have the right to be whomever they want without prejudice. To Tris, people are individuals, not the amalgamation of any group they identify or are identified with. People must be free to make their own decisions without being coerced out of fear from the group and should be judged by their own actions.

While Tris informs the young adult reader to avoid prejudice based on stereotypes and to judge individuals based on their actions, the presentation of government sanctioned identity groups warns the reader against state sponsored and promoted politics of identity. The solution to identity politics in the *Divergent* trilogy

asks the reader to reconsider their own society and their own prejudices, and to act like Tris, i.e., in an Objectivist manner.

## **Conclusion**

## The Phantom Menace

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Many thought, and probably wished, that we had heard and seen the last of Ayn Rand's ideas when Alan Greenspan left the Federal Reserve in 2006, yet with the financial crisis in 2008, interest in her philosophical writings and fiction, particularly *Atlas Shrugged*, has surged. With her work influencing so many high-profile politicians and members of the Trump cabinet, it would appear that Rand might be more influential than ever. While Objectivist groups have denounced drawing any correlation between Rand and Trump with articles like "The Anti-Intellectuality of Donald Trump: Why Ayn Rand Would Have Despised a President Trump" (Ghate) and "Which Ayn Rand Villain is Donald Trump?" (Biddle), those outside the circle have been quick to note the influence of Rand and her works on Trump and his administration. Without listing them all, some articles include: "Ayn Rand-Acolyte Donald Trump Stacks his Cabinet with Fellow Objectivists" (Hohmann), "Welcome to Bizarro World: Ayn Rand, Donald Trump, and Private Capital's Assault on Public Institutions" (Schwartz), "The New Age of Ayn Rand: How She Won Over Trump and Silicon Valley" (Freedland) and "Trump Administration Embraces Ayn Rand's Disdain for the Masses" (Debrabander). While these later articles seem to confirm Rand's direct influence in contemporary politics, the former articles suggest that Trump and those that agree with him are not true Objectivists.

While Riggenbach's categories for authors influenced by Rand would place the authors of *The Hunger Games*, *The Testing*, *Divergent*, and the *Matched* trilogies in the category of Second Generation of Randian influence because they "began publishing in the first years of the new century," there is no evidence to support that the authors of these trilogies were directly influenced by Rand's works (105).

However, given the thematic and philosophical similarities of these works with Rand's fiction and non-fiction, there is sufficient evidence to suggest Surface and Deep influence. Even if these authors were not directly or indirectly, knowingly or unknowingly, influenced by Rand, their works follow in the structural, character, thematic, and philosophical traditions of Rand's *magnum opus*, *Atlas Shrugged*.

Contemporary YA critical dystopias prove to be an ideal place for texts of an Objectivist nature to emerge, given the fact that almost all include governments that violate the rights of their citizens and limit their freedoms in conjunction with a protagonist that plays a pivotal role in abolishing said government. Rand presents a dystopian government in *Atlas Shrugged* by depicting a collectivist government operating on an aristocracy of pull, i.e., political and professional nepotism. The reasons Rand's imagined government is able to appear considerably worse than that of the contemporaneous reader's own government is, in part, achieved by Rand placing her fictional society within the confines of a near distant American future. While the depiction of the quality of life for the average citizen is considerably worse than that of the average American in 1957—continuous employment is exceedingly difficult to find, and they are experiencing hyperinflation—this is further compounded by the allusions of the fictional American government is similar to the contemporaneous Soviet Union.

Given Rand's personal experiences in Russia before and during the rise of the Soviet Union, and her outspoken criticism of the Soviet government, it is abundantly clear that Rand intended American readers to view her fictional government as worse than their own. Furthermore, Rand benefitted from the politics and political climate of the Cold War, where the Soviet Union was viewed as antithetical to the United States. Both culturally and professionally, it was considered unpopular and unpatriotic to be

sympathetic or supportive of the Soviet Union or any of their political or social practices, making it exceedingly easy for Rand to convey her fictional government as worse than that of the contemporaneous American government.

While governments of *The Hunger Games*, *The Testing*, *Divergent*, and the *Matched* trilogies do not directly allude to any particular contemporary government that is in direct geopolitical conflict with the United States, they too are able to communicate dystopia to the contemporary American reader. This is achieved by creating societies that exist in the same geographical confines as the United States, and that are either immediately or eventually revealed to be far worse than contemporary American society. Regardless of the forms these governments take, be it politically left or right wing in nature, be it a dictatorship, a limited democracy, a non-elected bureaucracy, an oligarchy, or something else, it is essential for the government of a dystopian text to be broadly totalitarian in nature. Because of Objectivism's inherent desire for limited government and individual freedoms, works that present a political dystopia will always be vulnerable to an Objectivist critique. While this does not necessitate that all dystopian works culminate in the establishment of an Objectivist government, if the work is to maintain a government and appear less dystopian it must move in the direction of Objectivism. This is because Objectivism is the organized antithesis of totalitarianism; the unorganized antithesis obviously being anarchy, which would result in no government and would likely perpetuate a dystopian society. This is not to say that all works that present a totalitarian political dystopia are, by default, Objectivist; instead, it is to recognize that works that present a totalitarian political dystopia will appear to be Objectively influenced if their dystopian government is to be eliminated.

