

# Interview of Shoshana Milgram Knapp about Ayn Rand

for the french blog about Objectivism:

**[ObjectivismeFR.wordpress.com](http://ObjectivismeFR.wordpress.com)**

A translation in french of this interview and the audio recording is available on the blog.  
Une traduction française de cette interview est disponible à l'adresse ci-dessus.

*I first heard about Shoshana Milgram in a 2011 Leonard Peikoff podcast, in which he said she was working on a biography of Ayn Rand. Shoshana Milgram is Associate Professor of English at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech); she has taught and published on various authors such as Victor Hugo, George Sand, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Nabokov and many others. She is the author of the biographical chapter of A Companion to Ayn Rand, published by Blackwell. During OCON 2018, I had the opportunity to meet this tiny woman full of passion and energy, and to interview her about her biography of Ayn Rand, a promising work in progress.*

*I thank Cornelius Robbins for helping me with the written transcript. Before revealing the interview, here is a short message from Shoshana Milgram:*

*« I want to thank Gio for our wonderful conversations at OCON in Newport Beach, for his informative blog, and for asking me good questions during our lunchtime interview. The transcript of our interview preserves the informality of our interchange. I have made changes for purposes of clarification. »*

*This interview essentially addresses three topics: Shoshana Milgram's book, Ayn Rand's temper, and Ayn Rand's readings. This interview may contain a few spoilers of Ayn Rand novels.*

**Several biographies of Ayn Rand already exist. Why are you working on a new biography?**

Thank you for asking the question. We're here in Newport Beach California at OCON (Objectivist CONFerence) in July 2018. That means that it's been quite a long time since Ayn Rand's death in 1982, but since then there hasn't been the kind of book I would have expected to find in a library or book store that one does ordinarily find for major writers, in which you have an assessment of the writer's importance and the facts about the writer's life as they concern the writer as a creator. This is a book that I was looking for, for years, and now it turns out that I'm going to be writing it myself.

And my purpose here is not so much to explain the deficiencies of other books, which have their own qualities, but rather to explain what I'm trying to do in my own book, and what my purpose is. My academic field is literature. I'm accustomed to teaching other writers, such as Charles Dickens and Victor Hugo and so on, where one can find important, documented facts about their lives. Then, you can see when they wrote, what they wrote, and something about why they wrote what they wrote, depending on how much information we have. So what I'm trying to do is to make real what we ought to know, what we might want to know, about Ayn Rand, the woman who wrote her books.

Now, here is the thing about books: You see them in the book store, you see them on your Kindle, and after you read a book many times, you can get the impression that the book is a metaphysical reality, that it's always been there. But books were not here until someone wrote them. And Ayn Rand's books were not here until she wrote them. The first time I got a glimpse of a manuscript of hers, this fact became extremely real to me,

and I thought: “She had a pen in her hand! She wrote the words! Until she wrote them, they weren’t there... and then she crossed something out, she changed it...” and the issue of Ayn Rand as an active creator became my passion: Who is this writer? Not simply what you might have gleaned from a newspaper report or a television show, but who is she as the person who wrote at her desk? And yet, as I learned about Ayn Rand, I saw who she was at her desk and who she was away from her desk, and I recognized: Here is the same person! And that became very interesting to me.

Now part of my work, my approach, is that I want to write the kind of book that I would have liked to find and read, but also one that fits Ayn Rand herself. And some of the things that she herself said made this whole inquiry a little bit questionable for me because in 1945, two years after *The Fountainhead*, she published a letter to her readers, who wrote to the publisher because they wanted to know about her life. She said: “There is nothing of any importance to be said or known about me, except that I wrote *The Fountainhead*.” (Of course she would have updated it later: “and then *Atlas Shrugged*.”) She continued: “It is the content of a person’s brain, not the accidental details of his life that determines his character. My own character is in the pages of *The Fountainhead*. For anyone who wishes to know me, that is the essential. The specific events of my private life are of no importance whatever. I have never had any private life in the usual sense of the word. My writing is my life.”

“My life has been ‘single tracked’ (...) a life consciously devoted to a conscious purpose. (...) Nothing else has ever mattered to me too much.”

Well... what am I supposed to do now? And what does she mean when she says her writing is her life? She puts similar words in the mouth of Howard Roark, the hero of *The Fountainhead*: “The only thing that matters, my goal, my reward, my beginning, my end, is the work itself. My work done my way.” For Ayn Rand, that’s also true. Her work done her way. She knew what she wanted, she knew where she was going. I’m remembering what she says about what matters and what doesn’t matter, as well as what Roark says in the novel to Steven Mallory:

“Now talk. Talk about the things you really want said. Don't tell me about your family, your childhood, your friends or your feelings. Tell me about the things you think.”

I looked at that, and I thought: “Does that mean that, as a biographer, I’m supposed to stay away from her family, her childhood, her friends, and her feelings?” I knew that couldn’t be quite right because she often does tell readers about her characters’ friends, feelings, and family. What I now understand her to mean is that she rejected as trivial any account of Steven Mallory that didn’t show him as the man who made his sculptures, any account of Howard Roark that didn’t show him as the architect of the Enright House, Monadnock Valley and so on... And for my purposes, rejecting any account of Ayn Rand that’s not the story of the woman who wrote *what* she wrote, *when* she wrote, *how* she wrote... So that issue was very important to me, and that is an aspect that I don’t always find in other books: a real portrait of this woman as the writers of her works.

As I found out, her life away from her desk is intimately related to her life at her desk as the author of those books. Now, she did say that she didn't have a private life in a usual sense. But she did have a private life. And her private life was important. Because one of the points that she made about Frank Lloyd Wright, when she talked about him as a person, was that he wasn't the inspiration for the character of Howard Roark, because in his life, in all contexts, he was not Howard Roark. That's not to discredit him. But Ayn Rand was indeed Ayn Rand. All the time. And her private life is tied to her public life; her public and private life are related in their personal meaning to her, because all of her life has this 'single-tracked' persistence in going after what she wanted.

However, she cherishes the dignity of privacy. And Gail Wynand in *The Fountainhead* — I'm thinking of *The Fountainhead* today partly because the Newport Beach conference was celebrating the 75 years since the publication of *The Fountainhead* in 1943, so I looked closely at it, again — Gail Wynand says:

« Every form of happiness is private. Our greatest moments are personal, self-motivated, not to be touched. The things which are sacred or precious to us are the things we withdraw from promiscuous sharing. ».

