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Ayn Rand's Rejection of Environmentalism: Toward Challenging Right-Wing Inaction on Environmental Issues in the United States

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Ayn Rand's Rejection of Environmentalism: Toward Challenging Right-Wing Inaction on Environmental Issues in the United States

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ABSTRACT

Environmental protection has become a volatile political issue in the United States, especially within the past decade. This toxicity must be remedied to facilitate substantive reform. Anti-environmentalism on the part of the American Right can be partially traced back to the writings of the conservative philosopher Ayn Rand. In this paper, I aim to show that Rand fundamentally misunderstood the mainstream environmental movement in the U.S., and similarly her environmental philosophy, as well as her answers to solving environmental damages, are inadequate in providing answers to collective environmental problems (i.e. climate change). I argue that even in a framework as far-Right as Rand's, environmentalist sentiments can exist when they are understood as willing sacrifices, and imposed environmental regulations can be supported through an expanded notion of property rights.

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For Nan.

INTRODUCTION

When Ayn Rand began writing the “The Strike” in 1945, she envisioned a dystopian America where all the great minds of society suddenly began to disappear. These individuals, through the urging of the industrialist John Galt, retreated away from society to the secretive ‘Galt’s Gulch’ to nurture their creative possibilities. Later, Rand would rename the novel *Atlas Shrugged*, in which the Greek titan Atlas is used as a metaphor for the heroic industrialists who balance the world on their shoulders. Through the myth of Atlas, Rand encapsulates her philosophical system of objectivism and provides a poignant symbol for her thought.

And yet, I think there exists a more fitting myth to describe Rand’s philosophy: Heracles—the Greek hero-turned-god—who, in twelve labors, set out to destroy all that is savage and monstrous. Rand’s philosophy of the environment gives humans license to do much of the same: to tame what is wild and savage in their environments, and in doing so, free humanity from primitivism.

Environmental protection has become a volatile political issue in the United States, especially within the past decade. This toxicity must be remedied to facilitate substantive reform. In this paper, my intention is not to rescue Rand’s thought for our modern age; I see Rand’s thought primarily as the root of anti-environmentalist sentiments on the American Right. Instead, this project is an attempt to discern, understand, and evaluate this most extraordinary position on environmentalism and the human relationship to the environment in order to make room for a more expansive public discourse on environmental issues. Following a thorough investigation of the Randian position, my chief aim is to problematize her fundamental misunderstanding of the

environmental movement in the United States and examine the possibility of some form of environmentalism within her radical conservative framework. The relationship between sacrifice and self-interest—which Rand’s objectivist philosophy held to be diametrically opposed—can be reframed to allow for *willing* sacrifices to be made when the commonality of sacrifice is recognized. Rand’s theory of property rights, too, can be reinterpreted to support collective environmental regulations. At its heart, my work lays the framework for a *new conversation*, poised to challenge widespread inaction on environment issues, primarily on the part of the American Right. The presence of Rand’s uncritical position is certainly a cause for concern within American politics, but the potential for fruitful public discourse on environmental issues—especially if environmentalism can be found within a position as far right as Rand’s—makes Rand’s thought worth investigating. In short, my goal is to show that even in a framework as apparently anti-environmentalist as Rand’s, I believe we can still find the basis for supporting environmentalist policies.

I. WHY RAND?

In the October 2014 television segment on his show *Last Week Tonight*, the British comedian John Oliver asks: “Ayn Rand: How is she still a thing?”¹ In a short video clip, a haughty narrator mocks Rand’s self-interest-based philosophy called objectivism, wondering why she remains a popular Right-wing figure. “Ayn Rand has always been popular with teenagers,” the narrator points out, “but she’s something you’re supposed to grow out of, like ska music or hand-jobs.”² Yet, she has many adult supporters, namely the modern political figures who continue promote her ideas (i.e. Wisconsin Representative Paul Ryan, Kentucky Senator Rand Paul, and Texas Senator Ted Cruz). Oliver also points out that Rand is an “unlikely hero for conservatives, because she was also pro-choice,” anti-God, and against “the real God,” President Ronald Reagan.³

The humorous nature of this late-night comedy piece aside, Oliver’s concern is valid, because Rand remains an influential voice for many on the Right. Through the efforts of her beloved fans, she has posthumously become a touchstone of American conservatism since her death in 1982, attracting the interest of mainstream Republican politicians and radical libertarians alike. Historian Jennifer Burns even makes the case that for over half a century, Rand has been the “ultimate gateway drug to life on the Right.”⁴ Rand’s conception of a radically free,

¹ John Oliver, *Last Week Tonight With John Oliver*, YouTube, 3:40, October 9, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_8m8cQI4DgM.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Jennifer Burns, “Introduction,” in *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 4.

laissez-faire capitalist economy has given a voice to those on the Right, and her celebration of the individual as the “smallest minority on earth,” whose rights deserve the utmost protection has inspired many conservatives to advocate for smaller government and civil liberties.⁵ Her political clout has been amplified further through the creation of advocacy groups (such as the Ayn Rand Institute), libertarian think tanks (such as the Cato Institute), and through the support of national political figures (such as Paul Ryan and Ted Cruz), who advocate some parts (or all) of her philosophical system of objectivism.

One interesting and less discussed facet of Rand’s philosophy is her passionate anti-environmentalism, which mirrors the policy of inaction on environmental issues promoted by many on the Right presently. According to Rand, the environmental movement is motivated by an underlying intention to destroy technology, capitalism, and human progress. I will deconstruct and problematize this claim later, but what remains concerning is the continued dissemination of her uncritical view of environmentalism by Right-wing institutions, which threatens the potential for substantive environmental legislation to be enacted. Through her misunderstanding of the environmental movement, Rand’s thought justifies the anti-environmentalism of the contemporary Right.

I have deep reservations about Rand’s philosophical framework, and I have no intention of redeeming her ideas. Even in Rand’s day, few intellectuals saw value in her thought and academics were often her most ruthless critics.⁶ Despite being shunned by the majority of the academic community, Rand’s ideas linger within the American political consciousness. In 2008,

⁵ Ayn Rand, “Collectivized ‘Rights,’” in *The Virtue of Selfishness* (New York: New American Library, 1964), 122.

⁶ Jennifer Burns, “Introduction,” in *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1.

the year of the catastrophic financial meltdown in the United States, her novels sold over eight hundred thousand copies.⁷ Rand's influence cannot be ignored.

My purpose here is not to salvage Rand's thought, but to trace anti-environmentalist sentiments on the part of the American Right to her writings specifically. Rand's claims about environmentalism are often unfounded and vitriolic, but statements today by anti-environmentalists on the Right are eerily similar. Rand's refusal to accept environmental regulations of nearly any kind mirrors the vocal, unyielding conservatives who oppose any new environmental protections and aim to strip the EPA of its regulatory power. Opposition to both environmentalism and environmental protection are important obstacles that the contemporary environmental movement faces. As uncritical as Rand's environmental views may be, such views remain enduring and popular viewpoints among many on the Right. Rand's philosophy, while often seen as eccentric or radical, should not be underestimated. The sheer political effectiveness and influence of Rand—whether her contributions are warranted or not—demand that we critically investigate her ways of thinking. Given the advocacy groups, politicians, and institutions that continue to promote her thought, it is clear that Rand's ideas are not going away. Yet, if we can unpack and problematize Rand's view, I believe commonly held conservative beliefs about the environment—which I believe can be traced back to Rand—can be challenged, and the current political gridlock on issues like climate change can begin to be alleviated.

RAND'S LEGACY

Rand's political and intellectual legacy is largely centered in the politicians and formidable conservative institutions that continue to endorse her ideas. At a speech in 2005,

⁷ Ayn Rand Institute, "Interest in Ayn Rand Soaring," *ARI Impact*, 15, no. 4 (2009).

future Vice Presidential nominee Paul Ryan stated: “[T]he reason I got involved in public service, by and large, if I had to credit one thinker, one person, it would be Ayn Rand.”⁸

Congressman Ryan, who received the endorsement of the Republican Party along with Mitt Romney in the 2012 presidential election, clearly does not represent some small, radical faction of the American Right wing. Before entering politics on the national stage, Ryan stated that he “grew up reading Ayn Rand,” and that it taught him “quite a bit about who [he is] and what [his] value systems are.”⁹ The prominence of Paul Ryan—a candidate for national office—is testament to Rand’s lasting and continued influence on the American political system.

The Irvine, California based Ayn Rand Institute actively promotes Rand’s objectivist ethical system through high school and university outreach, education programs, and objectivist conferences. The Ayn Rand Institute’s chief objective, the organization claims, is to “spearhead a cultural renaissance that will reverse the anti-reason, anti-individualism, anti-freedom, anti-capitalist, trends in today’s culture.”¹⁰ The institute offers free class sets of Rand’s novels to high schools, in an attempt to “[introduce] young people to Ayn Rand’s books and ideas.”¹¹ For college professors who would like to teach Rand’s philosophy in the classroom, ARI provides a “Recommended Reading List” that covers a wide range of academic disciplines.¹² Nearly all of the recommended texts are written by Rand herself.

⁸ Husna Haq, “Paul Ryan Does an About-Face on Ayn Rand,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, August 14, 2012, <http://www.csmonitor.com/Books/chapter-and-verse/2012/0814/Paul-Ryan-does-an-about-face-on-Ayn-Rand>.

