



Conflicting Visions Of Utopia In Ayn Rand's Atlas Shrugged And Rebbe Nachman Of Breslov's The Master Of Prayer

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Abstract

Many people consider "Utopia" to be a paradise. Thomas Moore coined the term "Utopia" in his authorized publication of the same name in 1516. He imagined an imaginary and solitary island where everything appears to be working perfectly in his paradise. It's like looking out the window at blue sky, warm and brilliant sunlight, working in clean, spacious buildings, living with pleasant people, going to work gladly, and coexisting peacefully with everyone. There is, however, a reason why many people see utopias as pure fantasy. This study compares and contrasts Rebbe Nachman Breslov's *The Master of Prayer* and Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*, two Utopian redemption scenarios. Their stories are strikingly similar in structure yet diametrically opposed in terms of the ideals they preach and their ideas of society, redemption, and paradise.

Keywords: *Utopia, dystopia, Thomas More.*

1. Introduction

The psychologies of individuals living in changing times have inspired literature throughout history. This is how different genres of literature are classified. The utopia and its descendant, the dystopia, are two genres of literature that investigate social and political structures (and are diametrically opposed). Where Utopian fiction depicts as the setting for a novel a setting that fits with the author's ethos and is portrayed as having many traits that readers frequently feel to be typical of that which they would like to apply in reality or utopia. In dystopian fiction, the portrayal of a setting that entirely contradicts the author's ideology and is portrayed as having numerous characteristics that readers frequently perceive to be representative of that which they would prefer to avoid in reality, or dystopia, is the antithesis. Many novels blend the two, typically as a metaphor for the various paths humanity might take in order to arrive at one of two possible futures. Both utopias and dystopias are frequent in science fiction and other speculative fiction genres, and are potentially a sort of speculative fiction in and of themselves. The chronometer – a fictitious place in time and space associated with a representation of a certain number of morals held by the Utopian community – is an essential general feature of utopia.

“Without the Utopias of other times, men would still live in caves, miserable and naked. It was Utopians who traced the lines of the first city.... Out of generous dreams come beneficial realities. Utopia is the principle of all progress, and the essay into a better future.”

The above comment by Anatole France implies that the term utopia has two meanings: first, it refers to the ultimate human fantasy of perfection in an imaginary land; second, it is directly linked to progress because it outlines rational efforts to re-create human nature, environment, and institutions, and to enrich communal life possibilities. Commentators have added dystopia or "bad place" and anti-utopia or "not a good place" since More revolved on utopia or "good place." As a result, the readers must be able to recognize if the fictional Utopian place is good or awful.

Furthermore, we must remember that utopias evolve over time: most sixteenth-century utopias would horrify today's readers, despite the authors' progressive intentions at the time. Most twentieth-century utopias, on the other hand, would be termed dystopia by sixteenth-century readers. Since Thomas More's first usage of the word utopia in 1516, it has dreamed up a slew of contradictory meanings. However, the history of what we now call "utopia" must begin with Thomas More. He coined the term 'utopia,' which comes from the Greek word *ou-topos*, which means 'no place' or 'nowhere.'

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, the founder of the Breslover Chasidic sect, was one of the most innovative, influential, and deep of the Chassidic sages. The town of Breslov is located in Ukraine. He had been on a road of asceticism and prayer since he was a child, yet he advised his disciples not to harm themselves physically. He underlined the importance of having a happy and joyful life. "It is a tremendous commandment to be joyful," he is famed for saying. He was a passionate person who experienced extreme mood swings. He put them to great use in the service of God, and he talked a lot about how to find God even when you're in a depressed state, and how to serve Him while you're in a positive spirit. The role of the Tadzshik, who has the capacity to descend into the darkness to rescue lost souls, is central to his teachings, as is the path of prayer as the primary manifestation of religious life. Likely *Moharan*, his primary work, was authored in part by him and in part by his chief follower, Rabbi Nossan Sternhartz. The book is a compilation of Rabbi Nachman's sermons, most of which were delivered during the holidays when his Hasidim congregated. The teachings are lengthy and difficult, relying on a vast amount of Talmudic, Midrashic (interpretation of Bible), and Kabbalistic literature. A lyrical and intuitive understanding of the texts binds the ideas together.

Rabbi Nachman also penned thirteen Tales, which are mythological stories about monarchs and wizards based on Kabbalistic philosophy and encapsulate the core of Rabbi Nachman's teachings. Later authors such as Franz Kafka were said to have been inspired by these stories.