So I thought to myself: "Well...you know...'promiscuous sharing': I don't want to do that, in a biography" However, there are private aspects of Ayn Rand's life that I think are important to reveal because they're part of her. And I've got one more quotation here that I want to share, and it's from "The Fullness of Life," by Edith Wharton, an American novelist of the Gilded Age. She describes a person's nature as:

"like a great house full of rooms. There is the hall, through which everyone passes going in and out. The drawing-room, where one receives formal visits. But beyond that, in the innermost room, the Holy of Holies, the soul sits alone, and waits for a footstep that never comes."

I thought about that. Ayn Rand certainly had a Holy of Holies. Did she wait for a footstep that never came? What is the soul's secret self? And I thought that part of my job was to try to join her there. To tell what I thought was important, not on an impersonal basis and not as if I were her actual friend because, although I did meet her once, I was not her friend, but rather a conscientious observer, someone who seeks to tell the relevant truth. So what does it mean to tell the relevant truth, to write a book about someone's life? Well, it is a biography, it's about her life, so it's not just about the books by themselves as one would read them if one didn't know anything about her, if they arrived over the doorstep without any person involved or any personal information. Her life is part of my story, and it's taken me into libraries in Boston, Chicago, Irvine, New York, Paris, and also West Branch (Iowa), Provo (Utah) and Auburn (Alabama). I became an archival adventurer.

One of the reasons I did this (and this pertains to the kind of book I was writing) is that I realized that the more likely I was to get close to first-hand information, the more likely

I was to be able to learn information about Ayn Rand the writer. Contemporary records from her life, and especially in her own words. I've always been very interested in the contemporary records, without the interference or the distortions of memory, and in her own words. Because other people observe only what they observe and perhaps do not grasp, but I believe she knew herself better than anyone else did. And other people report, or they report what other people said and then we're into third-hand, fourth-hand, and so on, and I've always thought that if I can get to the first-hand, that's the best. Then also it is useful to have confirmation from other people. I don't remember everything about my own life, so she might not remember everything about her own life. She helped in my research because she was a saver. She stored up a lot of contemporary written records. So there were treasures to be found in Irvine (California) — the Ayn Rand Archives — and gold. But there were also clues. Because there were clues to other things that I could look for elsewhere that would also help me to get close to who she was. For example, I found in the Archives drafts of her writings, and that was important. I found a few things that had been published that I'd never seen reprinted, and that was interesting. There were documents, letters and so on. Those are interesting. So I made it my concern, first, to read everything that she had ever written. Then, I made it my concern also to read everything I knew her to have read. Because she's a reader — and later on I'll say something about what we know about her reading — but I thought: “If I know she read this, then I know that her eyes passed over this, that it's in her mind, and I should read it too.” And by “reading” I mean not just books, but films, movies, because one of the documents we have is her movie diary from her early years. Then from her day calendar I could see other things, such as plays, more films and so on... So I did my best with finding all of them. And some of the clues led me to other places, so I went. I see that she's corresponding with other people, and I want to find out more about them and what they might have written to other people from their own context with Ayn Rand. Of course, that correspondence is second-hand, but, still, it's second-hand from the 1940s! And that's better than third-hand from 2010 or what-have-you.

One of the things that I learned along the way was that — one of the reasons it's taken me as long as it has — is that some of the information that I thought was known and clear was less than certain. And I needed to check for myself. Because the contemporary record had a better memory than people, but sometimes there would be discrepancies between different records. That's one of the reasons it's taken me as long as it has, and yet always I had in my mind that I need to have everything. But I also need to have an emphasis on everything that's important. Gregory Salmieri just gave a wonderful lecture here at OCON about what's important and not important in *The Fountainhead*. Though he didn't read this passage, as it happens, I want to read a passage that matters to me. Steven Mallory is talking to Roark and says:

“Have you ever seen how your best friends love everything about you — except the things that count? And your most important is nothing to them, nothing, not even a sound they can recognize. You mean, you want to hear? You want to know what I do and why I do it, you want to know what I think! It's not boring to you? It's important?”

...and Roark says to Mallory: "Go ahead." I thought about that, and I thought that Ayn Rand is saying: "Go ahead. Find out what's most important, and be sure that you've got what's most important - but use everything that you can". We know various things about her and we know about the goal of her writing as she formulated it at one time — and I understand that you've translated that, so everyone listening to this can read it in French — she talks about the projection of the human ideal, the ideal Man, and that goal really defines much of her life.

Because in order to be true to that ambition, she needed for one thing, to survive, physically... and she knew that if she stayed in the Soviet Union she was not going to get to write those books. She even made an experiment to try to write something in a disguised form so that readers would be able to understand what she meant, but the censors would not, and she would get it past the censors. So she thought about that as a possible strategy, if she couldn't get out. But the person she showed it to, someone who worked for the censorship and was a friend of hers, he knew something was wrong! So she had the idea that she would be caught if she tried to disguise her ideas, to smuggle them in, and she would be killed. In fact, as you may know, that fate came to the original of Leo. Leo Bekkerman was caught, and killed. So I think part of pursuing her goal, the goal of her writing, involved this life event of getting out of Russia and going to the United States where she would be free to write about her ideas.

She did also want to write in English because she thought that was the language in which more people would be able to read what she wrote. It was not her first language, but it became her writing language. In the United States she'd be able to develop her writing skills, and she'd be free to write about her ideas - and she also had a plan for supporting herself by other writing work and non-writing work in order to get to her goal of projecting the human ideal.

So everything actually is integrated to her central purpose. Her writing of plays, her writings of screenplays, her leaving Russia. Everything is coherent with her fiction and theme and style and characterization. None of this is boring to me.

I'm not going to tell you everything that I found, but one of the things that was fascinating to me was how much continuity there was in her life and in her writing. I looked at her very earliest surviving Russian writing (I can read Russian), and I saw that she's using some of the same ideas and even the same images that later show up as late as her article on the Apollo mission, the landing on the Moon. So all the way from the 1920s in Russia to the late 1960s in the United States, she's the same writer, although of course her English and writing skills get better. But when she says that she's been the same person as long as she can remember and had the same fundamental philosophy since she was young, there's something very true about that. To be sure, she's always learning. She once said "I'm always learning every day. I don't know how I got to today without what I learned yesterday." You know that she's always learning. Yet she's always the same person, and of course that's also what's true in *The Fountainhead* about Howard Roark. That he's got the true immortality, the same consistency of character that

Mallory sees in Roark, such that you can imagine him going on forever and you *know* him.

So I think that you can see from my enthusiasm that I'm passionate about the subject, and I'm passionate about telling the truth about Ayn Rand. I believe that from what I've said you can already infer what is not there in any of the books written so far.

