

Ayn Rand Interview with Mike Wallace

Edited and Formatted Transcript

Editorial Note

This edition presents the interview as a readable transcript. Grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and paragraph structure have been standardized while preserving the substance of the original interview.

Chapter 1 – Objectivism

Mike Wallace: This is Mike Wallace with another television portrait from our gallery of colorful people.

Throughout the United States, small pockets of intellectuals have become involved in a new and unusual philosophy that would seem to strike at the very roots of our society. The fountainhead of this philosophy is novelist Ayn Rand, whose two major works, *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*, have both been bestsellers.

We'll try to learn more about her revolutionary creed—and about Miss Rand herself—in just a moment.

Throughout history, various political and philosophical movements have emerged. Most have eventually disappeared. Some, however, like democracy and communism, have profoundly influenced the world.

Here in the United States, perhaps the most challenging and unusual new philosophy has been forged by novelist Ayn Rand. Her point of view is still comparatively unknown in America, but if it were ever to gain widespread acceptance, it would revolutionize American life.

Mike Wallace: Ayn, to begin with, I'd like to ask you to summarize your philosophy. I know that's difficult, but can you capsuleize it? What is 'Randism'?

Ayn Rand: First of all, I do not call it 'Randism,' and I don't like that name. I call it Objectivism.

Mike Wallace: All right.

Ayn Rand: It means a philosophy based on objective reality. My philosophy begins with the premise that reality exists as an objective absolute; that man's mind—his reason—is his means of perceiving reality; and that man needs a rational morality.

Ayn Rand: I have attempted to formulate a morality based not on faith, emotion, arbitrary authority, or mystical revelation, but on reason—a morality that can be demonstrated through logic.

Mike Wallace: All right.

Ayn Rand: My morality is based on man's life as the standard of value. Since reason is man's basic means of survival, he must treat reason as his only guide to action. His highest moral purpose is the achievement of his own happiness. He must neither force others nor accept their right to force him. Every individual should live as an end in himself and pursue his own rational self-interest.

Mike Wallace: May I interrupt?

Ayn Rand: Certainly.

Mike Wallace: You present this philosophy in *Atlas Shrugged*. A *Newsweek* review suggested that you seek to overturn our Judeo-Christian religion, our regulated capitalism, and majority rule. Other reviewers have said that you reject churches and the concept of God. Are those fair criticisms?

Ayn Rand: Yes, with respect to the facts, though not the judgments. If I challenge those institutions, I do so because I reject the moral code of altruism—the belief that a person's moral duty is to live for others and to sacrifice himself for them.

Mike Wallace: What do you mean by self-sacrifice?

Ayn Rand: Self-sacrifice is the doctrine that a person's moral purpose is to serve others. I regard that doctrine as evil. A person is entitled to pursue his own happiness through his own effort, but he has no right to demand that others surrender their lives to make him happy. Nor should he wish to sacrifice himself for others. Man should possess self-esteem.

Chapter 2 – Morality, Love, and Self-Interest

Mike Wallace: Can a man not have self-esteem if he loves his fellow man? What is wrong with loving your fellow man? Christ, and nearly every great moral teacher throughout history, has taught that we should love one another. Why, then, do you believe this kind of love is immoral?

Ayn Rand: It is immoral if it is a love placed above oneself. More than that, it is impossible. If you are asked to love everyone indiscriminately—without regard to their character or values—you are really being asked to love no one.

Mike Wallace: Yet in your book you describe love almost as though it were a business transaction. Isn't the very essence of love that it rises above self-interest?

Ayn Rand: What would it mean to love someone above self-interest? It would mean marrying solely for the other person's benefit, without any personal desire or happiness. No one would want such a relationship.

Mike Wallace: Should husbands and wives keep score of what each has done for the other?

Ayn Rand: No. Love should not be treated as an ordinary business deal. But every exchange has its own values. In love, the currency is virtue. You love people because of the values and virtues they have achieved in their own character. Love is never causeless. You do not love everyone indiscriminately. You love those who deserve it.