*The Hunger Games*, *The Testing*, the *Matched*, and the *Divergent* trilogies can all be categorized as critical dystopias because they conclude by presenting a “eutopian enclave or [hold] out hope that the dystopia can be overcome and replaced with a eutopia (“US Eutopias” 222). *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent* both achieve this qualifier by eliminating the dystopian systems of government that are presented at the start of the text, and in the case of *Divergent*, all subsequent forms of government that are presented in the interim. *The Testing* and the *Matched* trilogies on the other hand, only hold “out hope that the dystopia can be overcome and replaced with a eutopia.” While both trilogies strongly suggest that this will be the case, in *The Testing* President Collindar has announced that *The Testing* will no longer take place and in the *Matched* trilogy the citizens are voting for their new government, there is no guarantee that the society will become more eutopian. Nonetheless, all four trilogies conclude with the society being more Objectivist than it was at the start of the text.

By virtue of no longer being totalitarian, it could be argued that these governments, by default, would more closely resemble any liberal alternative; however, when looked at in conjunction with the motivations of the protagonists, it is clear that an ethically Objectivist society is the goal for these characters. The case is the same in Rand’s *Atlas Shrugged*, where the American government has seemingly collapsed and there is no guarantee that an Objectivist government will rise in its place. However, given the actions, goals, and ethical beliefs of the protagonists, it is clear that they hope an Objectivist government will replace the previous totalitarian government. While the compatriots of the protagonists in these YA critical dystopias might be seeking only to achieve any liberal alternative to their totalitarian dystopia,

the actions, motivations, and decisions of the protagonists are inherently Objectivist, suggesting that they desire a government that is congruent with their ethics.

In Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*, the protagonist, Dagny Taggart, is not a fully developed Randian heroine at the start of the text, though strong evidence is shown that she has Objectivist leanings. In addition to her rational decision making, Dagny's Objectivist leanings are primarily communicated through her work ethic and her unwillingness to sacrifice others for her own gain. While Dagny is indeed inconsistent as a Randian heroine during much of the text—this is attributed to her willingness to continue to work in the collectivist world—by the end of the text she does become a fully developed Randian heroine. Though the rebellion in *Atlas Shrugged* is a silent rebellion, removing all of the competent heads of industry in order to stop the engine of the world, it is not the act of waging war against the government that makes Dagny a Randian heroine. Instead, it is her ability to recognize that robbing the collectivist society of the producers will equally result in society falling apart and the government losing control that makes her finally achieve the status of a Randian heroine.

While the protagonists in all four of these contemporary American YA critical dystopias do face violent rebellions, the protagonists also, like Dagny, begin their journeys with only some evidence of an Objectivist leaning and are not fully developed Randian heroines. All of the protagonists in these trilogies are at least half Dagny's age when their respective stories commence; they are, by definition, young adults that are still developing their ethical frameworks. Although they begin their stories with varying levels of Objectivist leanings, they are all fully developed Randian heroines by the conclusion of their texts. This steady development results in them being more accurately called coming-of-age Randian heroines, given that their ethical frameworks are not changing, as is the case with Dagny, but are developing

throughout the text. Given the ethical philosophy that these protagonists operate in accordance with by the end of their respective trilogies, it is clear that these characters are striving for their societies to be specifically more Objectivist.

In striving for a more Objectivist society, these YA critical dystopias present readers with Objectivist solutions to contemporary social concerns, all of which require a limiting of the government's influence over the lives of its citizens. In these four trilogies their governments are directly responsible for the particular social concern presented. The issues of socioeconomic inequality in *The Hunger Games*, access to higher education in *The Testing*, creative censorship in *Matched*, and identity politics in *Divergent*, are all the products of government policy. The Objectivist solution presented is consistent across the trilogies: make a change to the government and give power back to the people. However, this solution is only brought about because of the actions of the protagonists. While alone this solution could be attributed to any number of political or philosophical theories, being the desire and product of Objectivist protagonists the solution is inherently Objectivist. This is depicted by how each protagonist comes to the conclusion that this is the best solution, in each case they apply their Objectivist ethics to the social concern and act accordingly.