I will add to that, that I have some skills that I think are pertinent to the task, including that I know Russian. I don't know Russian as well as Ayn Rand knew Russian, but I can read Russian, which means I could read the letters: the Russian replies to Ayn Rand's letters to her family that she wrote until it was dangerous to continue the correspondence. She wrote letters to her family. Her letters... as far as we know are lost! Who knows where they went in Russia? But her family wrote letters to , and they sometimes quote from her letters to them, referring to what she had written, so that's a very important set of documents. And Dina Schein Federman translated the letters, but I can read them in Russian. And that collection was a big deal. Using it was something important I could do.

Also, I can read French. I don't know French as well as you do, but I can read the fiction that she read in French, and I have. I think that's an asset. Her first hero, literary hero, was Cyrus Paltons in *La Vallée Mystérieuse*. Not only did I read it in volume form, but I have also (with Bill Bucko, who was the one who identified the true original source), tracked down the periodicals where she read the novel. So, once I can see where she read the novel in serialized form, I see what else is in there, in the issue. Yes, now I've got a collection of the periodicals, the French children's magazines that Ayn Rand read. And we know she didn't necessarily read every page, but these were in her hands and I can read them now. These are things that have not been translated. So... I can read those magazines. Now Victor Hugo, whom she read, has translated, not very well necessarily, and people who cannot read French can read him. But the French children's magazines, they're not translated... So that's something else that I can do.

So I've got the Russian, I've got the French, I have some background in films, I'm interested in films. I have taught literature and film at Virginia Tech, I have some research experience, I don't know everything, I've never made a film myself, but... I know something about Ayn Rand's Hollywood years (and I've worked with David O. Selznick's papers), so that was also of help to me - I don't know if there's anyone else who's worked on Ayn Rand who has that kind of knowledge of languages and film.

And something else that I had when I started my work was that I had experience in tracking down facts that have not been found. And I will try to make this short, although if you look me up, I published most of that under the name Shoshana Knapp, or Shoshana Milgram Knapp. In the 1980s I got interested in a writer who wrote under the name "Victoria Cross." I couldn't find in any of the usual reference places her birth date or her death date or any of the facts about her life or even her actual first real name. The sources I found said that her name was Vivian Cory, and it was actually Annie Sophie Cory, which was why I couldn't get any real information until I found her real birth date

and her real birth place, which was India! This is before Google! I spent some years tracking down the information about her, and now if you look in the references you'll find what I learned.

But when I started.... I started with correspondence with scholars, and I tried to find anyone who might know, and at some point someone told me: "Well, don't you know that she was the sister of Laurence Hope?" And I thought: "Who's Laurence Hope?" Laurence Hope was another writer, a woman published under that name, and there was information about her. And because I could find information about Laurence Hope [i.e. Adela Florence Cory Nicolson], I could then get to my writer, the sister. Eventually I landed on the doorstep of a living relative, and he confirmed the relationship: "Oh yes" - and it turned out that he had ideas about my writer, which I was surprised to learn! Unfriendly ideas, but he basically confirmed what I've been finding about her identity and family. And I kept going, I read all of her writing that I could find. I read all of her letters that I could find anywhere. I eventually over time found more information. Some letters written by her uncle (and a few letters written by her) to Mabel Purefoy FitzGerald turned up just recently at the Bodleian Library in England. So we're still finding out a bit more, but we don't have her manuscripts. Eventually I wrote what I wrote and... let it go at that, because I thought I couldn't really get all the facts of her life without the manuscripts and without some of the secrets that I couldn't find answers to. But I had the experience of realizing: "Boy! You don't know anything" and the printed sources don't know everything, and you have to go out and find clues.

Now, with Ayn Rand there was already a lot of information, but I knew that I could probably find more, and I did. And interesting things, to me! Sometimes the task simply meant being persistent. Also, I tried to find information about her that would either support or contradict other information that I found.

This is just one matter that I'll try to describe quickly: Ayn Rand was interviewed, on tape, in 1960-61 by Barbara Branden (who was asking her most of the questions, and Nathaniel Branden was there some of the time, and Frank O'Connor was there some of the time and so on, but mostly Barbara Branden). Ayn Rand talked. And sometimes the follow-up questions that I would have asked if I'd been there were not asked! Also, since their relationship ended some years later, Barbara Branden did not have the chance to ask follow-up questions. The existing interviews were all she had, and all that any of us have, on some subjects.

Ayn Rand talked about a certain story editor for Cecil B. DeMille, how Ayn Rand had sent her some screen treatments and how this person had rejected them and so on... and she didn't give the name. All I had as information was what Ayn Rand said had happened. I thought it would be nice if I could nail this down, if I could get some confirmation of who this person was, what happened with the treatments, and what the screen treatments were. Well, that was one piece of good luck that came to me in Provo (Utah) when I went to look at the Cecil B. DeMille Papers. I went through the appropriate years, and I turned over every page because the items were not identified by item, but rather by general category and year. I'm turning over a page, and there's Ayn

Rand's name. And there's the letter from the story editor. She's returning the treatments, she names them, she says very nasty things about Ayn Rand, including that Ayn Rand will never have any success as a writer... so there it is! This really happened! You had to look for it to find it, but basically the document supported Ayn Rand's story. Then I thought: "Are the treatments going to be there, too?" And they were not there... That's unfortunate because we don't have them. But maybe there's someplace, someone had them, took them, maybe they were discarded... that would be another piece of information that I would like to have.

I did find some screen treatments in DeMille's papers that had not been copied completely when an earlier researcher had made some copies and put them in another library, so I found other things there that were interesting. But the letter from the story editor was my main treasure. I was so excited: I started jumping up and down, I explained to the people in charge of the papers, and we took an electronic picture of it right away, so it wouldn't disappear even if the paper crumbled or the library burned. And that was a good day! But I wouldn't have thought to do anything as persistent as turning over every page, that if I hadn't had my Victoria Cross experience, decades ago.

So why has this project taken so long? I've been working on this for many years, I thought initially that I would just be able to use the papers in the Ayn Rand Archives, that I knew everything, and that I just had to fill in some details of the story. It turned out that there were all sorts of follow-up questions that should have been asked, and people whom Ayn Rand knew and I could get to their memoirs or their papers, and find more prime Ayn Rand stuff. Again, without telling you everything, I will tell you about an example. A writer said: "Ayn Rand wrote a lot of comments on my manuscript." There is no manuscript in the Ayn Rand Archives from that writer, but I know where that writer's papers are, and I can investigate. I see the manuscript. I see some handwriting that I recognize. There is Ayn Rand's own handwriting, the real stuff, and here she is, it's real! What the writer said about Ayn Rand's comments, is real. The second-hand report is that she made comments, but the real thing is that I'm looking right at it. So this process is exciting, and it takes time.

