



The Soul of Atlas

Mark David Henderson

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In this insightful and practical book, the author builds a case for common ground between Faith and Reason. *The Soul of Atlas* is the story of a conversation between two world views: Ayn Rand's philosophy and Christianity. These influential ways of viewing the world are represented by the men who shaped his life: the author's two fathers. As each father articulates his philosophy, the resulting conversation will challenge your own way of thinking and suggest surprising ways to engage.

The Soul of Atlas Details

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From Reader Review The Soul of Atlas for online ebook

Carol J says

I have received this book as a Good Reads Giveaway. I have found this book to be difficult to read. I do not know anything about Ann Rand's view of life and have found this to be a stumbling block. I have only been able to get as far as the second chapter. I plan to get back to this book during my vacation so I can allow time without any major distractions to absorb the depth of the issues. Sorry. I hope I will be able to edit this review when I have finished reading this deep and thoughtful book.

Tony Parsons says

for me polar opposites luv 2 win/read this book

J.E. Byrne says

Seasoned with the perfect amount of philosophy and personal story, Henderson successfully weaves together the two contrasting views of his childhood: Objectivism and Christianity. This thought provoking analysis unveils the depth of each, seeking unity instead of division. Intellectually stimulating and spiritually invigorating, The Soul of Atlas is an excellent read for those willing to enter this challenging conversation.

Tom Trinter says

Great book!

Kristen Hill says

This book is worth the read for anyone wanting to compare Objectivism and Christianity two world views which are very influential in American life. Mark takes all of the important issues facing both worldviews: sex, money, capitalism, Reason, meaning, selfishness, joy and power and discusses in depth what each world view has to say about the following At the end he wraps it up by comparing and contrasting Jesus Christ and John Galt. This book is wonderful it is balanced on both sides of the equation, easy to read and entertaining.

Amy J. says

What I like about this book is Mark David Henderson's self-reflection, his recognition of how his personal experiences affect his beliefs and values, his attempt to set into conversation two (seemingly) disparate world views, and his expressed desire to engage with people who hold to a different world view than his own.

All of these could be enhanced with a fuller engagement with postmodern concepts. Lacking this likely limits his audience to those who accept his own modernist assumptions. To my mind, it is actually an illustration of the very postmodern contention that he dismisses on p. 180-181: truth claim = power play. Ignoring postmodernism, arguably the major philosophical movement of the last 50 years, can be seen as a strategic move, in that it's a lot easier to promote absolute truth and universal values when one does not have to respond to those pesky postmodernists, with their insistence on the unavoidable slippage between language and real things, their insistence on the self-interestedness of all truth claims, etc. A second-hand quote of Foucault via Tim Keller really does not cut the mustard.

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If Henderson had more fully engaged with Foucault and others' (Saussure, Barthes, Derrida, Bhabha) assertions about the constructed nature of truth, perhaps he would recognize how artificially constructed and therefore non-universal are the truth claims of his own book. Perhaps he would better realize and acknowledge how the many choices he made in shaping his book (who he converses with — why not his mother? what "truth" is communicated by leaving her out? who he cites -- why primarily white, first-world, educated, well-fed males? are there possibly valid and important insights they can't be expected to represent? which topics he selects and avoids) affect what is talked about, what is not talked about, who matters to the conversation, who is left out, and how all these contribute to conceptions of "truth."

Even the fact that Henderson has the personal connections to get his book published, resources that many other people who also may have deep convictions about truth, faith and reason don't have, reveals how subjective and incomplete human conceptions of truth are. Because the influence of an idea, its acceptance, just might be far more closely related to who has the resources to obtain a larger megaphone than to whose idea has more "validity." Right?

Postmodern concepts would also help Henderson in his depiction of Faith and Reason, Christianity and Objectivism, etc., as "philosophical dichotomies" (209) which he is laboring so hard to rethink. Postmodernism loves breaking down those binaries, pointing out how they distort reality, privilege one belief over another, and always attempt to control and manipulate what we understand to be "truth."