Mike Wallace: Then if a man or woman is weak, are they beyond love?

Ayn Rand: Not forever. Human beings possess free will. If a person wishes to deserve love, he should correct his weaknesses and flaws. But no one should expect the unearned—not in love, not in money, nor in spiritual matters.

Mike Wallace: By your standards, there are very few people who are truly worthy of love.

Ayn Rand: Unfortunately, yes. But everyone has the opportunity to make himself worthy of it. That is what my morality offers.

Mike Wallace: Let us move from personal morality to politics. Much of the social legislation enacted in recent decades has been based upon the belief that we are our brother's keeper. How do you view the political direction of the United States and the Western world?

Ayn Rand: I think it is disastrous. Unless the welfare-state philosophy is reversed, we are moving steadily toward collectivism, where everyone becomes enslaved to everyone else. That trend is the product of altruistic morality.

Mike Wallace: Yet these policies were adopted democratically. Do you object to democracy itself?

Ayn Rand: I object only to the belief that majorities have the right to vote on everything. Individual rights place limits on majority rule. A majority has no moral right to vote away another person's life, liberty, or property.

Mike Wallace: Then how should society make its decisions?

Ayn Rand: Through the voluntary cooperation of free individuals. Government should exist only to protect rights and to use force solely against those who initiate force.

Chapter 3 – Politics and Individual Rights

Mike Wallace: When you say that government should not take the property of others, I assume you're referring to taxes.

Ayn Rand: Yes, I am.

Mike Wallace: Then you believe government has no right to levy taxes. You oppose welfare legislation, unemployment compensation, rent controls, and other forms of economic regulation?

Ayn Rand: That is correct. I oppose all forms of economic control. I advocate a completely laissez-faire economy and the separation of state and economics, just as America established the separation of church and state.

Mike Wallace: Many social reforms arose as reactions to abuses. Labor legislation, for example, did not appear in a vacuum. Wasn't it a response to real problems?

Ayn Rand: Not entirely. The original abuses themselves resulted from government intervention that favored certain businesses. Later legislation merely extended the same principle by using government power on behalf of labor. My position is that neither employers nor employees should use the coercive power of the state to advance their own interests.

Mike Wallace: Critics would argue that an unregulated economy becomes a dog-eat-dog society and that government controls were necessary to restrain the excesses of powerful industrialists.

Ayn Rand: I reject that interpretation. America was built by productive individuals who succeeded through ability rather than political privilege. Those businessmen who relied upon government favors were not champions of capitalism—they were its opponents. Government regulation creates the very monopolies and privileges it later claims to solve.

Mike Wallace: You have expressed little confidence in the direction of modern American society. Do you believe the nation is moving toward dictatorship and economic disaster?

Ayn Rand: If the present trend toward collectivism continues, yes. But I reject historical determinism. Human beings possess free will. If people change their ideas, they can change the course of history.

Mike Wallace: Yet the public repeatedly votes for what you call the welfare state. How can that trend be reversed?

Ayn Rand: Because the American people have never been offered a genuine alternative. Both major political parties accept various forms of government control. There is no significant political movement consistently defending complete individual rights and laissez-faire capitalism.

Chapter 4 – Capitalism, Government, and Society

Mike Wallace: How do you explain the fact that so many of our leading intellectuals—and even many of our leading industrialists—support the modified form of capitalism we have today?

Ayn Rand: Because this is fundamentally an intellectual issue. Most of them have accepted the philosophy of collectivism, and therefore they support it. The American people have never truly been offered a choice between collectivism and genuine laissez-faire capitalism.

Mike Wallace: Isn't it possible that people accept these ideas because they believe we are, after all, our brother's keepers?

Ayn Rand: No one has ever provided a rational justification for that principle. History offers countless examples of people destroying themselves by attempting to live for others instead of according to reason and individual responsibility.

Mike Wallace: You have no faith in anything?

Ayn Rand: Not faith. Faith means accepting ideas without evidence. I have convictions based upon reason.

Mike Wallace: Tell us something about yourself. You were born in Russia?