In a sense you could say: "What do I learn that's new? Because everything is consistent!" But because I like to have more than one source, especially if it's not specific, as was the case about the story editor. It's better for me to have more, and the real thing is not always easy to find. Sometimes people tell me: "Just finish it." I could have simply done that. At some point, maybe I have to draw a line and do that, then fill things in afterwards, in a website or a blog or what-have-you... I have said that to myself and then I find something new, some new information. And I think: "Gee, it's a good thing! I waited to find that."

The Frank Lloyd Wright papers were very interesting to me. Those were in Arizona, and I had not known how much there was to read, because I hadn't seen a finding aid. But I wanted to see his side of the correspondence, and I got hold of the finding aid. Then the papers were all moved to Columbia University (New York). Visiting them was now

something that I could do easily. And that was helpful. That was informative, and I think it saved me from some mistakes I might have made.

So I think that what I've covered so far in this interview is: I've talked about my project, the continuity in her writing, what I'm trying to do that hasn't been done before, as far as I know, what my own skills are, and also that... I'm interested! It's more important to me to get this right than to rush. I sometimes say that when I first saw this project I thought: "Well I guess I know and I agreed what the first line of my obituary is going to be." And you know that Austen Heller in *The Fountainhead* is someone who sees greatness and says so. And that's what I need to do is to do justice to Ayn Rand's life... and get it right.

So that's my work and that's why it's taken as long as it has. I wish it had been quicker, but the other side of it is that information does show up and... I now understand so much more than I did when I began, including more about why she made the writing choices she made. Because Ayn Rand was a very practical worker on her writing and, you know, she counts the number of words. If she knows she has to write an article and it needs to fit in a certain space, she's working with that, so she will make some changes based on that factor and not only on preferring a different word, because the article needs to fit. (That's something, I see, that I need to learn too. Because I need to limit what I have to say to the time that I have it has to fit! So if a certain point can't be explained in the words and the time that I have, then that point needs to not be there if it can't stand without the appropriate support.) So if you sometimes wonder why didn't Ayn Rand write about a particular point? Well, sometimes the article needed to fit.

I'm going to tell you an *Atlas Shrugged* story here, because it pertains to the fact that I'm trying to get things right. With *Atlas Shrugged*, she planned it, she actually had an idea for it back in Russia, a book she called "the grandfather of *Atlas Shrugged*"... There's a paragraph in *The Fountainhead* where you can see that *Atlas Shrugged* is on the way. "What would the world be without those who work and produce?" But while she was working on it, she kept writing letters to people saying: "I'm almost done, I'm almost done, I'll move back to New York when I'm done, etc.", so she herself knew what she needed to accomplish in the book, but she didn't know how long it was going to take. And she did get it done. (I initially didn't quite realize how much more there was to know for my project, but that doesn't mean I'm not going to get it done.)

Having said that, there's also the fact that when she finished writing Galt's speech — and she was living in New York by then — that was when she went to negotiate with publishers. (had not yet finished the whole novel.) With *The Fountainhead* there were a lot of rejections from publishers; with *Atlas Shrugged* the rejections were the other way! There was a lot of interest, and that was exciting. She had a list of criteria that she would consider in a publisher, and she had questions that she wanted to ask. Bennett Cerf got her attention by saying "Why don't you have a contest? You know, and talk to several people.." She liked his idea, and that helped a lot with her decision to offer the book to Random House. Eventually — and it wasn't that long — he said: "Write your ticket" and they wrote the contract.

What happened after that was that the issue of Galt's speech and the length of the whole book.—They're now seeing the whole book and how long it's going to be... The whole book is longer than she'd said in the contract. So what's going to happen? Is she going to cut? What she agreed to do was a reduction in the royalties in exchange for having the book the way she wanted it. I could tell you a little more, but basically... for people who say everything is about money in Ayn Rand, that's silly! But it's also true she had signed a contract, so she thought it was reasonable to renegotiate because the book going to be longer, which means it was going to be bigger, and printing and all of that, but they were able to make a deal. It was a deal that made her happy. Because it was more important to her to have the book the way she wanted it than to have the fraction of the royalties.

Bennett Cerf, who was something of a wise guy: he was a raconteur, he made jokes, he appeared on TV shows. One of the things that he did is that he told a story about Ayn Rand: he said that what she said, when he talked about cutting Galt's speech, cutting the novel, was: "Would you cut the Bible?" This has become very famous. But here's the thing: Bennett Cerf may say that it happened, but that doesn't mean it actually happened. When someone asked Ayn Rand about that anecdote, because it was published, she said: "I didn't say that. And besides, the Bible needs cutting." That's Ayn Rand! Now I have what he said, you know, documented that he said it, and actually I've read the book *At Random*. It exists in a few forms: there's the published book, there is the recorded transcript when he was interviewed, and you can find that free, online on the Columbia University Oral History site and then there was the edited transcript, which is an intermediate stage. But Ayn Rand [her perspective, the context of the contract and the royalty cut] is not in any of those things! And there's no reason to think that the Bible remark is what she said, and when she was asked about it, she denied it, and commented further that the Bible needs cutting.

When you put these stories together, you need to consider what makes sense, and the nature of your sources for something, so it's irresponsible to repeat that Bennett Cerf said that she said something and to assume from that that she actually said that. Because it doesn't match her thoughts or expression. And that essentially was a measurement that I use sometimes: "Do I have a good source?" If I don't have a good source: "Is it at all possible?" And then I can at least report it as what somebody says, or: "Is it something that really makes no sense at all?"

Consider the fact, for example, that someone once said that Frank O'Connor really wrote *The Fountainhead*... Someone actually said that, someone who knew them back in the day, who knew Frank. And someone said: "Well he knew English better and so on..." I think that that simply isn't plausible. It is someone's point of view, but look at the evidence against it. On the opposing side, we have the facts that the manuscripts exist as holographs, in handwriting, and that Frank O'Connor is not known for someone who could have written a book as long as *The Fountainhead* - he didn't write any other novels! So in order to think that Frank O'Connor actually wrote *The Fountainhead*, you would have to think that the two of them were in cahoots with a fraud and Ayn Rand painstakingly produced the draft in her own handwriting! I don't think that could have

happened! That's not very likely, so the fact that someone said that Frank O'Connor wrote it... I don't even really need to report it, other than to maybe impeach the credibility of the person who said it. Does that really make sense? No. You don't have to prove that Frank O'Connor didn't write it, you need to look at the substantial evidence that Ayn Rand did write it. That's why sometimes I think, when people come up with: "Well, I've got a source." Yes, but what's your source like? And what's on the other side?