Rabbi Nachman died at the age of 38 from tuberculosis. Despite the fact that there was never any Breslov Rebbe to take his place, the mystery and profundity of his teachings try to generate pupils today, and Breslove Chassidism remains one of the largest and most active of the Chassidic movements. Nachman's teachings were frequently contextualized in tales, many of which have now become Jewish classics. He said that he was doing it because the stories had the ability to reawaken dormant souls. *princesses and paupers, kings and knaves, sinners and saints*, offer both deep kabbalistic mysteries and practical truths.

Rebbe Nachman (1772-1810) lived during the dawn of industrialization, the industrial revolution, capitalism, and the age of enlightenment. He recognized these tendencies as a serious challenge to religious people, and he worked hard to provide his followers and readers with the skills they needed to retain their faith and ideals. On Saturday night, January 6, 1810, little than a year before his tragic death from illness, he delivered his disciples the story *The Master of Prayer*. This story, which is based on Kabbalistic motifs about the process of future redemption, centers on the charismatic and revolutionary Master of Prayer (possibly Rebbe Nachman himself), who leads a secret counter-culture group that lives on the outskirts of a general society that is progressively distanced from spiritual values. The overall civilization in Rebbe Nachman's story is one of severe capitalism, but the

revolutionary counterculture group is spiritual. It's unclear if the organization was governed as a collectivist commune or not, but we'll learn about their views on wealth acquisition soon enough. *The Master of prayer* isn't satisfied with simply ministering to his people. He and his supporters actively solicit individuals of the general public to flee and join their hidden organization. "It was [the Master of Prayer's] tradition to explore populated places, persuading others to follow in his footsteps, serving God and praying ceaselessly." Praise to God by singing, confession, self-mortification, repentance, and other comparable activities... His teachings eventually gained traction, and his actions became well-known. People would vanish without a trace, and no one knew where they had gone... People came to realize that the Master of Prayer, who was enticing people to worship God, was to blame for everything" He is well-known and feared by the general public, who have been unable to apprehend him due to his ability to skillfully disguise himself.

"It was impossible to recognize or capture him, since he would always appear in a different disguise. He would appear to one person as a merchant, and to another as a pauper" (292).

What was the nature of the society the Master of Prayer was attempting to destabilize? While there were multiple distinct realms that he was sabotaging, it is evident from the account that "the Land of Wealth" was the most misguided and toughest to combat. In this hyper-capitalistic society, men are assessed entirely on the basis of their money value, with the wealthiest being referred to as "gods" and the poorest as "animals," with the richest being referred to as "gods" and the poorest as "animals." The outcome is a never-ending cycle of severe rivalry, with one's life practically riding on their ability to climb the social ladder. According to their religion, "animal" were sacrifices to the "gods," and robbery and murder were common. Furthermore, "Charity was a very significant sin." They felt that doing charity would reduce the amount of wealth that God had bestowed upon him... As a result, it was categorically banned to provide charity" The biggest obstacle for the Master of Prayer is a culture that strongly resembles Sodom, the biblical town of horrors. Not only is the culture riddled with violence and idolatry (including human sacrifice), but the belief in riches was also the most difficult theological mistake to overcome, because "it was easy to bring a person out of every desire for wealth," according to the Bible. Rebbe Nachman addressed the desire for money and its inherent spiritual perils in various places in his works, and he must have witnessed its widespread bad repercussions all around him. The only way to treat this disease was to take the person to a particular spot ("the route of the sword") where he would be magically freed of his craving for wealth: "Money is the greatest humiliation in that place." When someone tries to disparage someone else, they suggest the other has money. Wealth is such a disgrace that the more wealth a person possesses; the more guilt he feels... Now it has been proven that wealth is the fundamental reason for shame. The Land of Wealth eventually crumbles as its residents repent of their bad ways and spirituality replaces monetary values as the primary definition of human activity. The eschatological utopia is ushered in, and the entire earth is redeemed.

A century and a half after Rebbe Nachman delivered the story of the Master of Prayer, the American author and philosopher Ayn Rand penned "Atlas Shrugged," a strikingly identical story with the opposite meaning. Rand (1905-1982), Alisa Zinov'yevna Rosenbaum was born to a well-integrated bourgeois Jewish family in St. Petersburg, and she and her family suffered immensely during and after the Communist revolution. She adopted an extreme capitalist and libertine mindset she dubbed "objectivism" after arriving in the United States in 1926, and she utilized the heroes in her stories as mouthpieces for her ideology. Her socialist anti-heroes were also portrayed as "mystics," promoting an atheistic and rationalistic worldview. She regarded herself as a representative of the "Romantic Realist" school of writers. Atlas Shrugged was the crowning achievement of her writing career. Simple terms, she had articulated her ideology in its most evolved form in just 1168 pages, and it would appear that from then on, both her literary career and her personal life, it was all downhill. "Atlas Shrugged" is about a mystery revolutionary person dwelling on the outskirts of society, similar to the Master of Prayer in Rebbe Nachman's story.