⁹ Husna Haq, “Paul Ryan Does an About-Face on Ayn Rand,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, August 14, 2012, <http://www.csmonitor.com/Books/chapter-and-verse/2012/0814/Paul-Ryan-does-an-about-face-on-Ayn-Rand>.

¹⁰ “About ARI,” Ayn Rand Institute, accessed August 30, 2014, http://ari.convio.net/site/PageServer?pagename=about_ari.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² “College Resources,” Ayn Rand Institute, accessed August 30, 2014, <http://www.aynrand.org/educational-resources/college-resources>.

Not only does the Ayn Rand Institute sponsor educational programs, it positions itself on the web as a think tank, where interested persons can learn about Rand's philosophy of objectivism. ARI analysts and scholars write blog posts that appear on the website which offer an objectivist perspective of contemporary political issues. ARI's webpage devoted to environmental issues states:

ARI maintains that it is vital to oppose the antihuman ideology of environmentalism and to uphold the indispensable values of reason, science, technology, industrialization and laissez faire capitalism — cornerstones of the environment in which individual human beings flourish.¹³

The Environmental Issues page is rife with provocative articles and blog entries that make no effort to hide ARI's anti-environmentalism. In one such article, titled "No More Green Guilt," author Keith Lockitch urges readers to "reject the unwarranted fears spread by Green ideology by rejecting unearned guilt."¹⁴ Instead, Lockitch contends, "we should proudly embrace our unparalleled ability to alter nature for our own benefit as the highest of virtues."¹⁵ Preventative environmental regulations have no place in ARI's ideal objectivist society. Despite the overwhelming evidence in favor of the existence of climate change, a March 2014 Gallup poll found that climate change and the quality of the environment rank at the bottom of American's worries.¹⁶ Such a disparity is troublesome, and the dissemination of Rand's anti-environmental politics via the Ayn Rand Institute can only exacerbate this problem.

¹³ "Environmental Issues," Ayn Rand Institute, accessed August 30, 2014, <http://ari.aynrand.org/issues/science-and-industrialization/environmental-issues#filter-bar>.

¹⁴ Keith Lockitch, "No More Green Guilt," *Ayn Rand Institute*, May 1, 2009.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Rebecca Riffkin, "Climate Change Not a Top Worry in U.S.," *Gallup Politics*, March 12, 2014, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/167843/climate-change-not-top-worry.aspx>.

Rand's ideas also have significant ties to the corporate community, who stand to benefit from her moral justification for unregulated capitalism. Specifically, the influence that wealthy donors may be exerting on the American college system has been the subject of recent debate. John Allison, former chair of the BB&T Insurance Corporation offers universities (through the BB&T Charitable Foundation) "grants of as much as \$2 million if they agree to create a course on capitalism and make Rand's masterwork, "Atlas Shrugged," required reading."¹⁷ Such actions by wealthy donors begin to raise suspicions about academic freedom, which most college institutions seek to uphold. In an age of declining university funds, such intervention could threaten the ability of professors to teach what they wish. Corporate influence on college campuses—especially if it resembles anti-environmentalism—could greatly impact the ability for meaningful environmental legislation to be enacted in the future. It also goes without saying that the corporate community has much to gain from relaxed (or nonexistent) environmental regulations.

Conservative think tanks—some of which are Randian, some of which are not—are also known to hold anti-environmentalist sentiments. In a paper by Peter J. Jacques, Riley E. Dunlap, and Mark Freeman, quantitative analysis showed that 92 percent of environmentally skeptical books—which deny the seriousness of environmental problems—published between 1992 and 2008 are linked to conservative think tanks.¹⁸ 90 percent of conservative think tanks were found espouse environmental skepticism.¹⁹ What appears to be evident is that this relationship between

¹⁷ Seth Lubove and Oliver Staley, "Schools Find Ayn Rand Can't Be Shrugged as Donors Build Courses," *Bloomberg*, May 5, 2011, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-05-05/schools-find-ayn-rand-can-t-be-shrugged-as-donors-build-courses.html>.

¹⁸ Riley E. Dunlap, Mark Freeman, and Peter Jacques, "The Organisation of Denial: Conservative Think Tanks and Environmental Skepticism," *Environmental Politics* 17, no. 3 (2008): 349.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

conservative think tanks and environmentally skeptical books has formed a formidable political machine, which Jacques, Dunlap, and Freeman contend has “contributed to the weakening of U.S. commitment to environmental protection.”²⁰ The relationship between Ayn Rand’s anti-environmentalist commitment and the think tanks that promote such ideas is compelling. Skepticism of environmentalism, it seems, is justified by—if not rooted in—Rand’s thought.

RAND’S PHILOSOPHICAL SYSTEM

If we are to evaluate Rand’s position, it is important to understand what her philosophical system claims at the basic level. Ayn Rand encapsulated her philosophy into one word: ‘objectivism.’ The terminology is based on her fundamental premise that objective reality exists independent of human consciousness. In Rand’s own words, her philosophy of objectivism posits:

1. Reality exists as an objective absolute—facts are facts, independent of man’s feelings, wishes, hopes or fears.²¹
2. Reason (the faculty which identifies and integrates the material provided by man’s senses) is man’s only means of perceiving reality, his only source of knowledge, his only guide to action, and his basic means of survival.
3. Man—every man—is an end in himself, not the means to the ends of others. He must exist for his own sake, neither sacrificing himself to others nor sacrificing others to himself. The pursuit of his own rational self-interest and of his own happiness is the highest moral purpose of his life.
4. The ideal political-economic system is laissez-faire capitalism. It is a system where men deal with one another, not as victims and executioners, nor as masters and slaves, but as traders, by free, voluntary exchange to mutual benefit. It is a system where no man may obtain any values from others by resorting to physical force, and no man may initiate the use of physical force against others. The government acts only as a policeman that

²⁰ Riley E. Dunlap, Mark Freeman, and Peter Jacques, “The Organisation of Denial: Conservative Think Tanks and Environmental Skepticism,” *Environmental Politics* 17, no. 3 (2008): 349.

²¹ I am well aware of the problematic nature of Rand’s consistent use of masculine pronouns. Although I have kept Rand’s quotations in their original form, I have made every attempt to use gender non-specific pronouns when discussing Rand’s ideas throughout this paper.

protects man's rights; it uses physical force only in retaliation and only against those who initiate its use, such as criminals or foreign invaders. In a system of full capitalism, there should be (but, historically, has not yet been) a complete separation of state and economics, in the same way and for the same reasons as the separation of state and church.²²

For my purposes of critiquing Rand's position on environmentalism and her environmental philosophy, her ethics (rational self-interest) and her politics (laissez-faire capitalism) are of primary importance. Rand's ethical egoism, which she defined as the pursuit of rational self-interest, appears to reject environmental protections unless they directly harm the individual agent, and rejects any form of self-sacrifice to the interests of others. Her support of unrestricted capitalism (with little government intervention), which Rand advocates, suggests that environmental regulations of any kind are not compatible with her view.

If we are to even begin considering the possibility that some form of environmentalism can exist within a conservative position as far-Right as Rand's, it is her opinion of the environmental movement that stands in the way. What appears to be at the heart of Rand's rejection of environmentalism is ultimately a misunderstanding of the motives of the environmental movement. By examining the mainstream environmental institutions in the United States with the most power, we can conclude that Rand has constructed a straw man. Once it is evident that the mainstream environmental movement bears no resemblance to what Rand prophesied, we are free to offer some form of environmentalism to anti-environmentalist conservatives.

²² Ayn Rand, "Introducing Objectivism," *The Objectivist Newsletter*, Aug. 1962, 35.

II. RAND AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT

“The ecology movement is a political fraud...But the ecology movement won’t get away with what it’s doing, even in a semi-free society, so long as men are not insane.”²³

—Ayn Rand, 1976

Before we can fully engage with Rand’s environmental philosophy, it is important to first understand her opinion of environmentalism as a political movement. Rand was intensely critical of the environmental movement, which she identified as anti-technology, anti-capitalism, anti-human, and ultimately intent on establishing a global dictatorship.²⁴ In *Goddess of the Market*, Jennifer Burns notes that Rand “focused relentlessly on what historians call conservation environmentalism, which emphasized the the dangers of technology and was resolutely anti-growth,” failing to take on more mainstream environmental concerns.²⁵ “As usual,” Burns points out, “Rand was unwilling to accept the political claims of a political movement at face value, convinced that hidden agendas drove the environmental movement.”²⁶ According to Rand, the budding ‘ecology’ movements of the sixties and seventies cared little about the protection of the environment; rather, she insisted that environmentalists aim to return humanity to a primeval state of nature through authoritarian means. Instead of pursuing stringent environmental regulations aimed at curbing pollution and cleaning up the air, Rand would instead advise us to

²³ Ayn Rand, “The Moral Factor,” (lecture, Ford Hall Forum, Boston, MA, 1976), Printed in *Ayn Rand Answers: The Best of Her Q&A*, 10.

²⁴ Ayn Rand, “The Anti-Industrial Revolution,” in *Return of the Primitive: The Anti-Industrial Revolution* ed. Peter Schwartz (New York: The Penguin Group, 1999), 279-81.

²⁵ Jennifer Burns, “It Usually Begins with Ayn Rand,” in *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 262.

²⁶ Ibid.