I am willing to look briefly at even implausible things that people say, just to see what's behind what they say. But I don't actually have to go searching for the unpublished works of Frank O'Connor. He didn't write *The Fountainhead*. I mean he gave her a few lines, such as casting pearls before someone without receiving even a pork chop in return, but she wrote about that, giving him credit for his line. He gave her the line: "Brother, you asked for it" in *Atlas Shrugged*, and that line appears in the manuscript in his handwriting. However, he didn't write *The Fountainhead*! And there is no good reason to believe that he did.

**Why, when it comes to talking about Ayn Rand's personality, do most people focus exclusively on her anger? Is it fair?**

I'm glad you asked that, for one thing, I'm not entirely sure that most people are focusing entirely on her anger, I'm not sure that's quite accurate, but it's certainly true that some people have focused on her anger. I think an interesting book is *100 Voices*, based on interviews, friendly to Ayn Rand or not-so-friendly. There are interviews with people who knew Ayn Rand during various stages of her life and some of them have stories to tell. Just because somebody has a story doesn't mean that the story is true — and you will even see that some of the conflicting stories can't both be true at the same time - but nonetheless, as far as the issue of what most people focus on, what you will get from *100 Voices* is indeed many things that many people focus on.

One interesting feature of that book, by the way, is that oral interviews were done that, in the end, the people that were interviewed (or their heirs, if they were no longer living) all signed off on the edited version. They approved the published version. Because some people were interviewed for many hours, and sometimes people talk about things other than the subject, so it's not as if everything that came out of someone's mouth for hours went into the book, but all the people who were interviewed (or their heirs) did know what was going to be published, and agreed: "This is OK." I mean, I did not look at every single signature, but that agreement was part of the deal. You may have read that some interviewees have raised questions about the book. Sometimes people don't remember exactly what they said, or they remember talking for hours, and the book just has two pages. But the book is certainly not uniformly positive, and the interviewees (or heirs) approved what is in it. The book is a good source for seeing what many people say about Ayn Rand in different contexts, and it does not exclude references to her anger. (See the index.)

The issue of what's fair, regarding her anger. I think that's an interesting way to ask the question, because the very matter of anger — for Ayn Rand, and for many other people

— comes about as a response to injustice. Ayn Rand was very concerned with justice. Justice has a positive aspect and a negative aspect in that justice involves doing right by goodness and doing right by evil. It is wrong to not acknowledge and pay tribute to goodness and thank the people who do good things, and it is also wrong to pretend that evil isn't evil. A few years ago, I lectured at OCON about moral self-defense. That issue was very interesting to Ayn Rand, because in her fiction, as you see, sometimes people ignore evil and suffer the consequences.

So it's a question of what your response to evil ought to be. Sometimes it ought to be "I don't have time for this," but sometimes it ought to be "I need to pay attention to this in order to combat it. John Galt tells Dagny: "Never think of pain or enemies longer than is necessary to combat them." That's not verbatim, but that's close, and I think that if it is necessary to combat something to prevent it from destroying your values, then you need to pay attention.

With Ayn Rand, anger was sometimes an overt response to injustice when she saw injustice and when the circumstances warranted it. If she were trying to get her visa to leave Russia for the United States, and the person interviewing her said things that didn't make sense, she was not going to get angry at him, she was going to do what needed to be done. But sometimes she got angry and it was right for her to get angry. Possibly, sometimes, she might get angry if she misunderstood and then if it was pointed out to her that she had misunderstood, the anger would disappear, she would correct herself. But as far as anger being a response to injustice, I think that this is something that should make sense to anybody.

I think about, one of the ways that's very vivid to me. I can get angry when the matter concerns my children. I'm very, very close to my children and if someone mistreats one of my children, I get very angry. You know: "How dare you?!" Of course, when my children were very young, and in school, I would not go marching into the school to complain directly to the teachers because that was not appropriate. We would have to figure out what to do, but, as for getting angry at someone who is unfair to one of my children, of course I would get angry, because unfairness was not right! That's not a proper response to reality. I think Ayn Rand, when she saw something that wasn't right, the anger was aroused. But the positive responses were aroused, too, and they were very important to her.

One of the treasures I think, in her correspondence, if you look at the letters of Ayn Rand, is she made an effort to write to people she admired — people she didn't necessarily know personally — to say: "I saw your performance in this play, you're a hero and I admire you." Or: "You showed courage, you've been attacked in the press, and I admire you" or: "You've been arrested, and I support you." She wanted to give a tribute to goodness and to acknowledge it in the world. Interestingly, she didn't write hostile letters to strangers, partly because she had other ways of showing what she thought, but she would not write hate letters to people, as far as I know. She had, again, other ways of dealing with her anger on those issues, but as far as doing justice to

people who did good things, that was something she wanted to do. And anger was justice, as well.

I will tell you an anger story that took place during the making of *The Fountainhead* movie. Long history, the making of *The Fountainhead* movie — but she fought for her script, she negotiated this, she negotiated that, she decided that the speech was very important, there were many meetings, the Johnston Office — which is the later name for what used to be called the Hayes Code — came to visit, they were concerned about the sex, about the speech; she writes the speech, she rewrites the speech, she modifies the speech, Gary Cooper's lawyer is worried about the speech, "people are gonna think Gary thinks this!" and she explains everything... She thought the battle was over, that it was all settled, the speech was settled. And she came onto the set, the day that they were shooting the speech. It is not clear if she knew that that was the plan for the day, but she arrived there — she wasn't exactly expected at that particular moment — and what did she see? They were shooting a truncated version, a shortened version of the speech. Leaving out the first half.

This was something that made her furious, because she thought that if the speech—which she had already shortened-- didn't have in it the justification for Roark's action, it would look as if Howard Roark became a bomb thrower out of whim, so it was unacceptable to have the speech shortened by starting in the middle, yet there they were shooting that. King Vidor said: "Oh, we're just sort of doing this as a protection shot and so on, but she said "oh no" and as she put it, was talking "calmly" — but the anger was evident — and she went all the way to the top, and the order came down: "NO CHANGES — speech to be shot as written." She was very, very angry. And she was entitled to be angry. She explained that if this speech were shot in the truncated version and it got released, then she would make sure that anyone who admired the book knew that she disapproved. I think that after all the trouble she went to, for them to be doing this behind her back, you can see how she would think: "*Well..!!*" And, yes, Ayn Rand was angry that day.

You ask whether it's fair to look only at her anger, I think that here, what's fair was for her to be angry! It was also, I think, important for her to do something because who knows what her director and producer would have done if she had not made clear her reasons and protested! She didn't have any legal protection — she had only 'word of honor' protection. But she could have used her voice. They broke their word, and that was not right.