Crucially, these contemporary American YA critical dystopias represent and provide evidence of an Objectivist resurgence in both literature and American society. While the full extent of the impact of these specific works on American society is currently immeasurable, and is likely to remain so, they do stand to have a similar impact on the future as *Atlas Shrugged* and other notable dystopian works that have influenced generations of thinkers. While it is highly unlikely that the authors of these works will obtain a cult-like following specifically because of the Objectivist

philosophy evident in their works, the works themselves have the potential to be artifacts that reveal the thoughts and concerns of American society in a historical context.

As this thesis has demonstrated, the legacy of Ayn Rand is alive and well in these contemporary YA critical dystopias. Furthermore, these works are communicating to an entire generation of young people that Objectivism is the ideal political and ethical philosophy, and that it provides a ready-made solution to our current social concerns. While many academics might believe that Rand “is not a philosopher at all and should not be taken seriously,” they are highly mistaken (Cleary). As Cleary states, “We need to treat the Ayn Rand phenomenon seriously. Ignoring it won’t make it go away.” Rand and her philosophy of Objectivism have been influencing authors, readers, politicians, and policy for decades, and it paramount that we acknowledge that fact.

While the body of scholarship about Rand and Objectivism has slowly begun to grow in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a more concerted effort is absolutely necessary if we are to fathom the extent of her influence. Dismissing Rand as a charlatan or treating her ideas as “so extreme that [...] they read as parody,” would be to ignore someone that is clearly contributing to the current American narrative (Cleary). If Donald Trump, his cabinet, and his followers are in fact influenced by Rand, then surely the prudent, and dare I say, academic, thing to do would be to seek to further understand Rand, Objectivism, and their influence; or, if this is not the case, do we not have an intellectual duty to clarify how Rand, Objectivism, and these individuals differ?

Regarding the notions of difference and further research on Rand and Objectivism, it has become increasingly clear during the research and composition of this work that we need to address the extent to which Rand and Objectivism might be

divorced from one another. While it is impossible to completely sever the link between the philosophy and its creator, I would be remiss to not at least acknowledge that some disconnect exists between them. This has already begun to play out within the sphere of Objectivist thinkers, primarily between the Ayn Rand Institute and The Atlas Society. In 1989 there was significant disagreement at the Ayn Rand Institute between Leonard Peikoff, co-founder of the institute and Rand's legal heir, and David Kelley, a philosopher at the institute and member of Rand's inner circle. The disagreement was primarily over whether or not Objectivism should be considered an open or closed philosophical system, with Peikoff arguing Objectivism is a closed system and Kelley arguing that Objectivism is an open system. The disagreement resulted in the two individuals parting ways and Kelley starting what would become The Atlas Society, then called the Institute for Objectivist Studies, in 1990. The primary difference between these two institutions, or schools of thought, is that for Peikoff and the Ayn Rand Institute Objectivism is limited to Rand, whereas Kelley and The Atlas Society believe that Objectivism has the potential to move beyond Rand.

However, there is a further divide that should be considered when debating the nature of Objectivism's relationship with Rand, and that is the fact that not everything Rand said is congruent with what Rand said Objectivism is, i.e., some of Rand's own opinions and positions are in direct contrast with Objectivism. One example is Rand's position on homosexuality. As D. Moskovitz notes in an article for The Atlas Society, Rand considered "homosexuality to be immoral." In what could only be considered an attempt to deflect this view from Objectivism, Moskovitz adds the clause: "this was only her personal view." In this case, the clause is absolutely necessary as this viewpoint is diametrically opposed to Objectivist principles in that Objectivism holds

that man should have the right to pursue his own happiness so long as the individual is not violating the rights of others.<sup>72</sup> This is but one of several opinions that Rand held that are not in-line with Objectivism, with others including the rights of Native Americans and the European conquest of what is now the United States and the roles of men and women—particularly that men should be treated as superior to women—to name but a few. While some cognitive dissonance is to be expected between an individual and any philosophy they attempt to adhere to, when this dissonance exists between the philosophy and the person that developed it, it is exceedingly problematic.

It is for these reasons that I have endeavored, whenever possible, in this work to use the term Objectivist rather than Randian, so as to not confuse the principles of Objectivism with the principles or opinions of Rand herself. While, as previously noted, it is impossible to divorce Rand from Objectivism and vice versa, it is vital to differentiate and distinguish the two whenever possible. This is because what might be deemed Randian is not necessarily Objectivist. So it is that when using either term it must be done with the most extreme specificity, as to avoid confusion or conflation.