“Give a silent ‘Thank you’ to the nearest, grimmest, sootiest smokestacks you can find” for increasing our societal (and individual) longevity.²⁷ “If it were true that a heavy concentration of industry is destructive to human life, one would find life expectancy declining in the more advanced countries,” Rand assured readers.²⁸

Should we be thanking the nearest smokestack—a symbol of industrial progress—for our long lives? While advanced industrial nations do not exhibit declining life expectancies based on industrial development per se (access to medical care tends to an ancillary outcome of industrial development), it is uncritical to assert that pollution is generally innocuous. People who live near factories and chemical plants exhibit higher rates of cancer and other health issues: the recent natural gas hydraulic fracturing boom in the United States has sparked the building of numerous chemical plants along the Gulf of Mexico in Louisiana, providing a telling case study.

Nicknamed “Cancer Alley” by locals, the region contains over 150 petrochemical plants and refineries, which emit a “large range of pollutants,” leading to high cancer rates in the area.²⁹ A scientific study of the 100 mile stretch from Baton Rouge to New Orleans revealed that not only were the primary pollutants—formaldehyde and benzene—increasing cancer risk, racial minorities and socioeconomically disadvantaged communities were disproportionately affected.³⁰ Rand’s solution air pollution would be to simply ‘leave the area.’

People who are hurt by smog should move—if their doctors advise them or if they are uncomfortable. [The United States] is a large and free country. Nobody can order a

²⁷ Ayn Rand, “The Anti-Industrial Revolution,” in *Return of the Primitive: The Anti-Industrial Revolution* ed. Peter Schwartz (New York: The Penguin Group, 1999), 279.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 279.

²⁹ Rachel Cernansky, “Natural Gas Boom Brings Major Growth for U.S. Chemical Plants,” *Yale Environment* 360, January 29, 2015, http://e360.yale.edu/feature/natural_gas_boom_brings_major_growth_for_us_chemical_plants/2842/.

³⁰ Wesley James, Chunrong Jia, and Satish Kedia, “Uneven Magnitude of Disparities in Cancer Risks from Air Toxics,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 9, no. 12 (2012): 4365.

person to live in Los Angeles or New York City. If some place is bad for your health, you shouldn't live there.³¹

Cancer risk could be minimized by moving farther away from industrial plants, but that is only possible *when and if* sufficient financial resources are available. Did the disadvantaged persons *consent* to the building of such chemical plants? Additionally, as the human population continues to grow, areas where one can avoid pollution are shrinking. If the health risks of living in polluted areas become unavoidable, what solution can Rand offer? We will return to these issues later.

'ANTI-TECHNOLOGY'

In her most notable piece on environmentalism, “The Anti-Industrial Revolution,” Rand begins by painting a dire picture of human life with restrictions on technology. Writing in 1971, Rand imagines that four years later, in 1975, environmental legislation has restricted technology in almost every aspect of human life. Rand would have us believe that the typical human (in Rand’s case, a man) used to have an electric coffee percolator and an electric toaster, but such “self-indulgent [luxuries]” are no longer manufactured.³² He used to have a car to drive to work, but “private automobiles have been outlawed.”³³ He can barely see across the room of his house because “electricity is rationed and only one bulb per room is allowed.”³⁴ This unfortunate scenario—we are to assume—was caused by zealous environmental regulators intent on saving the environment from destructive human actions.

³¹ Ayn Rand, “The Anti-Industrial Revolution,” (lecture, Ford Hall Forum, Boston, MA, 1970), Printed in *Ayn Rand Answers: The Best of Her Q&A*, 10.

³² Ayn Rand, “The Anti-Industrial Revolution,” in *Return of the Primitive: The Anti-Industrial Revolution* ed. Peter Schwartz (New York: The Penguin Group, 1999), 270.

³³ *Ibid*, 270.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 272.

One of the ultimate intentions of the environmental movement—according to Rand—is the outright destruction of human technology. The environmentalists Rand saw in the early seventies who sought to restrict technology as a way of curbing pollution were merely masking their true intention: returning humans to a preindustrial way of life. The “activists of the New Left,” Rand wrote, “are closer to revealing the truth of their motives: they do not seek to take over industrial plants, they seek to destroy technology.”³⁵ Objectivist scholar Peter Schwartz even makes the claim that technology is “routinely denounced by environmentalists.”³⁶ It is not clear to whom—that is, what brand of environmentalist—Schwartz is referring.

Scholars writing for the Ayn Rand Institute continue to make similar ‘anti-technology’ claims. In a piece titled “The Real Meaning of Earth Hour,” Keith Lockitch maintains that the worldwide event urging us to turn off the lights for an hour “makes the renunciation of energy seem like a big party,” masking what he believes to be the “draconian carbon-reduction policies that climate activists are demanding.”³⁷ “How about Earth Month, without any form of fossil fuel energy?” Lockitch suggests.³⁸ “Try spending a month shivering in the dark without heating, electricity, refrigeration; without power plants or generators; without any of the labor saving, time-saving, and therefore life-saving products that industrial energy makes possible.”³⁹ Amanda Maxham, another ARI contributor, advises readers—on Earth Day—to: “Salute your toaster. Cherish a disposable plastic bag. Savor a biotech food. And for crying out loud, keep the lights

³⁵ Ayn Rand, “The Left: Old and New,” in *Return of the Primitive: The Anti-Industrial Revolution* ed. Peter Schwartz (New York: The Penguin Group, 1999), 169.

³⁶ Peter Schwartz, “The Philosophy of Privation,” in *Return of the Primitive: The Anti-Industrial Revolution* ed. Peter Schwartz (New York: The Penguin Group, 1999), 230.

³⁷ Keith Lockitch, “The Real Meaning of Earth Hour,” *Ayn Rand Institute*, March 23, 2009.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

on.”⁴⁰ Arguments that the environmental movement is technophobic stem from Rand’s original assertion that environmentalists were intent on regulating technological progress out of existence.

What Randians misunderstand here, is the difference between technological *innovation* and technological *products*. An gasoline powered automobile is a technological product that, in many ways, is regulated by the government to prevent smog. Conversely, a technological *innovation* refers to the process of creating or innovating something—like developing a hydrogen fuel cell vehicle. Rand seems to lump together the process of technological innovation with the physical, technological products created with technology. She makes the claim that environmentalism stands opposed to technological innovations of any kind *as well as* current technologies. While mainstream environmental movement today is critical of old, inefficient technologies that use fossil fuels, nowhere do they suggest that we should abandon technology as a whole. In fact, contemporary mainstream environmental groups often posit technology as an important solution to environmental problems. Aidan Davison argues that contemporary discourse on sustainable development, which mainstream environmentalism is located in, is in fact “characterized by Promethean rhetoric and technophilic passions in which technology is canonized as the savior of nature,” as opposed to early environmentalist concerns in which technology was “held responsible for the desecration of nature.”⁴¹ Such ‘neo-Luddite’ rhetoric no longer has a place in mainstream environmentalism.

⁴⁰ Amanda Maxham, “This Earth Day, Shrug Off Environmentalist Fear and Guilt,” *Ayn Rand Institute*, April 22, 2014.

⁴¹ Aidan Davison, “Ruling the Future? Heretical Reflections on Technology and Other Secular Religions of Sustainability,” *Worldviews* 12 (2008): 154.

Secondly, I am not aware of any mainstream environmentalist who is suggesting that we expand ‘Earth Hour’ to ‘Earth Month.’ Here, Randians misunderstand the intention of symbolic actions like Earth Hour. “The lights of our cities and monuments are a symbol of human achievement, of what mankind has accomplished in rising from cave to the skyscraper,” Lockitch writes.⁴² Earth Hour “presents the disturbing spectacle of people celebrating the those lights being extinguished.”⁴³ What Lockitch misunderstands is that Earth Hour is not critical of the ‘lights’ of human civilization, rather, it is critical of our reliance on carbon-based fossil fuels that are scientifically proven to harm the environment. Environmentalists are not *literally* asking us to renounce electricity, they are simply raising awareness about the consequences of fossil fuel consumption.

A current evaluation of the mainstream environmental movement in America reveals that this ‘anti-technology crusade’ is nowhere to be found, at least among the most powerful environmental institutions. While some radical factions of the environmental movement (i.e. deep ecology) call for less reliance on human technology and advocate a significant reduction of industrialization, mainstream environmental groups in the United States espouse no such goals. Faced with the imminence of seemingly impossible-to-solve environmental problems, the mainstream environmental movement aims to ensure a sustainable future for humanity, in which humans can coexist peacefully with the natural world. To contend that such problems could be solved without the need for technological advancements, or—as Rand believes—through the

⁴² Keith Lockitch, “The Real Meaning of Earth Hour,” *Ayn Rand Institute*, March 23, 2009.

⁴³ Ibid.

destruction of progress and technology, would be nearly impossible if current levels of consumption are to be preserved.⁴⁴

'ANTI-HUMAN'

Randians have a second objection: environmentalism does not hold human life as the standard of value, and therefore, should be rejected because it is 'anti-human.' ARI's Keith Lockitch is critical of a popular symbol of environmental concern: the carbon footprint. In "No Footprint, No Life," Lockitch argues that the concept of a 'environmental footprint' implies that one should "feel guilty for [their] very existence," and that the "only way to leave "no footprint" would be to die."⁴⁵ When confronting environmentalism, Lockitch urges readers to "remember what counts as the final solution for [green] ideologues."⁴⁶ Does mainstream environmentalism ask that you *die* to advance the cause?

