

## From the Editor's Desk

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The writer, and sometimes philosopher, Ayn Rand (1905-1982) could perhaps be regarded as being amongst the most provocative and interesting authors of the 20th century. She was born in Russia but at the age of 21 years she moved to live in the United States of America where she published several books and plays within her lifetime such as the well-known *Atlas Shrugged*, *Philosophy: Who needs it* and *Capitalism: the unknown ideal*. Ayn Rand was a strong advocate of rationalism, individualism and capitalism. A short excerpt from her book *For the New Intellectual* published in 1961 is: "The 'common good' of a collective - a race, a class, a state - was the claim and justification of every tyranny ever established over men. Every major horror of history was committed in the name of an altruistic motive." She goes on to state "The most dreadful butchers were the most sincere." Unfortunately, these words remain as true today as when she first wrote them and one has merely to read the daily newspapers to see frequent examples of modern proponents of collectivism for, what are claimed as supposedly, altruistic motives. And, the hypocrisy and greed of some of these individuals is simply astounding if not chillingly amusing at times. In another passage, she suggests that "Men have been taught that the highest virtue is not to achieve, but to give." Something that at first glance might seem perfectly acceptable but she goes

on to argue, "Yet one cannot give that which has not been created. Creation comes before distribution- or there will be nothing to distribute. The need of the creator comes before the need of any beneficiary." She mainly advocated a philosophy known as *objectivism* which focused on issues such as reason, objective reality and rationalism in ethics. Her ideas regarding philosophy have not always found support in academic or other circles and this stems to some extent from her fundamental concept that the individual's highest moral purpose should be to pursue his or her rational self-interest and happiness. Taken out of context this concept has always been an easy one to criticize. Added to this was her generally anti-war, anti-statist and anti-religionist attitude which also did not always make her too many friends in certain circles. But, she was a particularly strong supporter of freedom, and especially of individual freedom with minimal interference from institutions such as the state, religious authorities or other groups with a collectivist agenda. Racism, in her view, was nothing more than a primitive type of collectivism. But she was also a prisoner of her times (as we all are) and a few of her opinions with regard to issues like gender or homosexuality might not be regarded very positively today by many more-tolerant societies or individuals. Ayn Rand, I believe, would have been a very strong supporter for rationalism



and reason in education, whether at school or university. Sadly, today in South Africa, there is often little reason or rationalism in education and this is having some profound effects on diminishing the quality of education that is being offered to young people and this problem is also producing negative effects in terms of demotivated and unenthusiastic teachers, academics and students. Lots of energy and attention is being directed, especially in tertiary education, towards many issues that are in essence unimportant and research and other activities more closely related to the goals of excellence in teaching and learning are suffering as a result. Creativity, scientific and other development and growth can only occur in a supportive and enriching environment that offers as much freedom as possible with as little unnecessary interference as feasible.

## Reference

Ayn Rand. *For the New Intellectual*. New York: Signet, 1961 p.80, 83.

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