Yes, Henderson manages to find common ground between Objectivism and Christianity. I was not too terribly impressed with this for two reasons: 1) Can't we find something in common with any two world views, if we try? How hard is that? And 2) In this instance, the commonality that Mark David Henderson finds between Objectivism and Christianity is largely because of the particular version of Christianity that he presents, an American, Western-enlightenment version. Because Objectivism is also American and Western-enlightenment influenced, it's no wonder these two portrayals are both found to value rugged individualism, personal agency, hero worship, etc. But I question whether African, Latin American, Middle Eastern and so on understandings of Christianity, with emphases on such things as group identity, the preferential option for the poor, and so on, could be seen to share so much in common with Objectivism.

I look forward to seeing whether Henderson expands his conversation to include world views that have even less in common than Objectivism and (American, 21st century) Christianity. What about Modernism and Postmodernism, or Christianity and Marxist-Feminism, or Objectivism and Marxist-Feminist-Christianity? To quote Mark to Mark: "'I envy the adventure that awaits you.'" (xiii).

Bob says

Summary: Is there any way to reconcile the thought of Ayn Rand and the Christian faith? Through a

personal narrative of dialogues with his two fathers, one a Christian, and one an adherent to Ayn Rand's philosophy (Objectivism) the author explores what possible ground could exist between Objectivists and Christians.

Ayn Rand argued that we ought to pursue that which is of chief value, which is our own selves, validated in productive work. The universe is all there ever was. There is no God. Christians see our chief end as to glorify the creator God who made us in his image. Rand criticized the altruism and self-sacrifice she saw at the center of Christian ethics as weakness. Christians would argue there is no virtue in selfishness. It seems these two worldviews are poles apart and utterly irreconcilable.

Mark David Henderson was stuck with a dilemma. There are two men, both fathers, in his life. One he calls Dad and he is a Christian. The other is John, an adherent of Ayn Rand's philosophy of Objectivism. He deeply respects both men and has experienced the imprint of both men's worldviews on his life, even though he has finally chosen Christianity over atheism, because as he explains in one place,

"In connecting my fathers' world views to Meaning it became clear that Dad lives to glorify God and sees Meaning as dependent upon a Supreme Being. John sees existence itself as Reality. Along with Rand, he says that asking for anything else is a futile pursuit. Both men would consider their values objective, that is to say, true for everyone. The turn for me happened here. I found that John's explanation didn't satisfy, and while dissatisfaction itself didn't validate dad's answer, I felt myself leaning in his direction. I recognized there is plenty we may value in life that is not lasting. It may be meaningful, in a temporal sense, but if it came about by chance and it fades away, there is no ultimate purpose to it. Valued aspects of life may be meaningful, but this is not Meaning" (p. 127).

This gives you a flavor of his writing. I worried as I got into the book that the "two fathers" theme would get schmalzy but it never did. There was both feeling and intellectual grit in the discussion of these two men's ideas about Sex, Money, Power, Meaning, Joy and more. Along the way he recognizes places of convergence, common grounds of a common humanity between two disparate world views. Neither man nor the beliefs they represented could accept a "hook up culture". Both recognized the value in productive work and the monetary measures of this although each placed this differently in their values hierarchies. Both agree that the best government is limited government, whether this infringes upon the initiative of productive individuals or because governments are tempted to usurp the place of God.

Perhaps Henderson's most significant insight, influenced by the writing of John Piper was to recognize convergence around the idea of rational self-interest. In fact, God is the greatest egoist of all, because he rightly puts himself and his glory above all else. What distinguishes the Christian from the egoist is simply the recognition that there is One greater than oneself of ultimate worth and indeed, the greatest Joy one can have in life is to place value in what is of ultimate worth.