Further research could and should be developed to ascertain in what other ways Rand and Objectivism, together and individually, have influenced literature and culture. While a great deal of further work could be done on the YA critical dystopias discussed in this work on an individual basis, the work begun here could also extend to other literary genres, particularly dystopian works aimed exclusively at so-called adult readers. One way this could be done in any number of genres is to explore the extent to which other works that could be placed under the blanket term neoliberalism

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<sup>72</sup> It is worth noting that, despite her personal opinions on the matter of homosexuality, Rand supported nondiscrimination laws for people that are homosexual.

do or do not conform to Objectivism, or how they might challenge Objectivism and provide an alternative. While not every analytical undertaking should, or could, apply and Objectivist lens, selective analysis would aid in further understanding Rand and Objectivism's influence on contemporary culture.

One other area, not addressed in this thesis, which certainly deserves further attention is Rand and Objectivism's influence on feminism, both in society and literature. Featuring strong female protagonists and written exclusively by female authors, *The Hunger Games*, *The Testing*, *the Matched*, and the *Divergent* trilogies would benefit from an analysis that considers the intersection of Rand, Objectivism, and feminism within these works. Although a body of scholarship examining Rand and feminism does exist, it is extremely limited. The most substantial work on Rand and feminism is *Feminist Interpretations of Ayn Rand*, edited by Mimi Reisel Gladstein and Chris Matthew Sciabarra.<sup>73</sup> While this work does contain nineteen contributions covering four areas of Rand and feminism, it was first published in 1999. Perhaps, given the relevance of Rand and Objectivism in the contemporary American political climate, it is time to revisit this topic, not only to consider its implications on these particular works, but also to reconsider the relationship between Rand, Objectivism, and feminism.

By addressing the wider implications of how Rand's work, both in fiction and philosophy, has influenced politics and society in America and beyond, we are likely to find that her ideas are much further reaching than one would initially suppose. Whether we as individuals and critics love or hate Rand's fiction and/or her philosophy of Objectivism, we must recognize that she has influenced and continues to influence literature, politics, and society, in and outside the United States. It is only

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<sup>73</sup> Full citation provided in the bibliography (see Gladstein).

by first acknowledging her influence, and then understanding it, that we can come to comprehend the extent to which her legacy continues.

# Appendix 1

Ranking of *The Hunger Games*  
Academic Year

	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Grade 4			1,478	24					
Grade 5			92	4	11	15			
Grade 6		54	11	2	2	4	11	16	24
Grade 7		18	3	1	1	5	7	5	6
Grade 8	168	10	2	1	1	5	7	6	7
Grade 9				1	1	3	4	4	6
Grade 10				1	1	4	7	5	9
Grade 11				1	2	6	8	4	7
Grade 12				1	1	3	6	4	6
Grade 9-12	179	15	1	1					

Ranking of *Catching Fire*  
Academic Year

	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Grade 4									
Grade 5			194	11					
Grade 6		114	25	4	10	13			
Grade 7		31	10	3	4	7	22		
Grade 8		23	5	2	4	8	20	21	
Grade 9				2	2	7	18	23	
Grade 10				2	2	9	18	25	
Grade 11				2	4	7	19	21	
Grade 12				2	3	6	17	22	
Grade 9-12		33	6	2					

Ranking of *Mockingjay*  
Academic Year

	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Grade 4									
Grade 5			398	25					
Grade 6			36	11	13	20			
Grade 7			14	5	7	13	25		
Grade 8			6	4	6	14	17		
Grade 9				5	6	12	19		
Grade 10				5	7	11	19		
Grade 11				6	6	10	16		
Grade 12				5	5	9	19		
Grade 9-12			7	3					

Ranking of *Divergent*  
Academic Year

	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Grade 4							
Grade 5							
Grade 6		1,215	129	9	17		
Grade 7		408	31	3	6	10	22
Grade 8		219	14	2	5	10	16
Grade 9		257	20	1	3	7	13
Grade 10		210	14	1	3	8	15
Grade 11		199	13	3	5	5	14
Grade 12		185	19	1	2	5	18
Grade 9-12							

Ranking of *Insurgent*  
Academic Year

	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Grade 4							
Grade 5							
Grade 6		22,914	250	21			
Grade 7		9,507	66	9	10		
Grade 8		9,922	40	7	11	25	
Grade 9		15,407	40	10	12	25	
Grade 10		21,152	42	7	10	21	
Grade 11		9,136	39	8	9	17	
Grade 12		4,822	44	7	8	21	
Grade 9-12							

Ranking of *Allegiant*  
Academic Year

	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Grade 4							
Grade 5							
Grade 6							
Grade 7				22			
Grade 8				11	21		
Grade 9				16	25		
Grade 10				15	20		
Grade 11				14	18		
Grade 12				13	21		
Grade 9-12							

Ranking of *Matched*  
Academic Year

	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Grade 4							
Grade 5							
Grade 6							
Grade 7		31 (Girls)					
Grade 8		16 (Girls)	12 (Girls)				
Grade 9			20 (Girls)				
Grade 10							
Grade 11							
Grade 12							
Grade 9-12							

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