I'll give you one more story, this one I don't have external confirmation for because it's based only on her account, but it's so much "Ayn Rand." This is the story about the charming little boy, and it's a story from her childhood. She went to a park one day where there were slides and swings, and so on, things that children play with — and there was a certain kind of roundabout swing that she liked to go on, you would hold on and you would get momentum and swing around. She lined up, she got her turn, a boy asked winsomely if he could have one go around and then he would relinquish her spot back to her — and he asked very nicely, and so she said "Okay, one go around." One go

around, and but he was back, he stayed on it the roundabout and didn't get off. He broke his word. And she was furious — “How can somebody lie?!?!” — He broke his word, so she went after him, she attacked him, there was blood on the playground. The grown-up Ayn Rand would not have done that, but from her point of view: “He said he was going to get off, how could he do that?!” If he'd grabbed a spot and just stayed on, she wouldn't have liked that, but when he gave his word, and then broke it, that made her very angry.

I think that people who say that they always saw her angry, I'm kind of wondering... are they people who had broken their word to her? And that's why they saw anger? Because I'm sure that, if there were people who broke their word to Ayn Rand, there could well have been opportunities for her to get angry. But they started it! They broke their word — if they were going to break their word, they shouldn't have given their word.

I think that those situations are the source of some of the anger stories — it is, however, also true that sometimes she might misunderstand what someone said and get angry, but when she found out the intended meaning, anger would disappear. One of the things that did make her angry, in a sense of breaking one's word, is that if she was expecting someone to know her work, and the person seemed to be there as someone who knows her work, and then did not. . . she would wonder: “Where's that question coming from?” When she was interviewed for *Playboy*, Alvin Toffler showed up the first time without having read what he was supposed to have read, that wasn't right. For her to be doing the interview with him as if he knew her work (even though of course it was going to be recorded and edited and so on) but still! The interview process was not what she had agreed to. He was asking questions, and she wondered: what context are they coming from? So she was not pleased about that, and understandably. That wasn't what was supposed to happen. An occasion for anger.

I am not surprised that some people see her as angry, but I also believe that she was justified in much of her anger. I wouldn't necessarily want to defend every single example of anger, but again, without being there, I wouldn't necessarily be able to recreate the context of what happened. So, it could be that she might have sometimes been angry when she shouldn't have, but overwhelmingly there is the story of her being angry when she ought to have been, and that's important; it's part of being Ayn Rand.

**In the biography which exists in French released in 2011, the author says that Ayn Rand had never read the philosophers she criticized, such as Kant or some others. He says that she had read only books *about* Kant but not Kant himself. What do you think?**

I'm glad you asked that, because it gives me an opportunity to talk about evidence here. Best evidence that Ayn Rand read something would be if we have a copy of something that she's read and we see her notes in the margin. Then, if her notes were in the margin, the notes are in her handwriting, her copy of the book exists in physical reality, I think that we can say: "Yes she read this book." The evidence that she had not read a book

would be if she said: "No I've never read that." I think that those are pretty good extremes. I think it's unlikely that she would say: "I never read that" if she had read a book, and I don't think that there'd be marks in the margin if she hadn't read that book.

Having said that, it's also the case that there are books she read — that we know she read — that were not in her library when she died. That means that those books either were given to other people or were discarded in some way. So the fact that we don't have a book with her marks doesn't necessarily mean that there wasn't one once. Here is a trivial example, but an accurate one. We know that she read all of Agatha Christie. All. Well, they're not *all* in the books that she left behind when she died, although there are a few Agatha Christie novels. I think many of them were probably given to Leonard Peikoff, to Cynthia Peikoff, and so on... whatever! But the fact that we've only got a handful of Agatha Christie books doesn't mean that Ayn Rand lied about reading all of Agatha Christie, it because that just doesn't make sense! Leonard Peikoff remembers seeing her make check marks in the margin and so on, and she refers to specific things... it doesn't make sense that she lied about reading Agatha Christie. So, not having a book in her collection at the end of her life doesn't necessarily mean she never read it or never had it.

Having said that, we can now put together what we do know about her policies in reading, and her remarks. Sometimes you'll hear people say that she was a very slow reader. It is true that she was a very slow reader when it came to certain materials, for example contracts. She was very slow when it came to contracts, so if for example you're her secretary and you see her reading the contracts or you know a letter that needs to be dealt with in some way, you might conclude that she is a slow reader. Some things she read much faster. Ayn Rand's job for quite some period of time on a piecework basis was reading books and writing up screen treatments of them or synopses, and she was pretty quick at that because each one was more money. This was her job: she was dependable and she could read several languages. So sometimes she could read pretty fast. I think that sometimes also she read something years ago and remember it without rereading it recently. For example she remembered *La Vallée Mystérieuse*, which she, as far as we know, hadn't seen since she was a child... and yet she remembered it, she remember the illustrations and she didn't have a copy with her, she hadn't taken a copy when she left Russia. In fact when she was interviewed at one point she didn't even remember the name of the author, so she had not gone looking for information about the book, but she remember that novel very well.

As a side issue, I note that she remembered certain passages from Hugo quite well. Others she remembered less explicitly until she reread the book. I mention this only to indicate that sometimes she remembered, at some level, better than she might have realized. It was pointed out to her that Rearden's speech to Dagny on the morning after their first sexual experience is quite a bit like what Frollo says to Esmeralda in *Notre Dame de Paris*. You can find a version of the scene in the book *The Art of Fiction*, edited from transcripts of her informal course on fiction-writing. When this was pointed out to her, she says: "Oh, that's right but that's the way influence works, in that I had certain things in my mind..." But once the parallel has been pointed out to her, she gets

very interested, she has that translated, she does her own translation and that translation is in *The Art of Fiction*, where she has a whole long commentary on it. So you can see the way that she treasures the scene in Hugo, appreciates it, and in a sense remembered it without her forming the explicit intention that: "Oh I'm going to go copy Hugo here"... In fact, one of the things that she said about *We the Living* is that it was a little closer to Hugo than she wanted. She wanted her own voice. I wrote a piece on *We the Living* and Victor Hugo in which I traced some of that. The opening chapter of part 2 of *We the Living*, where she talks about Petersburg, that's very much the way that Victor Hugo would have written that. It's less the way that Ayn Rand would have written it in a later book... which doesn't make her merely imitative or anything. She had her own themes, but she had some sense of how a novel goes — a good novel — from him. That's one instance in which she may not have read something recently, but she knows the work well.