Objectivists assert that the environmental movement is a prime example of Rand's philosophical arch-enemy—altruism—in practice. Altruism contends that individuals should put the interests of others above their own self-interest. Rand's collection of ethics papers, *The Virtue of Selfishness*, provides a frank introduction:

The doctrine that concern with one's own interests is evil [altruism] means that man's desire to live is evil—that man's life, as such is evil. No doctrine could be more evil than that. ⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Ayn Rand, "The Anti-Industrial Revolution," in *Return of the Primitive: The Anti-Industrial Revolution* ed. Peter Schwartz (New York: The Penguin Group, 1999), 279.

⁴⁵ Keith Lockitch, "No Footprint, No Life," *Ayn Rand Institute*, January 9, 2009.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ayn Rand, "Introduction," in *The Virtue of Selfishness* (New York: New American Library, 1961), ix.

Rand regarded altruistic ethics to be anti-human because they asks humans to sacrifice their interests to others. Objectivist philosopher Peter Schwartz (who edited and contributed to a collection of essays with Rand, titled *Return of the Primitive: The Anti-Industrial Revolution*) elaborates on Rand’s view, declaring environmentalism to be “altruism unadulterated and uncamouflaged.”⁴⁸ Environmentalism extends the altruistic ethic of self-sacrifice to the environment, so instead of sacrificing one’s interests to the interests of other humans, Schwartz contends that environmentalism demands that we “sacrifice the human to the non-human,” that is, human interests to non-human interests.⁴⁹ Additionally, altruism—“environmentalism’s most potent weapon” according to Schwartz—allows for a severance between humans and the environment, environment exists separately from human beings.⁵⁰ It comes as no surprise, then, that Rand asserts that within environmentalism, “man is treated as if he were an unnatural phenomenon.”⁵¹ Yet, with bombastic titles like Alan Weisman’s *The World Without Us* and Derrick Jensen’s *Endgame, Vol. 1: The Problem of Civilization* circulating amid the swaths of environmentalist literature, it becomes difficult not to sympathize with Rand’s assertion that the environmental movement deems humans ‘unnatural’ and wholly separate from their environment. However, the environmental movement is not altruistic, per se; rather, anthropocentric environmentalists simply hold an ethical view that encompasses the value of environmental services to human existence. Because nature provides the services that make

⁴⁸ Peter Schwartz, “The Philosophy of Privation,” in *Return of the Primitive: The Anti-Industrial Revolution* ed. Peter Schwartz (New York: The Penguin Group, 1999), 228.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 228.

⁵⁰ Peter Schwartz, “The Philosophy of Privation,” in *Return of the Primitive: The Anti-Industrial Revolution* ed. Peter Schwartz (New York: The Penguin Group, 1999), 227.

⁵¹ Ayn Rand, “The Anti-Industrial Revolution,” in *Return of the Primitive: The Anti-Industrial Revolution* ed. Peter Schwartz (New York: The Penguin Group, 1999), 277.

human existence possible, environmentalists do not seek to ‘sacrifice’ human interests to nature. Rather, it becomes an issue of collective human self-interest, not sacrifice.

‘ANTI-CAPITALIST’ AND INTENT ON GLOBAL DICTATORSHIP

Do objectivist assertions stand up to empirical evidence? Should humanity damn environmentalism for its fundamental anti-technology, anti-human stance? On the accounts we have established thus far, the Randian position has built up a veritable bogeyman from which to launch convincing, seemingly well-founded criticism. Objectivist criticism of environmentalism, however, lacks factual proof to back up its claims.

Another Randian criticism of environmentalism is its alleged anti-capitalist stance. This “anti-industrial revolution” advanced by environmentalists has two objectives: “the destruction of the remnants of capitalism in today’s mixed economy, and the establishment of a global dictatorship,” Rand argued.⁵² Unlike Rand’s predictions, however, modern mainstream environmental advocacy groups in the United States generally work within a capitalistic economic framework. The ‘Big Ten’ environmental lobbying groups—the Sierra Club, the National Audubon Society, Friends of the Earth, and others—instead focus on forms of *corporate cooperation*, which Carolyn Merchant argues can be attributed to the greater transition from grassroots confrontation to reform environmentalism that occurred during the later part of the twentieth century.⁵³

Since the mainstream Big Ten environmental organizations do not advocate for the destruction of the capitalist economy or the implementation of a global dictatorship that could

⁵² Ayn Rand, “The Anti-Industrial Revolution,” in *Return of the Primitive: The Anti-Industrial Revolution* ed. Peter Schwartz (New York: The Penguin Group, 1999), 280-81.

⁵³ Carolyn Merchant, “Green Politics,” in *Radical Ecology* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 168.

enforce regulation on an international scale, I argue that Rand’s views on environmentalism in this case are hyperbolic. Theorists certainly question and critique capitalism (there is no reason why the chief economic system of our time should not avoid critical scrutiny), and current discourse certainly debates the means (i.e. the political institutions) in which regulatory changes could be made on a global scale. However, the extent to which Rand’s argument assumes that an anti-capitalist global revolution is being planned by the mainstream environmentalist movement appears to be speculation aimed at provoking overzealous conservatives. Randians--who assume that Rand’s words remain as important today as when she wrote them--need only peruse the website of one of the most prolific environmental advocacy groups in the U.S.—the Sierra Club—to find that the organization clearly does not actualize Rand’s dire prognosis.⁵⁴

The Sierra Club is arguably one of the most powerful environmental organizations in the United States. Founded by John Muir in 1892 "to make the mountains glad," the Sierra Club was created with the intention of creating national parks and designating wilderness areas.⁵⁵ Since its founding, the Club had amassed total assets of over \$106 million based on their 2013 tax return.⁵⁶ Today, the Sierra Club’s consists of anti-fossil fuel programs (“Beyond Coal,” “Beyond Oil,” and “Beyond Natural Gas”), wilderness protection (“Our Wild America”) and an exceedingly harmless “Get Outdoors” program.⁵⁷ Whether or not the Club has continued to reflect Muir’s original ideas is not a subject I will be discussing here. Nevertheless, nowhere does on its website does the Sierra Club mention limiting—much less destroying—technology,

⁵⁴ “Who We Are,” *Sierra Club*, accessed September 10, 2014, <http://www.sierraclub.org/about>.

⁵⁵ Who Was John Muir?” *Sierra Club*, accessed February 14, 2015, http://vault.sierraclub.org/john_muir_exhibit/about/.

⁵⁶ The Sierra Club Foundation, “IRS Form 990 Public Disclosure Copy,” (2013), <http://www.sierraclubfoundation.org/about-tscf/financial-management/financial-statements>.

⁵⁷ “Sierra Club Programs,” *Sierra Club*, accessed February 15, 2015, <http://www.sierraclub.org/programs>.

except for its anti-nuclear energy stance. Opposition to nuclear energy is hardly representative of an underlying motive to destroy technology in general as Randians suggest environmentalists intend.

Rand's analysis of environmentalism is perhaps more indicative of radical, so-called fringe environmental movements such as deep ecology. In 1972, Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess coined the term 'Deep Ecology movement,' which came to be known as an alternative, nearly religious approach to environmentalism that veered far from (and is often critical of) conventional environmental politics. This newly defined mode of environmental thought probed questions of value, asking followers to undergo a process of self-realization to develop a radically different ethic of biocentrism, which holds that all nature is intrinsically valuable. The dominant ethic of anthropocentrism must be revoked, according to deep ecologists, because humans deserve no special privilege over other species.

If one compares Rand's analysis of the environmental movement to radical environmental movement like deep ecology, I will concede that her predictions are perhaps more accurate. Rand was concerned that the burgeoning environmental movements of the 60s and 70s spelled the grumblings of a potent environmental lobby capable of achieving substantive reform. While environmental protections were enacted (like the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency in 1970 and the Clean Water Act in 1972), the new agencies and legislation created at the time paled in comparison to the changes a deep ecologist perspective would recommend. Deep ecology advocates for the use of only "appropriate technology," which one can only imagine the implications in attempting to define or regulate.⁵⁸ A critical deep ecological principle—that

⁵⁸ Bill Devall and George Sessions, "Deep Ecology," in *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs M. Smith Inc., 1985), 69.

“Humans have no right to reduce [the] richness and diversity [of life forms] except to satisfy vital needs”—comes much closer to the kind of philosophy Rand accused mainstream environmentalism of supporting.⁵⁹

If Rand misunderstood the motives the budding mainstream environmental movement in the late twentieth century, why is it that contemporary Randians are still advocating the same argument that has proven to be false? If Randians truly want to make the case that environmentalism is anti-technology, anti-human, anti-capitalist, and intent on creating a global dictatorship, then they have burden of proof. It will suffice to say that as of yet, the radical environmentalism that Rand warned of has yet to gain a foothold within U.S. politics. Objectivists and conservatives alike need to take a good, hard look at the environmental movement—especially the mainstream movement present in American politics—which will do little confirm their misunderstandings. The modern mainstream environmental movement is pro-technology, it works within a capitalist framework, and puts human interests at the forefront. Whether or not this could be thought of as a neutered environmental movement is worth considering, but what is definitive is that Rand’s prediction of a potent environmental movement capable of destroying technology and capitalism has proven false.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 70.

