

Happiness Is A Process Rather Than A Goal In Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead*

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Abstract

Ayn Rand's fictional characters appear to have the secret to happiness, based on the standards for a "flow experience" set forth by Hungarian psychologist Csikszentmihalyi. This study looks into the circumstances that result in "flow" in Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead* in an effort to identify the components of living a happy life. The goal of this study is to make a difference by attempting to apply Csikszentmihalyi's psychological theory to comprehend Rand's character development and identify the elements that significantly contribute to the creation of a psychologically sound person, who is therefore frequently in a state of "flow." While some critics have addressed the pursuit of happiness in Rand's novels, this research aims to make a difference.

Keywords: Experience, Happiness, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *The Fountainhead*, novelist-philosopher.

Introduction

Any work of art that inspires someone to live a better life, whether it is a play, sculpture, painting, film, song, or book, usually persists in their memory for a lifetime. As people pause certain priceless moments in their lives and repeatedly replay those memories in their brains, it occasionally happens that a certain scene from a film, a character's statement, or even a piece from a symphony can work as a huge motivator, changing the path of many lives. One such scene in Ayn Rand's novel *The Fountainhead* offers a crucial lesson that the world is sorely lacking at the moment.

After much effort, the protagonist, Howard Roark, an architect in the novel *The Fountainhead*, receives his first commission. He gives commands while seeing the first structure he is working on. Mike, a construction worker friend of his, notices Roark's joy and remarks: "Control yourself, Red. You're open like a book. God, it's indecent to be so happy!" Roark is standing on the ledge, looking down at the county road as a car load of people, going to a picnic, drives by. It looks like the people inside the car are: "enjoying a day of their existence; they were shrieking to the sky their release from the work and the burdens of the days behind them; they had worked and carried the burdens in order to reach the goal—and this was the goal." Roark realizes as the automobile speeds by that there was some "important difference between the consciousness of this day in him and in them" as well as reminding himself that he "should try to grasp it." However, when he gazes at a truck, he forgets: "panting up the hill, loaded with a glittering mound of cut granite" (135).

The implication of this image is that most people work to survive and view their jobs as horrible activities they must perform in order to enjoy the weekend, holiday, or vacation. Because they are uninterested in their jobs, they just live their lives from weekend to weekend, holiday to holiday, and vacation to vacation; at other times, they just exist. Rand's ideal man approaches labour from a different perspective than the average person, who drags himself through what he perceives to be an unpleasant task:

I have, let's say, sixty years to live. Most of that time will be spent working. I've chosen the work I want to do. If I find no joy in it, then I'm only condemning myself to sixty years of torture. And I can find the joy only if I do my work in the best way possible to me... (24)

Smith in *Ayn Rand's Normative Ethics* says that Roark tries desperately to understand the difference between those who view work as a "necessary evil" or a "punishment in the Garden of Eden" (206) and those who, like him, are passionate about their work and enjoy doing it well.

In his scientific study on happiness, psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* offers a significant claim that is consistent with Roark's way of thinking: "The best moments in our lives are not the passive, receptive, relaxing times... The best moments usually occur if a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile" (3).

Throughout the book, Howard Roark has a lot of these thrilling experiences. This is a state of mind that Mihaly refers to as "flow," in which one is totally engrossed in an artistic endeavour. According to this psychologist, flow is: "a state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience is so enjoyable that people will continue to do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it" (4). One of Roark's customers and admirers, Austen Heller, for example, is shocked by Roark's enjoyment of his structures, saying, "After all, it's only a building." It's not what you seem to make of it—a mix of Indian pain, holy rite, and sexual bliss. And Roark in *The Fountainhead* says, "Isn't it? (252).