And now back to non-fiction. We come to the question of philosophy. Here I can tell you a few things. One thing I can tell you is that she remembers falling in love with Aristotle, whom she knew only indirectly, from a course she took in college. She talks mostly about the course textbook. There were significant excerpts from Aristotle and Plato. She had it in her mind that she really likes this Aristotle, but that she needs to read him, herself, in order to fully make up her mind. She makes this comment in an interview in 1961, so this is her policy as she remembers it from the past time, but I think it's also reasonable to assume that it's the same policy in 1961, that you can't really know unless you've read someone for yourself. That's what she thinks. She can use the history of philosophy as a guide, but in order to speak with authority, she really needs to read the philosopher himself. And when she talked about reading Aristotle — and she didn't read him in Greek, she read him in translation, she couldn't read Greek — but she did speak of that as reading Aristotle in person, much as she would talk about seeing a painting “in person.” You know that she'd seen the Mona Lisa “in person.” So she read Aristotle “in person.” And interestingly, her own copy of Aristotle is very lightly annotated: there aren't a lot of marks in it. But I don't think that means that she didn't read it or that she didn't read the other parts of it! I used to wonder if there might be another copy of Aristotle that had more or better marks and that someone stole it or what-have-you and ~~this~~ the surviving copy was a later copy with just a few marks, but in any event she knew Aristotle! You can see that from the specific notes that she made on John Herman Randall's book on Aristotle, that she knew this, she knew that... and she has the quotation from Aristotle in the end of *Atlas Shrugged* so... she read Aristotle even though the book she owned was very lightly marked. So we know that. Also we know that at one point someone challenged her and said: "You're condemning Western philosophy without reading it" and she said: "No, do you think that I would say that I'm challenging the philosophical tradition of 2000 years without knowing the philosophical tradition of 2000 years?"

It is true that she was not super-interested in contemporary philosophy, and especially not in secondary sources for contemporary philosophy. That was not a major interest of hers, and she didn't think she had to read everything... she read Aristotle, the John Herman Randall book, but she didn't have to read all the Aristotle criticism... and she

didn't say she did! So we've got some professional articles in philosophy journals that she did have copies of, and she marked them up and she did go to a few conferences and so on, but that wasn't as important to her as the primary sources. And possibly one reason for that is that she knew what the secondary writing was like on her... which was not very good.

So she was more interested in primary sources. What did she read? We've got a few clues about primary sources that she might have known, or did know, in addition to books in her library. One of these is that a colleague of hers at one time made a list of the books that everyone ought to read, and it had nonfiction, fiction, so on, and Ayn Rand's own copy of that list had little check marks. Her little markings... and including places where she adds in books that ought to be there.

Also she went and lectured to students of Ake Sandler in his college course in political science. He was interviewed for *100 Voices*; he talks about how impressed the students were, and he was plenty impressed with her. She had his syllabus and she made corrections in that, in his conceptualization and so on, and we see little marks in his syllabus of texts that she has read, and question marks and what - "does this belong here...?"

Also, a publisher had a list of free-market books, and she checked off some of them. These are indications of works that she knew something about, information about her reading that you wouldn't necessarily know from her having written marginalia, or spoken about them, or lectured on them. So she's read a lot more stuff than you would get discussions of, and she has the principle that you aren't supposed to talk unless you actually know what you're talking about, because she knew from her own experience how she herself was distorted.

There's one more thing I should mention because I think it's relevant. When she wrote in *The Ayn Rand Letter* about John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*, she made the point that she was writing on the basis of reviews and not on the basis of having read it herself, unlike the review of the B. F. Skinner book, which she did read. She's been criticized for that, but I think that's frankly a stupid objection: might not even have known that she didn't read Rawls if she hadn't said so. She could have pretended. She could have grabbed a few quotations here, the way people do. She states the facts plainly because she is scrupulous. "This is what I have read, this is what I didn't read." I think that her being scrupulous that way indicates that's her policy. That she is not going to write about the content itself unless she's read something.

As for the criticism that she doesn't always have footnotes: it's a quality of a certain kind of writing: sometimes you have footnotes and sometimes you don't have footnotes. She especially made the point to people who wished to write for *The Objectivist Newsletter* and *The Objectivist* that this is middle-range writing. She thought that a few of the published pieces were kind of exceptions to the usual style: "Well, they're fine pieces, but they didn't quite belong in here" because they were written for a more scholarly audience. I think that's kind of interesting, that she had the idea for what belonged in

there, a certain kind of writing, and of some articles that she published, she said: "That's not quite the model of what an article ought to be..." even though these were obviously good articles that she agreed with, and agreed to publish. It does not make sense to criticize her for not having footnotes all the time when she is deliberately trying to write for a non-scholarly audience. And most of her writing is written for periodicals. Her own periodicals. Sometimes she does have references, especially something contemporary, or if she is doing a detailed stylistic analysis, or philosophical detection, she's going to have a footnote for that, or a reference. Because that's sometimes important, so that you can go look at the original and see if she's got it right.

Actually, that's something I did some years ago. I was teaching a course at Virginia Tech on expository writing. Because we were allowed to choose some of our course, I chose *Philosophy: Who Needs It*; one of the assignments to read articles that she was analyzing... Go find the original, read whatever it is, notice how she's analyzing it, and if you find that she has distorted or taken anything out of context, you make a note of that. She wasn't at fault, and they could all see that her critique was based on fair treatment.

By the way, since I mentioned my students, I could say, which is true: one thing that has made the book slower for me is that I am a full-time teacher at Virginia Tech. I had one period when I had a research leave from the University. But asking for a grant or asking someone to support the writing of the book so far is not what I wanted. I wanted to do the work without that because I didn't want to raise questions. Even if people say: "Well, you can accept support and still do what you want," I want to get the project done without having to seek financial support, although I have been supported in other ways, in the sense of there being people who are willing to answer my questions, and very nice people at that, and libraries all over the place and so on... But I didn't want to ask for money, for time off, to do it. Except from my own university, where research leave is part of the system. I'm a teacher, and when I've got students, I work hard to do what I can for them. I mean, I have the reputation for being someone who spends a lot of time with student writing. Because when I've got their writing in front of me, I have a chance to teach, and they have a chance to learn. I certainly do what I can to help them with their writing, with their reading, with their thinking. That all takes time. And it has taken time, as I was telling you in connection with an assignment I used when I taught the course with *Philosophy: Who Needs It*.

As for Kant, we don't have what I would like to have: an annotated copy or pages of notes. We don't have a lot of such notes. She remembers well what she has read. And when it comes to writing about a subject, it's her policy not to write without being informed. Sometimes, there is documentation of her seeking information from a friend or assistant (about a historical fact, or an economic principle, say), and it doesn't look as if she thought she had to do that for Kant. So I would say that she would not have written about Kant if she hadn't had some first-hand experience of him. Probably in English, not in German, which she would not have thought necessary. (When she marked items on Ake Sandler's syllabus (when she was preparing to speak to his college class in California), she didn't write down: "Oh, but you must read this in the French...")

or anything like that. She seemed to consider it to be acceptable to be familiar with those texts as the students themselves might have read them. So she probably did not read Kant in German, although she could read German.) She would not have considered it responsible to comment without some first-hand knowledge. Because that's her policy.

