

Capitalism and Morality

ATLAS SHRUGGED'S DAGNY TAGGART AND HANK REARDEN: TWO OF A KIND

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"I swear by my life and my love of it that I will never live for the sake of another man, nor ask another man to live for mine."

Ayn Rand's novel, *Atlas Shrugged*, depicts a once capitalistic society torn apart by looters. A society which punished hard working producers for their success, then forced them to carry the weight of the world on their shoulders. Yet at some point this weight became too much to bear, and the producers of the world decided to retaliate, leaving only a few behind working for a lost cause. Dagny Taggart and Hank Rearden were two of the few left behind, driven only by their love of work.

The protagonist of the novel, Dagny Taggart, is an intelligent, resourceful, and committed producer. She is the Vice President of Operations at Taggart Transcontinental, driven by her love for the railroad. Dagny supports and understands the necessity of competition, knowing that it leads to the best possible product at the lowest possible cost. Yet she still works and lives among the looters, who do all that is possible to stop competition and repress those who are successful. Dagny's very own brother, James Taggart, is one of the looters, driven by greed and corruption. Dagny is superior to her brother in all matters of business, yet ironically James was the one named President of Taggart Transcontinental.

At the start of the novel Taggart Transcontinental is in a state of crisis, as service on the Rio Norte Line is stunted by the shortening supply of steel. Dagny Taggart is the first to do something about this as she cancels the order with Taggart Transcontinental's original steel supplier, Orren Boyle. The only way to get the Rio Norte line up and running is to switch to a new supplier, and if necessary a new metal, which is why Dagny decides to take a chance with an inventor named Hank Rearden.

Hank Rearden is an extremely successful industrialist, stuck in a loveless marriage. He is forced to support a wife, mother, and brother who do not appreciate him. Rearden works every day trying to further the success of his business, which his family has a hard time understanding. They depend upon Rearden for their very livelihood, but do not treat him with any respect. Instead they complain day in and day out of him working too hard and not spending enough time at home. They do not seem to grasp the fact that if Rearden did not work so hard they could not live the life of luxuries they have become so accustomed to.

Rearden spent ten long years toiling before he was finally successful in developing a new alloy unlike any ever seen before. The new alloy, named Rearden Metal, is far superior to steel and offered at a much

lower cost. Dagny was one of the first to take a chance with Rearden Metal. She knew the Rio Norte Line was in need of serious repair and she had to act quickly.

After ordering a shipment of Rearden Metal, Dagny told Jim she canceled with Orren Boyle. Jim was infuriated upon hearing this and explained that by purchasing Rearden Metal, Taggart Transcontinental was in fact ruining any chance for suppliers such as Orren Boyle to survive. Jim does not understand or support competition as Dagny does. He is instead focused on the survival of Taggart Transcontinental and the looters he has established contacts with. Jim is blinded by greed and corruption, and does not understand that his actions are ruining the economy.

As the novel unfolds it becomes prevalent that Dagny and Rearden are two of a kind. They are both driven by their love of work and production, and forced to live among the looters. Dagny is unlike any other woman Rearden has ever met, she is upfront, strong, and decisive when it comes to business as well as personal matters. Rearden is obsessed with his work and underappreciated for all the effort he puts forth. His family does not appreciate the fact that Rearden has developed a metal that could change the future. Instead they are concerned with appearances and the trivial matters of life.

Rearden's wife Lillian convinces him to attend a party she has organized in order to celebrate their wedding anniversary. Rearden is stuck in this loveless marriage and the last thing he wants to do is celebrate the years of his life he has wasted with Lillian. But Rearden does what he thinks is respectable, hating every minute of the party. Dagny is one of the many to attend the party. Here she has a chance to see a bracelet Rearden made for Lillian. Rearden had molded the bracelet out of the first batch of Rearden metal. It represented the many long years Rearden had struggled to form the perfect alloy. In Rearden's mind this was the perfect gift more valuable than anything else he could have bought her.

Lillian on the other hand felt the bracelet was merely an ugly trinket. She did not understand what this bracelet meant to Rearden, just as she did not understand the amount of effort Rearden put into his work. At the party Lillian openly complained that she would much rather have had a bracelet made of diamonds than the one made of Rearden metal. Upon hearing this Dagny took the diamond bracelet off her own wrist and offered it to Lillian in exchange for the one made of Rearden metal. Though slightly embarrassed Lillian felt obligated to accept Dagny's offer. Lillian now had the diamond bracelet she said she had wanted.

Dagny, unlike Lillian, appreciated the bracelet made by Rearden for all that it stood for. She understood how much effort Rearden had put into developing this alloy, and the impacts it would make on the world. The diamond bracelet was more aesthetically appealing than the one made by Rearden, but that was of no importance to Dagny. Dagny respected Rearden and understood him far better than his family ever did.