What I liked about this book is that Henderson was not writing a work of syncretism--fusing Christianity and Randian Objectivism uncritically. Rather he recognizes that when it comes to some fundamentals, they *are* irreconcilable. Yet he does something else. He recognizes that we may differ without being utterly different. There are common grounds that may be found between those who differ and things we may deeply admire even in someone we might not agree with. His vision is one that recognizes how important such common agreement is to work in the public square to maintain the rule of law, basic human rights, and constitutional liberties. Most of all, though, I appreciated the insight that if Atlas represents Rand's highest ideal for humankind, that it is in the gospel that this ideal, this deepest longing in the soul of Atlas finds its realization. And that just may reconcile the irreconcilable.

Disclosure of Material Connection: I received this book free from the author. I was not required to write a positive review. The opinions I have expressed are my own. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255 : "Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising."

Jason Isaacs says

The Objectivism of Ayn Rand and the Christianity of the Bible have both left their thumbprint on the United States. But their compatibility is often a matter of debate: We have seen conservative candidates for office be attacked for claiming to be a Catholic and citing Rand as inspiration for entering public service. I have been surprised in the past to hear the Left equivocate Christianity with Objectivism (as well as using capitalism and Objectivism synonymously). So where do these two systems agree, and are they irreconcilable in other areas? This is the question Mark David Henderson unpacks in his recent book "The Soul of Atlas."

I started this book expecting to find a side by side comparison of Christianity and Objectivism, complete with Venn diagrams showing overlaps and distinctions. Instead, what I found was something much different: Henderson shares his life story in great detail, and with remarkable honesty. He maps out his life growing up with a father and stepfather, one of which is a Christian and the other an Objectivist. Both men defend and articulate their beliefs, and Henderson wants to please them both. The book is an account of how he tries to reconcile the competing beliefs and where his search leads him.

Many of my friends, Christians included, have found Ayn Rand in high school or college and decided to read several of her books. Her books and characters have a unique draw on the reader. Rand's commitment to rational consistency is apparent, and many of her ideas strike a chord, or leave a hint of familiarity for many readers. But, too often this sense of familiarity is not complete. There seems to be something amiss, and her insistence on rational discourse seems too restricted. I have often thought, "I agree with this, this, and that—but definitely not those ideas." Henderson's book provides the Rosetta stone needed to make sense of how her ideas and definition of terms fit or are incongruent with a Christian worldview.

Beyond comparing the two systems, Henderson discusses how Objectivism and Christianity handle crucial life topics, including: sex, power, money, capitalism, joy, and others. In other words, "It's all here!" He shows how these systems deal with real life issues, and how the logical consequences of these systems arrive at completely different answers on key issues.

This book is long overdue; I appreciate that Henderson tackles these questions head on with such transparency and vulnerability. Committed Christians and Objectivists will both find an intellectually robust and compelling discussion of these systems. Objectivists who have been curious about Christianity, but have found that many Christians are not well versed in Objectivism, will find Henderson particularly engaging since he can speak both languages so fluently.

The short answer to the big question is that these two systems are irreconcilable in their totality. Objectivism does not allow for faith since it insists on the use of reason alone; it follows that Objectivism is atheistic. Christianity believes faith is necessary to be properly related to God. That is the quick answer; but, if you think this question deserves a full discussion, this book is certainly worth your time. This question has been the long arc of Henderson's life, and he shares it with sensitivity to the reality that people are more than the

sum of their ideas. We will all benefit from a discussion of the areas in which Objectivists and Christians can work side by side, and the areas in which we are forced to admit the consequences of the great differences.

Katerin Henge says

Very well done! I recommend this book to friends of mine who are philosophical or maybe just searching for a world view. The book asks questions that pertain to any world view, not just to Ayn Rand and the Bible. But here, the author approaches two world views: one of faith and one of reason. But I find that they are both reasonable in their own way.

Very well-written and honest, heart-on-sleeve approach to examining some difficult topics without being too cerebral.

I like it and I want to talk about it.

Steve says

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. As a Christian coming into this book with a minimal understanding of Objectivism, I appreciated the "conversation". I haven't been converted to a Randian, and that isn't the goal of this book, but the goal instead is the reconciliation of our differences and the recognition of our similarities.