Ryckman in *Theories of Personality* says that Csikszentmihalyi's research is notable for its assertion that happiness is a state of mind that requires a great deal of "mental and physical discipline" rather than an emotion that is reliant on outside factors (453). Given that happiness is the goal of all living things, it is intriguing to examine the elements that contribute to the attainment of this mental state in Ayn Rand's fictional novel *The Fountainhead* using psychologist Mihaly's theory as a

foundation. Furthermore, Mihaly claims that anyone can achieve this state of "flow," provided they meet specific requirements. However, before delving into an investigation of these criteria, a quick overview of Rand's philosophy will undoubtedly aid in gaining a better grasp of the necessity of such an investigation.

Rand's Philosophy

In response to a question about whether she saw herself primarily as a philosopher or a novelist during a televised interview, Rand stated that she was both. She continued by explaining that her primary interest in philosophy and literature is the presentation of a tangible picture of the ideal human being. She learnt that she disagreed with every current philosophy while studying it, particularly with its moral precepts. In order to develop the character of a human being as he should be, she had to establish her own conceptual framework. When asked in a televised interview if she saw herself primarily as a philosopher or a novelist, Rand said that she was both. She went on to clarify that her primary motivation for studying philosophy and literature is to provide a tangible representation of the ideal human being. She found that, while studying philosophy, she disagreed with every philosophy that was in existence, particularly with its moral standards. She thus had to establish her own intellectual framework that would lead to the human character that he should have.

Craig Biddle explains why Ayn Rand's ideology is uplifting and motivating in his book *Loving Life*. In an essay titled "Religion Versus Subjectivism," Biddle emphasises that although people typically seek to society and religion for guidance on leading a good life, both share the idea of self-sacrifice. According to social subjectivism, one must sacrifice oneself for the sake of the majority, while religion teaches that one must devote oneself for the sake of a greater power. When Rand proposed a theory of self-interest that was entirely consistent with true happiness, it was warmly welcomed because there is no rational explanation for self-sacrifice, and no human being can be genuinely happy by adhering to either.

Three key similarities exist between Rand's ideology and Mihaly's concept of "flow": both present a romanticised view of the human condition, emphasise the self-interest of the individual, and view happiness as a mental state that necessitates moral restraint.

Rand's Fiction

As a novelist and philosopher, Rand goes beyond simply stating the issue and uses her fiction to try to provide a tangible solution, whereas most philosophers are content to only provide abstract answers to issues. When a Randian protagonist speaks, he is definitely conveying the author's own viewpoint because she employs her fictitious characters to convey her philosophy of life in *We the Living*, *Anthem*, *The Fountainhead*, and *Atlas Shrugged*. As explained in the next paragraphs, Rand's philosophy has not been the sole topic of discussion; her novels, which remain best-sellers to this day, have also been examined from a variety of angles.

According to Tore Boeckmann, *The Fountainhead* is a romantic book because the author strives to realise man's full potential and portrays him as a sentient entity. Boeckmann uses Aristotle's Poetics in another essay to demonstrate how fiction becomes more significant than history. Rand's *Fountainhead* is a living example of how history ends with the presentation of facts, whereas fiction imagines the future and depicts how things might be. This is most likely because John Bayer decided to comment on the "spirit of youth" that the book promotes. When a fictional character not only starts life with spirit and idealism but also manages to maintain the vision in the face of hardship and struggle and succeeds, it shows tenacity and a belief that anything is possible. Shoshana Milgram is so moved by Rand's portrayal of the "ideal man" that she tries to identify the real motivation that would have led the author to create a man of Roark's calibre in her research paper.

The concept has received the most attention, even though many critics have studied the plot, characterisation, and style of Rand's books. In his discussion of the conflict between good and evil in Ayn Rand's universe, Onkar Ghate emphasises that, despite evil's fundamental helplessness, understanding its essence is crucial to defeating it. Howard Roark is the only character in *The Fountainhead* who remains calm and content throughout, according to a significant discovery made in another essay by Tara Smith. He appears to have a specific mindset that renders him impervious to suffering and receptive to happiness whether it comes to his interactions with others, his job, or managing difficult circumstances. In his essay "Reflections on Happiness," Dr. Nathaniel Branden, a devoted follower of author and philosopher Ayn Rand, appears to share similar opinions. Branden is certain that a person's attitude, not the things that happen in his life, defines his level of happiness; what should be looked at is how a worthwhile person copes with his circumstances, to the extent that he finds happiness in spite of hardships. Although this mindset is applicable to all aspects of a person's life, the researcher suggests concentrating especially on the workplace because an individual's productivity there impacts not only the company he works for but also society, the nation, and the entire world.