Ayn Rand: Yes. I came to the United States about thirty years ago. My philosophy came from my own thinking, although I acknowledge a profound intellectual debt to Aristotle, the only philosopher who significantly influenced me.

Mike Wallace: What became of your parents?

Ayn Rand: They remained in Russia. I came to America alone, and I have never learned with certainty what became of them.

Mike Wallace: You're married? Is your husband an industrialist?

Ayn Rand: No. My husband is the artist Frank O'Connor. He was formerly a designer and later devoted himself to painting.

Mike Wallace: If necessary, would you support him financially? Doesn't that contradict your philosophy?

Ayn Rand: Not at all. I would help him because I love him and because doing so would be one of my own values. Helping someone you love is not self-sacrifice; it is an expression of your own happiness and self-interest.

Chapter 5 – Monopolies, Public Services, and the Free Market

Mike Wallace: Let me put a specific case to you. Suppose a single corporation gained control of a vital raw material—uranium, for example—and refused to sell it to the government. What would happen under your system?

Ayn Rand: Under a truly free economy, no one could acquire such a monopoly. Every genuine monopoly in history has depended upon government privilege—subsidies, franchises, or other special favors. Free competition prevents monopolies from enduring.

Mike Wallace: But suppose there were only one source of uranium in the country, and its owner refused to cooperate. Would the government have the right to compel him?

Ayn Rand: That hypothetical assumes an impossible situation. A resource essential to civilization would not remain under the permanent control of one individual. If a resource is truly valuable, competition and discovery prevent absolute monopoly.

Mike Wallace: Then how would we build roads, schools, hospitals, sanitation systems, and other public works if government could not tax its citizens?

Ayn Rand: First ask who pays for those things now. The wealth must first be produced by individuals. My point is that no one has the moral right to seize another person's earnings by force. If society requires such services, they should be financed voluntarily through those who choose to support them.

Mike Wallace: So you believe private enterprise could provide services commonly regarded as public responsibilities?

Ayn Rand: Yes. I believe in private roads, private schools, private hospitals, and private postal services. Where there is genuine demand, free individuals and free businesses will provide those services more efficiently than government.

Mike Wallace: What about economic crises? During a depression, with millions unemployed, would there be no unemployment insurance, Social Security, or government relief?

Ayn Rand: A genuinely free economy does not produce depressions in the way modern mixed economies do. Every major depression has been the consequence of government intervention. The proposed cure has almost always been additional intervention—the very policy that created the problem.

Mike Wallace: So, in your view, economic freedom rather than government management provides the greatest security?

Ayn Rand: Exactly. Freedom encourages production, innovation, and prosperity. Coercion discourages them. The more government interferes with voluntary exchange, the more economic distortions it creates.

Chapter 6 – Closing Reflections and Final Remarks

Mike Wallace: One final question. About how many Objectivists would you say there are in the United States today?

Ayn Rand: It is difficult to estimate. However, interest in these ideas is growing. Nathaniel Branden, a young psychologist whom I regard as my foremost intellectual heir, has been presenting lectures on Objectivism in New York. In a single month he received hundreds of letters requesting information, and attendance at his lectures continues to increase.

Mike Wallace: I'm certain this conversation will encourage many more people to read **Atlas Shrugged** and **The Fountainhead**. Whether they ultimately agree with your philosophy or not, they will undoubtedly be interested in examining your ideas for themselves.

Ayn Rand: Thank you.

— Closing Commentary —

Mike Wallace: As we said at the outset, if Ayn Rand's ideas were ever to gain widespread acceptance, they would profoundly change the world. To those who reject her philosophy, Miss Rand offers a challenge:

“For the past two thousand years the world has been dominated by other philosophies. Look around you. Consider the results.”

Mike Wallace: We thank Ayn Rand for adding her portrait to our gallery of remarkable people. This is Mike Wallace. Goodbye.

Afterword

This edited edition has reorganized the televised interview into thematic chapters while preserving the substance, sequence, and tone of the original conversation. Grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and formatting have been standardized to provide a smoother reading experience suitable for print or digital publication.