III. THE RANDIAN PHILOSOPHY OF THE ENVIRONMENT

He looked at the granite. To be cut, he thought, and made into walls. He looked at a tree. To be split and made into rafters. He looked a streak of rust on the stone and thought of iron ore under the ground. To be melted and to emerge as girders against the sky. These rocks, he thought, are here for me; waiting for the drill, the dynamite and my voice, waiting to be split, ripped, pounded, reborn; waiting for the shape my hands will give them.⁶⁰

—Ayn Rand, *The Fountainhead*

So far, I have established that Rand’s view of environmentalism has little merit, at least in describing the intentions of the most politically powerful mainstream institutions. But can some form of environmentalism thrive within her objectivist thought? Even in the first few pages of Ayn Rand’s 1943 bestseller, *The Fountainhead*, the character of Rand’s environmental view is evident; the granite, the trees, the iron ore, and the rocks—components of nonhuman nature—are meant for human manipulation, and perhaps can be *perfected* through the work of the great architect Howard Roark. Specifically, nature can be harnessed through *human* means. One could dismiss this passage as simply illustrative prose, except Rand herself insisted that her chief literary aim was the “projection of an ideal man.”⁶¹ Roark is no exception. With his nearly salacious gaze, Rand’s hero not only ignores the environmental consequences of his potential action; he provides an excellent example of Rand’s early philosophical development, reflecting her ideal relationship between humans and the environment. This ideal relationship, at its base, is anthropocentric, or human-centered. In *The Virtue of Selfishness*, Rand wrote:

⁶⁰ Ayn Rand, *The Fountainhead* (New York: New American Library, 1943), 16.

⁶¹ Ayn Rand, *The Romantic Manifesto*, (New York: New American Library, 1971), 155.

The Objectivist ethics holds man's life as the standard of value--and his own life as the ethical purpose of every individual man.⁶²

Rand makes clear that it is *human* life that is the standard of value in questions of ethical consideration. In the same essay, Rand remarks on the capacity of animals in understanding values:

An animal has no choice in the standard of value directing its actions: its senses provide it with an automatic code of values, an automatic knowledge of what is good for it or evil, what benefits or endangers its life. An animal has no power to extend its knowledge or to evade it.⁶³

Because animals lack the capacity to recognize and create values, they cannot be considered to have value-in-themselves, as Rand argues humans do. In Rand's view, human interests trump the interests of other species because humans are the only species that have the distinct capacity to create and recognize values. Therefore, Rand draws a hard line between humans and other species, which do not deserve the same moral consideration. Her viewpoint is representative of a strong anthropocentric species bias.

There is a distinction that needs to be made here, centered around the question of who is deserving of moral concern. For Rand, who matters morally—the individual agent or the human species as a whole? There appears to be an inconsistency in Rand's environmental ethics in regards to who is worthy of moral concern. In many cases, Rand positions her argument as ethical egoism, with the interests of the agent having chief moral concern. In an interview in 1962, Rand confirmed her ethical egoist position:

My ethics is *not* based on a concern for the continued survival of *mankind*... The Objectivist ethics is concerned with the rational requirements of *a man's* survival—of the

⁶² Ayn Rand, "The Objectivist Ethics," in *The Virtue of Selfishness* (New York: New American Library, 1964), 27.

⁶³ Ayn Rand, "The Objectivist Ethics," in *The Virtue of Selfishness* (New York: New American Library, 1964), 20.

survival of individual man qua man. The collective survival of mankind is not a consideration in moral questions.⁶⁴

To the casual eye, Rand's statement presents her ethical egoism as definitive. Yet, in other cases, Rand positions herself as a moral anthropocentrist, implying concern for all human life in terms of environmental issues. For example, when Rand expounds the value of technology, she asks us to "Consider what human life and suffering were like, indoors and out, prior to the advent of air conditioning."⁶⁵ This question is not directed at the lives of the individual agent, but humanity as a whole. Additionally, Rand grants that in regard to "actual pollution," if the "condition is collective, such as in an overcrowded city, appropriate and *objective* laws can be defined, protecting the rights of all those involved."⁶⁶ Here, Rand seems to switch her ethical point of view in admitting the need for collective—not simply individual—protections against environmental damages.

This inconsistency makes it evident that the ethics behind Rand's environmental view are—fundamentally—on shaky ground. What appears to be the case is that, while Rand commits to an ethical egoist position, she uses ethical anthropocentrist arguments when it is rhetorically convenient. Yet, if Rand is willing to concede that regulations may be necessary for environmental issues of collective concern, which her instances of moral anthropocentrism suggest, there is potentially some space for environmentalism within objectivism. I will return to this in Part IV of this paper.

⁶⁴ Ayn Rand, "Ayn Rand on Campus: Discussion of Her Essay, 'The Objectivist Ethics,'" (radio program, 1962), Printed in *Ayn Rand Answers: The Best of Her Q&A*, 108.

⁶⁵ Ayn Rand, "The Anti-Industrial Revolution," in *Return of the Primitive: The Anti-Industrial Revolution* ed. Peter Schwartz (New York: The Penguin Group, 1999), 276.

⁶⁶ Ayn Rand, "The Left Old and New," in *Return of the Primitive: The Anti-Industrial Revolution* ed. Peter Schwartz (New York: The Penguin Group, 1999), 167.

Aside from the inconsistency of her environmental ethics, what Rand did seem to understand—long before many environmentalists acknowledged it—was that nature is process, not a static, absolute entity. While Rand does not use these words specifically, in the “Anti-Industrial Revolution,” she wrote:

The dinosaur and its fellow-creatures vanished from this earth long before there were any industrialists or any men—and environmental “resiliency” never brought them back. But this did not end life on earth. Contrary to the ecologists, nature does not stand still and does not maintain the kind of “equilibrium” that guarantees the survival of any particular species—least of all the survival of her greatest and most fragile product: man.⁶⁷

Many environmentalists during Rand’s time were advancing the idea that nature was better left alone as wilderness, where nature can thrive separate from human interference. William Cronon, in the introduction to *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, notes that “recent scholarship has clearly demonstrated that the natural world is far more dynamic, far more changeable, and far more entangled with human history than popular beliefs about “the balance of nature” have typically acknowledged.”⁶⁸ Writing in the early 1990s, Cronon was cognizant that many popular conceptions of nature advanced the problematic conviction that nature is a “stable, holistic, homeostatic community capable of preserving its natural balance more or less indefinitely if only humans can avoid “disturbing” it.”⁶⁹ Attributing these beliefs to the scientist Frederic Clements—who influenced the first generation of American ecologists—Cronon makes clear the persistence of this idea within the popular American environmental consciousness.

Despite Rand’s obvious human-centric position (nature’s “greatest and most fragile product”),

⁶⁷ Ayn Rand, “The Anti-Industrial Revolution,” in *Return of the Primitive: The Anti-Industrial Revolution* ed. Peter Schwartz (New York: The Penguin Group, 1999), 276.

⁶⁸ William Cronon, “Introduction,” in *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature* ed. William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), 24.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

one cannot deny the similarities between Rand and Cronon's arguments.⁷⁰ Rand—much like Cronon—appears to have been aware that the ways we think about nature can—and perhaps should—be defined more precisely.

Rand, too, appears to have recognized a transformation in the meanings of 'wilderness' that occurred in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Cronon was among the first academics to point out the problematic nature of the wilderness concept. In his piece, "The Trouble with Wilderness, or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," Cronon argues that Western conceptions of wilderness have transformed from biblical perception of "places on the margins of civilization where it was all too easy to lose oneself in moral confusion and despair,"—places where one was always in "fear and trembling"⁷¹—to the sacred, "romantic sublime."⁷² Cronon's chief concern with this romantic understanding is its paradoxical essence; this popular way of thinking about wild nature limits the kind of conversations we can have about environmental problems. When environmentalists invoke the sacredness of 'wilderness,' they perpetuate a "dualism that sets humanity and nature at opposite poles," Cronon argues; this separation bars us from "discovering what an ethical, sustainable, *honorable* human place in nature might actually look like."⁷³

⁷⁰ Ayn Rand, "The Anti-Industrial Revolution," in *Return of the Primitive: The Anti-Industrial Revolution* ed. Peter Schwartz (New York: The Penguin Group, 1999), 276.

⁷¹ William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness, or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in *American Environmental History* ed. Louis S. Warren (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 215.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 220.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 225.

Cronon's critique mirrors Rand's writing decades earlier. "In all the propaganda of the ecologists," Rand stated, "Man is treated as if he were an *unnatural* phenomenon."⁷⁴ Rand, who understood that wilderness once represented a place of danger and fear for human beings, seemed aghast at the idea that wilderness (at least for environmentalists) was now something worth conserving for its innate value. The dark, impenetrable 'Uncharted Forest' in Rand's novella *Anthem* is representative of this 'dangerous wilderness' concept. Her protagonist 'Equality 7-2521' uses the Uncharted Forest to escape from his ultra-collectivist society that deprives him of his independence, and while the forest offers Equality 7-2521 sanctuary, it also represents a great danger, for "the forest disposes of its own victims."⁷⁵ Humans "cannot survive in the kind of state of nature ecologists envision," Rand wrote in "The Anti-Industrial Revolution."⁷⁶ As Jennifer Burns makes clear, for Rand, "nature was not benevolent," but a "force to be kept at bay by man's reason,"⁷⁷ While mainstream environmentalism does not advocate any such 'return to nature,' (as I argued in Part II) it is important to note that for all her strident anti-environmentalist positions, Rand appeared to see human beings as part of nature. While Rand and Cronon come to different conclusions about the human relationship to the environment (Cronon searches for an ethical, sustainable relationship with nature, Rand holds that view that the value of nature is dependent on human values) it is important to point out the parallels in their thought as we move forward in unpacking her philosophy of the environment.

⁷⁴ Ayn Rand, "The Anti-Industrial Revolution," in *Return of the Primitive: The Anti-Industrial Revolution* ed. Peter Schwartz (New York: The Penguin Group, 1999), 277.