The research essays by different critics that are most similar to the theme the researcher has selected for investigation are Nathaniel Branden's article on "Happiness" and Tara Smith's character analysis. Tara Smith only contrasts Roark with the other characters in the book, and Branden ends by noting that happiness is a mental condition or attitude that must be created. Both avoid utilising any psychological theories to examine what it takes to become a "happy" person, even if Branden does not use Rand's fiction as a case study to support his idea. By trying to comprehend Rand's characterisation using Csikszentmihalyi's psychological theory, the research scholar hopes to change things and give her theories more legitimacy. In *The Fountainhead*, Ayn Rand chose to narrate the success story of Howard Roark, an architect who is constantly in a state of bliss despite obstacles that threaten his advancement at work. Through a logical philosophy that is consistent with the

standards proposed by Mihaly to experience the state of "flow," Rand demonstrates how anyone can achieve this achievement. With regard to Rand's fictional book, *The Fountainhead*, the technique employed in this research is an analysis of the prerequisites established by Mihaly to attain the state of "flow." A person's level of independence in choosing a vocation is the first need Mihaly suggests.

Personal Decisions

Everyone aspires to succeed in their work, but according to Mihaly, the effort starts in childhood, when a person first begins to make decisions and establish objectives in life. According to Mihaly (1990, p. 88–89), one of the most important characteristics of those who experience the highest levels of flow is the ability to set clear goals. This trait is demonstrated in *The Fountainhead* in a conversation between Howard Roark and architect Henry Cameron during Roark's initial interview.

'When did you decide to become an architect?' "When I was ten years old."

... Why did you decide to be an architect?"

"I didn't know it then. But it's because I've never believed in God." "Come on, talk sense."

"Because I love this earth. That's all I love. I don't like the shape of things on this earth. I want to change them." (51)

Despite the difficulties and dangers, it is only natural for someone who picks a career they are so passionate about to have great delight and fulfilment. It's interesting to note that Peter Keating, another character in the book who had aspirations of becoming an artist, lets his mother decide on a better career path for him to pursue his sketching skills. "Architecture is such a respectable profession," she had stated, adding that you meet the best people in the field. Keating chose his vocation because his mother encouraged him to do so and he thinks architects always have "brilliant careers" (31). In contrast to Roark, Keating typically favours having people make decisions for him since he is always afraid to accept responsibility for his actions. He seeks advice from Roark, his college junior, after graduating since he is unsure whether to accept a scholarship for further education or to find employment.

"It's about my scholarship. The Paris prize I got." "Yes?"

"It's for four years. But, on the other hand, Guy Francon offered me a job with him some time ago. Today he said it's still open. And I don't know which to take."

Roark turned to face him; his fingers pounded slowly against the stairs.

"If you want my advice, Peter," he said at last, "you've made a mistake already. By asking me. By asking anyone. Never ask people. Not about your work. Don't you know what you want? How can you stand it, not to know?" "You see, that's what I admire about you, Howard. You always know." (33)

For Peter, consulting others is completely natural because the people he wants to impress are what drive him in life, not his work, but Roark thinks it unthinkable that someone requires others to make decisions regarding his work. Rand used Peter Keating's career, which starts out well but ends in failure, to illustrate the effects of decisions people make without exercising independent thought. According to Csikszentmihalyi, this is the reason why the majority of people experience "boredom, depression, and anxiety" at work. He suggests that people learn to become more "independent of their social environment," which implies that in order to find happiness and meaning in life, one must exercise one's individuality and avoid becoming a social puppet. To put it another way, a person's level of happiness is greatly influenced by the factors that led them to choose their work.