To begin with, John Galt bears a huge load due to the narrative of the work. He does not come on stage until the last part of the book, despite being the strikers' commander and the central mystery is

the aspect of the narrative. We see him for two chapters before he vanishes until the book's conclusion. In Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*, John Galt is a brilliant individualistic inventor who has disappeared from the repressive socialistic society that has become America, and he strikes dread into the hearts of that society, whose vernacular reply to practically everything is "who is John Galt?" He, too, attracts members of society to his hidden Utopian retreat. The circumstances are, however, entirely inverted, with a repressive America controlled by socialist tyrants who trample on individual and economic rights. Galt kidnaps the country's brightest minds. These elite "industrialists," like him, are ruthless individualists who have joined him in "going on strike" against a society that exploits their intelligence and output to serve one of mediocre and passive. Galt and his comrades know that America will inevitably implode and that when it does, they will take control, and their capitalist utopia will once again govern America and the globe, giving people the ultimate freedom — to produce and make money. Rand's heroes, as previously noted, are all brilliant orators who explain her ideals to her readers. Francisco d'Anconia speech on money in *Atlas shrugged*.

"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. "If you ask me to name the proudest distinction of Americans, I would choose--because it contains all the others--the fact that they were the people who created the phrase 'to make money.' No other language or nation had ever used these words before; men had always thought of wealth as a static quantity--to be seized, begged, inherited, shared, looted or obtained as a favor. Americans were the first to understand that wealth has to be created. The words 'to make money' hold the essence of human morality. (414).

Moving on to Galt's hidden utopian society, we see that even the most staunch individualists must follow certain guidelines. "We have no laws, no regulations, no official structure of any type in this valley," Galt says when railroad tycoon Miss Dagny Taggart comes by mistake on her first visit. But there are some traditions that we all follow... So I'll tell you right now that there is one word in this valley that is forbidden: the word 'give'" (714). The following slogan is inscribed above the structure that houses Galt's breakthrough motor for powering the settlement. "I swear by my life and my love for it that I will never live for the sake of another man, nor ask another man to live for mine" (731)." While the members of the group work hard and live on a budget, their long-term plans clearly stretch far beyond their temporary mountain hideaway. What kind of emblem would be acceptable for such a society? When Dagny arrives, she receives the following response: "But right before her, a dollar sign three feet tall, fashioned of pure gold, rose on a thin granite column from a ledge below to the level of her eyes, blinding her with its shine and darkening the rest." It hung in space above the town like its coat-of-arms, trademark, and beacon – and it collected the sun rays, like some kind of energy transmitter that sent them in shimmering benediction to extend horizontally into the air over the roofs." The dollar sign also appears upon their locally produced cigarettes and was used by Dagny when she finally leaves her railroad terminal for the last time: she took the lipstick and drew a dollar sign under the feet of her grandfather's statue. *Atlas Shrugged* finishes with the following eschatological vision: "'The road is cleared,' said Galt. 'We are going back to the world.' He raised his hand and over the desolate earth he traced in space the sign of the dollar" (1168).

2. Conclusion

If salvation was indicated by the residents of the Land of Wealth being repelled by money in the *The Master of Prayer*, Through the character of John Galt, Ayn Rand states that man needs political independence to apply his intelligence to pursuing the morals that his life needs. In conclusion, when we compare our two authors' utopian views, it is evident that state socialism undermines all that is good and pure in humanity, undermining human motivation, uniqueness, and freedom. Absolute laissez-faire capitalism and the freedom to develop, manufacture, trade, and, most importantly, generate money is the solution. Faithless capitalism, according to Rebbe Nachman, leads to idolatry

and bloodshed. Faith is the solution, and it appears that the structure of the specific economic system is secondary in the end, since the emphasis is on Divine service paired with a great degree of compassion. It's worth noting that even the use of the term "donate" is forbidden in Rand's utopia, yet the restriction on charity is one of the most egregious symptoms of corruption in Rebbe Nachman's terrible Sodom-like Land of Wealth.

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