⁷⁵ Ayn Rand, *Anthem* (New York: New American Library, 1961), 76.

⁷⁶ Ayn Rand, "The Anti-Industrial Revolution," in *Return of the Primitive: The Anti-Industrial Revolution* ed. Peter Schwartz (New York: The Penguin Group, 1999), 277.

⁷⁷ Jennifer Burns, "It Usually Begins with Ayn Rand," in *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 262.

Rand was not unaware of environmental problems, however. In the subsections that follow, I will discuss four aspects of Rand's environmental philosophy, all of which are attempts at solving environmental problems. As I will point out, however, each of these solutions falls short.

HUMAN INTERESTS TRUMP A 'NATURAL' AESTHETIC

Rand was very critical of preserving what environmentalists at the time were calling the 'natural beauty' of environmental landscapes. "Try to tell a Russian housewife," she wrote, "who trudges miles on foot in sub-zero weather in order to spend hours standing in line at a state store dispensing food rations, that America is defiled by shopping centers, expressways and family cars."⁷⁸ Human well-being, Rand contends, is more important than the preservation of beautiful environmental sights. There is value to the features of the industrialized world because it makes the lives the individuals better. What is telling about this view, however, is that it is heavily influenced by Rand's subjective aesthetic value judgement. Her illustrative portraits of the industrial mills of 'Rearden Metal' in *Atlas Shrugged* can make one question whether Rand is describing a breathtaking sunrise from afar or the fiery glow emitted from the chimneys of a metallurgical enterprise.⁷⁹

Of course, for many people, nature has the ability to inspire and to awe. Rationally, however, making the argument that 'because some parts of nature are aesthetically pleasing means they deserve protection' presents some challenges. What about the 'ugly' parts of nature that are also provide critical ecosystem system services? Advocates of endangered species

⁷⁸ Ayn Rand, "The Left Old and New," in *Return of the Primitive: The Anti-Industrial Revolution* ed. Peter Schwartz (New York: The Penguin Group, 1999), 166.

⁷⁹ Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* (New York: New American Library, 1957), 37.

preservation encounter this problem often when aesthetically pleasing species like the Siberian tiger or the giant panda receive the majority of funding, while lesser known, ‘uglier’ species are shortchanged.

What is problematic about the Randian view, however, is that subjective aesthetic judgements often get in the way of the scientific realities about the critical services that ecosystems provide. Peter Schwartz chides environmentalists who want to protect “mosquito and alligator-infested swamps” (wetlands) from being “defiled by man-made drainage.”⁸⁰ While it may seem sensical to Schwartz to drain a wetland ecosystem for a housing development (which will undoubtedly uproot “some piddling species”), a biologist may see a valuable ecosystem that provides habitat for a wide range of species as well as water filtration services.⁸¹ Schwartz again likens environmentalism to altruism to defend what is essentially a misunderstanding of science:

According to the tenets of altruism, you should “value” that which holds no significance for your life—*because* it holds no significance for your life. So while nature’s bogs and bugs may not be of any value to you, the precept of self-sacrifice commands: *that* is why you should treat them as though they are.⁸²

While Schwartz may not regard the ‘bogs and bugs’ of nature to be aesthetically pleasing, this does not mean that have no value to human life. A biologist, of course, does not see wetlands ecosystems as objectively ‘beautiful,’ but properly functioning ecosystems, even from an anthropocentric standpoint, provide important services; “forests store water and control floods; the atmosphere supplies clean air, rainfall, and terrestrial and aquatic productivity; wetlands

⁸⁰ Peter Schwartz, “The Philosophy of Privation,” in *Return of the Primitive: The Anti-Industrial Revolution* ed. Peter Schwartz (New York: The Penguin Group, 1999), 220.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 220.

⁸² Peter Schwartz, “The Philosophy of Privation,” in *Return of the Primitive: The Anti-Industrial Revolution* ed. Peter Schwartz (New York: The Penguin Group, 1999), 229.

process wastes and regenerate waters; soils store water, decompose wastes, and filter toxins.”⁸³

The contribution to the world economy, economists have estimated, can be valued at \$36 trillion per year.⁸⁴ Vitriolic statements on the part of Randians about the less appealing aspects of nature, it seems, are merely provocations that misunderstand basic ecological science. Additionally, just because aspects of nature might be dangerous to humans (i.e. alligators and mosquitos) as Schwartz implies, this does not mean that such aspects are not valueless to humans.

PRIMITIVISM

Rand viewed environmentalists as collectivists in disguise who aimed to return humanity to a primitive existence devoid of technological improvements. A primitive, hunter-gatherer lifestyle was to be revoked as anti-reason, and even—according to Rand—justified the European conquest of North America. Native Americans, Rand claimed, “had no right to a country merely because they were born here and then acted like savages.” Because Native Americans had no concept of property rights, “they didn’t have any rights to the land, and there was no reason for anyone to grant them rights that they had not conceived of and were not using.”⁸⁵ It was the ‘primitive existence’ of Native Americans that permitted their subjugation, Rand claimed:

“What were they fighting for, in opposing the white man on this continent? For their wish to continue a primitive existence; for their “right” to keep part of the earth untouched—to keep everybody out so they could live like animals or cavemen. Any European who brought with him an element of civilization had the right to take over this continent, and

⁸³ Carolyn Merchant, “The Global Ecological Crisis,” in *Radical Ecology* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 35.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁸⁵ Ayn Rand, “Philosophy: Who Needs It” (lecture, West Point Military Academy, 1974), Printed in *Ayn Rand Answers: The Best of Her Q&A*, 103.

it's great that some of them did. The racist Indians today—those who condemn America—do not respect individual rights.”⁸⁶

Rand's view is problematic for a number of reasons, most of which I will not take the time to discuss here. But from an environmental perspective—according to Rand—an unwillingness to commodify the environment for human exploitation rendered native populations as deserving of genocide. The eradication of Native American people is apparently a just price to pay for ‘civilized’ human society.

THE ROLE OF THE JUDICIARY

If environmental damages are incurred, Rand believed, the harmed party should “demonstrate an actual harm, and then sue the individual polluter.”⁸⁷ More specifically, Rand invokes private property rights as the chief protection against environmental ills:

In regard to the political principle involved: if a man creates a physical danger or harm to others, which extends beyond the line of his own property, such as unsanitary conditions or even loud noise, and if this is *proved*, the law can and does hold him responsible.⁸⁸

Rand's line of argument becomes much harder to apply to issues of community concern, such as the dumping of toxic chemicals into water systems, or even the wide range of pollutants present in automobile emissions. The damages are certainly provable (i.e. cases of asthmatic lungs in heavily polluted cities or poisonings from toxic drinking water), but whom—that is, what individual or corporate entity?—would one sue in such an instance involving resources held in

⁸⁶ Ayn Rand, “Philosophy: Who Needs It” (lecture, West Point Military Academy, 1974), Printed in *Ayn Rand Answers: The Best of Her Q&A*, 103-104.

⁸⁷ Ayn Rand, “Apollo and Dionysus” (lecture, Ford Hall Forum, Boston, MA, 1969), Printed in *Ayn Rand Answers: The Best of Her Q&A*, 9.

⁸⁸ Ayn Rand, “The Left Old and New,” in *Return of the Primitive: The Anti-Industrial Revolution* ed. Peter Schwartz (New York: The Penguin Group, 1999), 167.

common when it is not clear that there is a sole polluter? Rand's judicial solution to private property damages becomes difficult to apply to situations involving global commons.

Garrett Hardin's well-known argument in "The Tragedy of the Commons," as Carolyn Merchant contends in *Radical Ecology*, can be extended to a modern analogy which defines air and water sources as global commons. "Resource depletion and environmental pollution of the commons are shared by all," Merchant writes, as are the "costs of acid rain and chlorofluorocarbons in the air, oil spills and plastics in the oceans, and the depletion of fish, whales, and seals are shared equally by all who fish, breathe, and live."⁸⁹ Not even a Randian can avoid using resources held in common. Property damage suits may work to solve problems at the micro-level, but such a method is simply not equipped to deal with environmental destruction on a global scale. We can therefore conclude that Rand's judicial solution here is inadequate to address the problem of the global commons and requires the consideration of options beyond individual legal disputes.

TECHNOLOGY

For Rand, the ultimate solution to environmental problems was not political, but technological. In "The Anti-Industrial Revolution," she wrote:

City smog and filthy rivers are not good for men (though they are not the kind of danger that the ecological panic-mongers proclaim them to be). This is a scientific, *technological* problem—not a political one—and it can be solved *only* by technology. Even if smog were a risk to human life, we must remember that life in nature, without technology, is wholesale death.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Carolyn Merchant, "Environmental Ethics and Political Conflict," in *Radical Ecology* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 69.

⁹⁰ Ayn Rand, "The Anti-Industrial Revolution," in *Return of the Primitive: The Anti-Industrial Revolution* ed. Peter Schwartz (New York: The Penguin Group, 1999), 282-283.

If environmental problems can be solved solely by technology, then why should we protect the environment with environmental regulations at all? Randians place a great deal of faith, it seems, in technological solutions. When asked whether her philosophy had any room for God, Rand answered:

No. My philosophy includes only what man can perceive, identify, and demonstrate by means of reason. It doesn't permit the invention of "facts," or the acceptance of anything on faith—that is, without rational demonstration.⁹¹

Faith—that is, the belief in something for which there is no evidence—has no place in Rand's objectivism. But Rand appears to place a great deal of faith in human ingenuity in solving environmental problems. Perhaps Randians have adequate reason to believe that human technology can provide infinite solutions to our many woes: technology has put humans on the moon, put miniature supercomputers in the hands of many, and even discovered ways to manipulate the DNA of biological organisms to fit our needs. What can't human technology solve?