I also think that if someone had been able to ask her the question, she would have answered truthfully. "Please tell me exactly what you read." Some people ask unclear questions and she tries to answer, but if their questions are muddled, then they're not going to get a good answer. But if she's asked a direct question, in a friendly way, not starting with "some people say you didn't read what you said..." but sort of like: "I'm interested in knowing what you've read of Kant," then she would have answered truthfully.

One indication of this, which was interesting, is that in a letter, while she was writing films, she was on a six-month off six-month on schedule, she commented that one of the things that she did at a certain point was that she went out and bought two Adrian dresses — Adrian was a designer — and a copy of the complete works of Aristotle. This is what she wrote in a letter. Of course the complete works of Aristotle would be a big thick shelf. What she actually bought was the Random House book, I call it the McKeon book, because McKeon edited it; it consists of translations of the collected works of Aristotle. This is a standard book. It wasn't complete, so actually a philosopher-friend later asked her: "Complete?" He meant: had she bought the complete works of Aristotle. She replied: "Oh, that book: The McKeon book." So if you ask her directly, you will get an answer. And Ayn Rand is not a big fat liar because she wrote in a letter: "I bought two Adrian dresses and the complete works of Aristotle." If she actually bought two Adrian suits instead of two Adrian dresses, that wouldn't make her a liar either! If you ask her directly: "What color were the dresses? Was it a suit? Was it a dress?" She'd be able to tell, but the point that she was making at that level had to do with her values! Then she wanted Aristotle, she wanted clothes, and she made the purchases. I think that if she's asked the question, asked it straight, in a way that she understands as a serious question, she would have answered that. But I'm not aware of anybody asking her if she had read Kant.

To go as far as to say she didn't read any of these guys... you don't have the evidence for that. And you need evidence for it. Because she's got a policy, and if someone were to come forward and to say: "Ayn Rand told me she never read it", and it's someone who's reliable, and remembers when it happened, and asked the question straight, and she understood what the question was... then, maybe, that could be true. But it would have to be like that - that she actually said it herself, rather than that you never heard her talk about it or saw the book on herself, because she's got a policy. And the policy is first-hand judgment. When it came to Aristotle, she decided she was going to make up her mind when she read him in person.

One more thing about Kant. I don't think that she read Kant when she was in Russia. Or for some years. I'll tell you the reason I think that: the reason I think that is that in the first edition of *We the Living*, Leo, who's a hero, is described as quoting Kant. This is

sort of part of his being a little edgy, unconventional, daring. That reference to Kant was not in the 1959 edition of *We the Living*. There were various changes, and I think she wrote Spinoza instead. Also edgy. But I think that if Ayn Rand had been familiar with Kant and had hated Kant, she would not have put that in *We the Living*, which was published in 1936.

There is also the fact that she was friends with Isabel Paterson, the author of *The God of the Machine*, who was a good friend to Ayn Rand in the early 1940s and who made suggestions to Ayn Rand about things to read. That's when Ayn Rand read Gilson's *The Unity of Philosophical Experience* — it was Isabel Paterson's suggestion — and Ayn Rand mentioned that Isabel Paterson was always saying negative things about Kant. So she remembered that her friend was saying negative things about Kant, and Pat was giving her reading assignments. It could be that she read Kant at that time. Possible. I don't know. But that's a time when Kant could have come to her attention, which is after 1936. But before Isabel Paterson, Ayn Rand didn't say anything about Kant. But I don't know for sure exactly when she read what.

## Post-interview comments

*In addition to this interview, Shoshana Milgram sent me, on her own initiative, a complementary commentary about the French biography of Ayn Rand:*

In the interview, I was asked about a writer's claim that Ayn Rand commented on philosophers whom she knew only through commentary. I answered on the basis of the evidence I have seen of her reading and of her policy in writing on the basis of first-hand knowledge. I would like now to comment further.

Alain Laurent dedicates the tenth chapter of *Ayn Rand ou la passion de l'égoïsme rationnel* (2011) to the topic: "Une Philosophe?" On p. 205, he states that it is now a proved fact that Ayn Rand relied solely on commentators. But his evidence for this "proof" consists of his disagreements with her account and assessment of philosophers, along with his view that other philosophers who have written about egoism have anticipated her ideas. Both issues could be starting points for discussion: Is Alain Laurent right about various philosophers, or is Ayn Rand? Did the philosophers Alain Laurent mentions actually express her ideas before she did, or are her ideas fundamentally different from those of, say, Stirner and Spencer (or Chernyshevsky, whom he does not mention)? But these discussions would not serve to establish (or refute) the point at issue: that she reached her conclusions on the basis of commentators rather than first-hand knowledge.

He does not produce evidence of her reliance on commentators, e.g. evidence that she did not read the philosophers, or evidence that her stated views are found in commentators and not in the sources.

As I indicated in the interview, there is evidence of her familiarity with texts through first-hand reading, and anyone who claims otherwise needs to provide evidence.

If he (or anyone) wants to look further into the facts, I suggest reading James Lennox, “Who Sets the Tone for a Culture?: Ayn Rand’s Approach to the History of Philosophy,” in *A Companion to Ayn Rand* (Blackwell Companions to Philosophy), 2016, edited by Allan Gotthelf and Gregory Salmieri.

The opening chapter by Gregory Salmieri, “An Introduction to the Study of Ayn Rand,” is also relevant and useful.

I also note that, although Alain Laurent mentions Max Stirner as the originator of Ayn Rand’s ideas, he does not seem aware that Ayn Rand corresponded with Isabel Paterson and mentioned Stirner, as which point her friend insisted that Stirner and Nietzsche were very different. Alain Laurent’s bibliography includes *Letters of Ayn Rand*. See pp. 175-176.

I note , finally, that, although Alain Laurent refers to Ayn Rand’s mentions of Aristotle (mentions that he takes to be unrevealing of essential information), he does not cite the details of her review of John Herman Randall’s *Aristotle* (a review published in *The Objectivist Newsletter*, May 1963) or the detailed marginal notes she wrote on that book in preparation for writing her review; her review and her marginal notes indicate close examination of Aristotle.

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*Exclusive articles in French about the philosophy of Ayn Rand on :*  
<http://ObjectivismeFR.wordpress.com>