Time unfolds and Dagny and Rearden continue to work on the Rio Norte line. Though experiencing many difficulties, the two manage to keep production on track. That is until the State Science Institute releases a warning about Rearden metal. The warning is completely fictional and unfounded; making allocations that Rearden metal is unsafe and unreliable. In response to this warning Taggart Transcontinental's stock reaches an all-time low, as stockholders fear the Rio Norte line will be a failure.

In response to this Dagny informs Jim that she will finish the Rio Norte line without the help of Taggart Transcontinental. She will give up her position as Vice President of Operations and complete the Rio Norte line on her own. Only now it will be called the John Galt line. It takes much effort but Dagny comes up with enough investors to back the finishing of the newly named John Galt line.

To Dagny the name John Galt represents empowerment and hope for the future. But one soon comes to find that John Galt is in fact the destroyer Dagny has feared the entire novel. Dagny is a producer stuck in a world of looters, held hostage by her love for the railroad. She does not understand that by naming her line after John Galt, she is actually harming the cause and giving more power to the looters.

Dagny hears much skepticism upon finishing the line, but she knows Rearden metal will hold up. The first ride is a success and unsurprisingly Dagny and Rearden's relationship develops into more than business partners. Later that very night Dagny and Rearden make love. The next morning Rearden is ashamed of his actions the night before, feeling as if he gave in to his physical desires, which he views as a weakness. Dagny, on the other hand, views making love as something empowering when done with someone such as Rearden; someone with whom she shares many of the same values and respects. Dagny is a strong independent woman who understands herself and her body. She has no hesitations entering into the affair with Rearden, knowing that he is stuck in an unhappy and unfulfilling marriage.

Dagny and Rearden plan to travel around the countryside in hopes of coming across useful discarded machinery. During their trip they stop to explore a closed Twentieth Century Motor Company plant. Here they find something they never would have dreamed of, a motor designed to run off of static electricity. An invention of this magnitude could have huge implications of the future, providing a power source that would never run out. Dagny and Rearden decide right then and there that they are going to find the inventor of this machine.

Dagny and Rearden both understand and value the importance of such an invention. Just as Rearden metal has had a huge impact on the industrial world, so would an engine designed to run off of static electricity. This would alleviate dependence on natural resources which have become increasingly scarce. Dagny and Rearden are two of few producers left in a world of looters. And industry is in an all time decline as the producers of the world continue to disappear.

Dagny and Rearden's love affair nears the end of its life, as fate takes them in different directions. Rearden is distracted by the many new laws and restrictions looters have been placing on the industrial world. He is first taken to trial on outlandish charges and then blackmailed by his wife Lillian. Rearden is forced to hand the patent to Rearden metal over to the government, under a new law entitled Directive 10-289. The looters have finally succeeded in taking everything of value away from Rearden.

Dagny on the other hand is concerned with the electric motor. She hired a scientist named Quentin Daniels to try and rebuild the motor found at the Twentieth Century Motor Company plant. Then after receiving a letter from Quentin, Dagny began to fear he would be the next to disappear. In response to this Dagny rents a plane in an attempt to follow Quentin to his next location. Only she never makes it to her destination, and instead crashes in the mountains of Colorado. Here Dagny meets the infamous John Galt and comes to find that he is in fact the destroyer she has feared.

Galt and the other producers of the world had disappeared to this valley, in order to ride themselves of the burden of looters. In this valley every member lives by the quote "I swear by my life and my love of it that I will never live for the sake of another man, nor ask another man to live for mine." The most intelligent producers of the world retreated here, leaving the looters to their own demise. Only after this would they return needed and wanted to the industrial world.

This is where Dagny and Rearden's love affair came to an end. After her arrival in the valley Dagny fell in love with John Galt. Rearden and Dagny were two of a kind, that is to successful industrialists surrounded by looters. Rearden could not bring himself to leave what he had worked so hard to develop and Dagny could not tear herself away from the railroad, until there was nothing left in the industrial

world for them. They finally had to leave the collapsing industrial world behind and join the other members of the valley.

Atlas Shrugged depicted a world torn apart by looters; a world that discouraged competition and gave credit to the deceitful. This world fell apart and the only hope left lied with the producers. That is the hardworking scientists, inventors, and industrialists who were forced into hiding. Ayn Rand successfully established that competition and hard work are a necessary part of our economy, and it is imperative that we support capitalism.

Suggested Readings

"Atlas Shrugged." <www.sparknotes.com>. Summary written by Dr. Younkin's friend, A.K.A. Ayn Rand's Number 1 Fan