Yet, the faith Randians place in technology presents an issue in the face of the current ecological crisis. We are reaching a point where our ability to weather technological failures in our battle against global environmental problems is running up against the time we have left to deal with those problems. Technical 'fixes' may end up causing unforeseen issues that could complicate our environmental problems further, or the failure to reach a technological solution in time could prove to be too late. The question then becomes: do we make environmental sacrifices now to avoid a technological crisis later, or do we put faith in technological solutions

⁹¹ Ayn Rand, (radio program, "Night Call," 1969), Printed in *Ayn Rand Answers: The Best of Her Q&A*, 149.

that may fail? To avoid such a crisis, it is in our interest as individuals, as nation, and as a global community to endure unpalatable sacrifices now instead of placing too much faith in technology.

While Rand appears to have understood that nature is a process, not a static entity, the conclusions she reached given the application of her philosophy to environmental issues are inadequate to addressing the environmental crisis at both the micro and macro levels of human existence. The application of aesthetic value judgements to aspects of nature that appear 'ugly' to some clouds ecological science and prevents Randians from understanding the importance of critical ecosystem services. Rand's critique of primitivism outlines the incapacity of her view to respect the views of a culture without a Western understanding of property rights, and therefore, a non-exploitative relationship towards nature. Because Native Americans did not commodify nature and had no concept of property rights, they apparently were deserving of having their land taken from them. Rand's judicial solution to dealing with environmental damages does not adequately address issues of community concern and presents no clear solution to resources held in-common. Finally, Rand's ultimate solution to environmental problems--technological innovation--falls short because it minimizes complex environmental problems into technological 'quick-fixes,' thus eliminating the possibility of introducing personal sacrifices into the conversation to confront environmental issues.

IV. A NEW CONVERSATION?

The information I have presented thus far has argued that Rand misunderstood the motives of the environmental movement, and that the environmental solutions that Rand provides are unable to adequately solve environmental problems beyond an individual level. What sort of environmentalism can be offered to objectivists given the shortcomings of their present convictions?

If we are to set the stage for a fresh conversation about environmental problems within American politics, we must first affirm the scientific methods that have provided the evidence from which environmental concerns have been raised. Rand (when she was alive) and many on modern Right today maintain that the science presented in favor of climate change and other environmental problems is ideologically biased, and therefore, should not be taken seriously. When asked in an interview about the potential threats of nuclear energy in 1961, Rand responded:

I am not a nuclear scientist, but I do not believe those stories about nuclear fallout, because they all come from leftist sympathizers of Soviet Russia. When we have better scientific evidence of that danger, we can take it seriously.⁹²

Her answer bears a striking resemblance to comments made by many climate change science skeptics—often on the Right—whose frank admittance “I’m not a scientist, but...” has become an all too common rhetorical maneuver to avoid responsibility for denial. How can one speak authoritatively about an issue one knows little about? The amount of scientific evidence in favor

⁹² Ayn Rand, “Political Vacuum of Our Age,” (lecture, presented to group of women in journalism, IN, 1961) Printed in *Ayn Rand Answers: The Best of Her Q&A*, 11.

of human-caused climate change has become nearly insurmountable.⁹³ Would Rand have perceived the evidence as enough of a threat to merit significant action?

Even with mounting scientific evidence, Rand herself probably would not have endorsed government action to minimize the effects of climate change because—much like many environmentalists today—she considered environmental issues to be technological issues that could be solved by the technological and economic trends already in place. Even if the threats of climate change potentially threaten human life, Rand would not have seen such evidence as damnable enough to sacrifice a consumptive Western lifestyle. Instead, Rand would have placed her bets on human innovation as the ultimate savior. However, as I argued in the previous section, technology cannot be relied upon to solve all of our environmental problems. Furthermore, the belief in technological ‘quick-fixes’ all too often removes all responsibility for maintaining the status quo. If we can fix climate change with a spark of human ingenuity, why sacrifice now?

SELF-INTEREST AND WILLING SACRIFICE

As I contended in the section “Rand and the Environmental Movement,” Randians are firmly opposed to environmental sacrifices because they run contrary to self interest. Rand sets up an antagonistic dichotomy between sacrifice and self-interest (not in specifically environmental sense) in ‘Galt’s Speech’ from *Atlas Shrugged* (reprinted in *For the New Intellectual*), where she defines sacrifice as such:

“Sacrifice” does not mean the rejection of the worthless, but of the precious. “Sacrifice” does not mean the rejection of the evil for the sake of the good, but of the good for the

⁹³ “Climate Change: How Do We Know?” *NASA*, accessed April 3, 2015, <http://climate.nasa.gov/evidence/>.

sake of the evil. “Sacrifice” is the surrender of that which you value in favor of that which you don’t.⁹⁴

For Rand, sacrifice is incompatible with self-interest because making sacrifices involves giving up a value for a non-value. In this sense, sacrifice is equated with altruism, because one’s self-interest is sacrificed for a non-interest. Political theorist John M. Meyer, author of “A Democratic Politics of Sacrifice?” deconstructs Rand’s definition of sacrifice, noting that when sacrifice is considered to be incompatible with self-interest, “there is less room for envisioning sacrifice as anything other than self-abnegation.”⁹⁵ If we narrow down the argument to environmental sacrifices specifically, Rand’s definition is equally limiting.

The Randian understanding of sacrifice is narrow and does not account for the ubiquity of sacrifice. Meyer instead proposes that we conceive of sacrifice in an expanded form: “rather than the negation of interest,” sacrifice can be reframed as the “pursuit of a higher interest, albeit at a recognizable cost.”⁹⁶ Acts that fit this definition of sacrifice, Meyer points out, such as saving for a child’s college education, parents would deny as sacrificial because they gain “satisfaction from the flourishing of their children” and could therefore be thought of as an expanded sense of self-interest.⁹⁷ When we re-envision such acts for what they are—as sacrifices—we can come to the conclusion that “sacrifice and human flourishing need not be mutually exclusive and *can* be mutually enforcing.”⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Ayn Rand, “This is John Galt Speaking,” in *For the New Intellectual* (New York: New American Library, 1963), 139-140.

⁹⁵ John M. Meyer, “A Democratic Politics of Sacrifice?” in *The Environmental Politics of Sacrifice* ed. Michael Maniates and John M. Meyer (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2010), 15.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

If we recognize sacrifice as a form of expanded self-interest that can be both *willing* and *long-term*, it is clear that Rand accepted such acts as morally permissible, although she did not call them ‘sacrifices.’ In Rand’s novels, her heroes make many willing sacrifices to reach their career goals; Hank Rearden in *Atlas Shrugged* willingly sacrifices time with his family to operate his company ‘Rearden Metal,’⁹⁹ and Howard Roark in *The Fountainhead* sacrifices economic security by refusing to practice conventional architecture.¹⁰⁰ Rand’s heroes make willing sacrifices for their long term projects. In this sense, sacrifices are integral to achieving their goals. Most importantly, these kinds of sacrifices are not *imposed* by anyone but the agent themselves.

If we conceive of sacrifice in the way Meyer suggests, I believe there is space for environmental sacrifices within Rand’s framework; that is, I have established that when sacrifice is reframed this way, Randians cannot claim that sacrifices of this kind are incompatible with objectivism.

Regarding sacrifice, could Rand support sacrificial acts with goals past an individual’s lifetime, such as sacrificing wealth for one’s descendants? In *Atlas Shrugged* and *The Fountainhead*, her characters were making willing sacrifices for *their own* self interest. Is there room for willing sacrifices for someone else’s self-interest? Rand’s philosophy of love, it seems, allows for sacrifices of this kind, because loved ones represent a selfish interest on the part of an individual. In a paper titled “The Ethics of Emergencies,” Rand writes:

Concern for the welfare of those one loves is a rational part of one’s selfish interests. If a man who is passionately in love with his wife spends a fortune to cure her of a dangerous

⁹⁹ Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* (New York: New American Library, 1957), 38.

¹⁰⁰ Ayn Rand, *The Fountainhead* (New York: New American Library, 1943), 128.

illness, it would be absurd to claim that he does it as a “sacrifice” for her sake, not his own, and that it makes no difference to him, personally and selfishly, whether she lives or dies. Any action that a man undertakes for the benefit of those he loves is not a sacrifice if, in the hierarchy of his values, in the total context of the choices open to him, it achieves that which is of greatest personal (and rational) importance to him. In the above example, his wife’s survival is of greater value to the husband than anything else that his money could buy, it is of greatest importance to his own happiness and, therefore, his action is not a sacrifice.¹⁰¹

Again, Rand neglects to call acts done out of love ‘sacrifices,’ opting instead to define them as part of an expanded, rational self-interest. In another passage from *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, Rand references love not as a static emotion, but as a dynamic emotion capable of different intensities:

If one wants to measure the intensity of a particular instance of love, one does so by reference to the hierarchy of values of the person experiencing it. A man may love a woman, yet may rate the neurotic satisfactions of sexual promiscuity higher than her value to him. Another man may love a woman, but may give her up, rating his fear of the disapproval of others (of his family, his friends or any random strangers) higher than her value. Still another man may risk his life to save the woman he loves, because all his other values would lose meaning without her.¹⁰²

The degree of sacrifices an agent would be willing to make for an individual that one loves are clearly dependent on the intensity of love, according to Rand. In the instance of a man risking his life to save someone he loves, clearly--for Rand--sacrificing one’s life is moral if the love is intense enough. Is this enough to get a Randian to willingly sacrifice past their own lifetime? It seems that Randians want to see the people they love thrive, even past their own deaths. Even though the potential for such sacrificial acts is subject to the *intensity* of love, there is still space for willing sacrifice to occur, even if the agent will not be alive to see their loved one thrive.

¹⁰¹ Ayn Rand, “The Ethics of Emergencies,” in *The Virtue of Selfishness* (New York: New American Library, 1961), 51.

¹⁰² Ayn Rand, *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology* ed. Harry Binswanger and Leonard Peikoff (New York: Meridian, 1979), 44.

Here, objectivist agents have moral obligations to the interests of future generations, if they love their children or grandchildren.

Working within Rand's theory of love, if one loves their child and wants the best for them (perhaps clean air and clean water), theoretically, a Randian could make environmental sacrifices in her lifetime in the interest of her children that are not antithetical to her individual self-interest. Interest in the welfare of a future generation, it seems can motivate environmental action within an objectivist framework. Again, it is clear that Rand's objectivism need not be opposed to *all* sacrifices. I have thus shown that the philosophical tenets of Rand's philosophy can conditionally support *willing environmental sacrifices*.

ARE ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATIONS POSSIBLE?

Thus far, I have have argued that when sacrifice is re-conceptualized as an expanded form of self-interest, Rand's framework can support *willing* environmental sacrifices. But what about environmental regulations that are imposed on people? Would it be possible for Rand's framework to accept the imposition of environmental regulations by the state?

Ayn Rand maintained that one of the few "proper function[s]" of government is "the courts, to protect your property and contracts from breach or fraud by others."¹⁰³ If environmental degradation (i.e. the effects of climate change) constitutes an unwarranted taking or damaging of property, then government action or regulation may be permissible within an objectivist framework. We have come to the point where the physical property of many persons is being degraded and damaged in the form of climate change and environmental destruction.

Would Rand accept government intervention to solve these problems? If Rand is willing to grant

¹⁰³ Ayn Rand, "This is John Galt Speaking," in *For the New Intellectual*, (New York: New American Library, 1961), 183.

that government regulation is permissible (if and only if demonstrable harm is shown) for collective environmental conditions (such as the overcrowding of cities), then we can begin to conceive of the permittance of some form of environmental regulations even within a position as far-Right as Rand's.

If environmental damages to an individual's property cannot be pinpointed to a single polluter--such as the effects of human-caused climate change--laws aimed at regulating all polluters must be considered, even within a Randian framework. Rand's two solutions to environmental issues (legal suits and technological improvements) offer no insight on issues an unidentifiable polluter. The owner of beachfront property--whose valuable land is slowly being eaten away by rising sea levels--cannot sue any single individual or corporate entity in court for property damages. Similarly, the operators of a ski resort cannot point to the acts of one agent as the reason for rising average temperatures that are delaying opening of their slopes to customers. For issues of collective blame, Rand's judicial solution is unable to provide victims of environmental damages with the tools for compensation.

In the section "The Randian Philosophy of the Environment," I noted that in *The Left: Old and New*, Rand was willing to grant that if the "condition is collective, such as in an overcrowded city, appropriate and *objective* laws can be defined, protecting the rights of all those involved."¹⁰⁴ If we are to protect the rights of collective entities (i.e. a group of beachfront property owners) from environmental damages that can be blamed on the activities of a collective of humans, then it seems that environmental regulations would be permissible.

¹⁰⁴ Ayn Rand, "The Left Old and New," in *Return of the Primitive: The Anti-Industrial Revolution* ed. Peter Schwartz (New York: The Penguin Group, 1999), 167.

Because Rand does not offer a legal solution for collective environmental damages caused to individual property, and because she was willing to endorse objective laws aimed at improving environmental of collective concern, I argue that the door is open fairly wide for environmentally protective regulations. If the role of government in protecting private property is extended in situations of environmental damage, then the collective damage all humans cause in the form of carbon pollution that contributes to climate change allows for environmental regulation. This conclusion is perhaps the most surprising, as Rand advocated for a strict separation of economy and state. Nevertheless, based upon what Rand wrote, it seems that environmental regulations would be permitted within objectivism under a variety of circumstances.

EXPANDING THE CONVERSATION FURTHER

Samuel P. Hays has traced the development of the anti-environmental movement partly to extractive industries that benefit from blocking regulatory legislation. What current scholarship has not yet adequately charted has been the ideological roots of anti-environmentalism. If we are to better understand the wellsprings of such thought on the American Right, I believe Rand is a good place to start.

One troubling aftereffect of Rand's influence on the Right is the unquestioned antagonistic dichotomy of the economy and the environment perpetuated by the Right wing. In *A History of Environmental Politics Since 1945* locates the roots of anti-environmentalism in part in the "long history of the American economy in farming and grazing, lumbering and mining,

elements that were dominant in the nation's past."¹⁰⁵ Extractive industries are "embedded in the psyche of many communities," Hays argues, and evoke "both personal values and rewards placed on physical labor in extracting resources from the Earth."¹⁰⁶ Extractive endeavors, by their definition, rest on the assumption that economic values cannot be accessed without environmental degradation of some form. Similarly, the ideology that American conservatives--as well as Rand--sell voters is ultimately an offshoot of that uncritical assumption, positing that economic progress is incompatible with environmental protections. Much like the Randian 'anti-human' concerns about environmentalism, the Right connects environmental regulation to a direct infringement on human flourishing. Why would any struggling American support stricter environmental regulations if they knew it would mean less economic growth, fewer jobs, and more sacrifices? Here, the Right takes a page directly from Rand's environmental thought. Environmental damages are defensible on the grounds that human interests are championed, and if one is interested in keeping their job or providing for their family, environmentalism stands contrary to that.

What appears to be the case is that Randians and conservative ideologies cannot conceive of an economic system that *doesn't* include environmental damages as the outcome of economic progress, leading independent and conservative voters to assume antagonism between the two. What is striking about such an assumption is the cognitive leap that avoids admitting that capitalism sole interest is profit-making. Capitalism, contrary to what Randians and conservatives posit, is not concerned with human interests. Rand's arguments put a 'human face'

¹⁰⁵ Samuel P. Hays, "The Environmental Opposition," in *A History of Environmental Politics Since 1945* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), 109.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 110.

on capitalism; she the personal growth, self-realization, and creative capacities that capitalism could nurture. Yet, capitalism is not in the business of maximizing human potential, it is the business of maximizing profit. In its purest form—which Rand advocated—it certainly had no interest in environmental protection.

Why can't a less antagonistic relationship between human economies and the environment be conceived of by those on the Right? Even from a purely human-centric standpoint the economic value of ecosystem services cannot be overlooked. In this sense, environmental damages that reduce the capacity of environments to deliver services critical to human flourishing are truly 'anti-human.' For example, the pollination services provided by insects, birds, and bats—many of which are threatened by degradation and climate change—are essential to agriculture, and therefore, human existence.

Right-wing anti-environmentalist rhetoric makes one choose between economic security and environmental protection, which makes environmentalism appear privileged and paternalistic. Rhetorical tactics like this frame the conversation in a narrow and limiting way that forces voters to choose one or the other. Because environmentalists have allowed the Right-wing to frame the debate in this way, most Americans cannot conceive of an environmentalism that will not harm them economically. Just as well, this narrow conception of environmentalism positions environmentalists as enlightened elites who know better than the rest of us (and can bear the financial costs of environmental sacrifice). This type of conversation, perpetuated by Right-wing rhetoric, limits the kinds of conversations we can have about environmental protection. Combine this limited view of the economy and the environment with the misunderstandings of the motives of the environmental movement presented by Rand and her

followers, and the public is left with little choice but to oppose environmental reforms on economic, as well as philosophical grounds.

CONCLUSION

Is Ayn Rand's rejection of environmentalism a cause for concern within U.S. politics? The arguments I have presented in this paper suggest that even a conservative position as far-Right as Rand's can indeed support environmentalism, whether it be through *willing* environmental sacrifices, or *imposed* sacrifices in the form of environmental regulations issued by the state. Followers of Ayn Rand, who actively oppose environmentalism at both the individual level and the state level, both misunderstand the motives of the environmental movement and fail to provide solutions to collective environmental problems, such as climate change. The concern for the environmental movement, of course, is the continued dissemination of such uncritical views on the part of conservative institutions like the Ayn Rand Institute. The influence of Rand among high school students--who are introduced to Rand's thought through the free classroom sets donated by the Ayn Rand Institute--cannot be underestimated. Because Rand's ideas are being introduced to students at a young, impressionable age, academe can no longer ignore the consequences Rand's thought may be having on voting decisions, policymaking, and public consciousness in general.

What I hope to have accomplished here is not to elevate Rand's thought, but rather to show that self-described objectivists, far-Right conservatives, or even libertarians who admire the views of Ayn Rand cannot logically support an anti-environmentalist position if they subscribe to Rand's framework. In this sense, my project is narrow in scope. However, I acknowledge that there is much more work to be done in addressing the strident opposition to environmentalism and determined inaction on critical environmental issues on the part of the

American Right. Given the lasting influence of Rand, exploring the consequences of her thought, I believe, is an excellent place to begin unraveling the roots and consequences of anti-environmentalism in the United States.

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