The Driving Force

Rand employs the literary device of contrasting the careers of two architects with dissimilar personalities in her book to make a point: a person whose motivation is his "work" can live in a state of perpetual "flow" and enjoy life, but a neurotic whose motivation is "people" can only lead a miserable life. Throughout his career, Howard Roark, the contented individualist in *The Fountainhead*, is unencumbered by social norms and has complete control over his life. Roark is expelled from Stanton University at the start of the book due to his radical beliefs; his meeting with the dean prior to leaving and starting his profession reveals a lot about his work philosophy. The Dean tells Roark not to be an idealist at the start of the conversation. One must consider the pragmatic aspects of an architect's profession. An architect by himself is not a goal. He is but a tiny component of a larger social entity.

There's the practical side of an architect's career to think about. An architect is not an end in himself. He is only a small part of a great social whole. Co-operation is the keyword to our modern world and to the profession of architecture in particular. Have you thought of your potential clients?

'Yes,' said Roark.

'The Client,' said the Dean. 'The Client. Think of that above all. He's the one to live in the house you build. Your only purpose is to serve him. You must aspire to give the proper artistic expression to his wishes. Isn't that all one can say on the subject?'

Well, I could say that I must aspire to build for my client the most comfortable, the most logical, the most beautiful house that can be built. I could say that I must try to sell him the best I have and also teach him to know the best. I could say it, but I won't. Because I don't intend to build in order to serve or help anyone. I don't intend to build in order to have clients. I intend to have clients in order to build. (26)

Austen Heller, one of Roark's clients who appreciates and comprehends his work, states succinctly, "Your house is made by its own needs." Roark's response obviously shows that his intention is not altruistic; he aims for personal achievement, not to

serve society. Roark's characterisation celebrates people who are interested in improving the quality of their work and consequently make the world a better place through their creative work. The drive to impress creates the others. The house itself is the determining factor. Rand labels individualists like Roark as "first-handers" and contrasts their methods with "second-handers" like Peter Keating, whose main concern and motivation are other people; Keating has no desire to build but wants "to be admired as a builder"; he does not wish to be great, but to be thought great" (605). "The determining motive of the others is in the audience" (136). Keating despises "every girder of that building" even "before it was born" when he starts a project; when he enters a competition, he worries more about who might solve the problem better, win the competition, and be publicly proclaimed superior to him. As a result, he is plagued by doubts about the quality of his work and feelings of jealousy, which affects his performance, which only serves to reinforce another crucial point of Mihaly's: focusing on living in the present moment to the fullest is the basic criteria to experience the state of "flow."

Embracing the Present

Peter Keating is ambitious to make money, gain power, and raise his status in society, since he lives in the future and concentrates more on the results that he can reap from his work rather than the work itself, he can never hope to match Roark's accomplishment. Mihaly goes to the extent of stating that "whether a job provides enjoyment or not" does not depend on the external working conditions but on the "person's approach to it" (161). Even a commonplace job can become exciting if the individual shows interest and involvement. In *The Fountainhead*, Mike, Roark's friend, on the surface appears to be doing a monotonous job that involves only physical labour; he is a construction worker. What seems to be a boring manual labour to others, to Mike is a skill that he has acquired and mastered. He takes pride in his expertise, worships his job and takes pleasure in doing it efficiently. "His view of the world was simple: there were the table and there were the incompetent; he was not concerned with the latter" (93). Similarly when Roark refuses to compromise his ideals and is compelled to work as a manual labourer in a granite quarry, he focuses on the work at hand and even under those adverse conditions translates the threat into a challenge. "He liked the work. He felt at times as if it were a match of wrestling between his muscles and the granite. He was very tired at night. He liked the emptiness of his body's exhaustion" (201).

Roark is content even in such a desolate setting, when he has no clients, because he has a long-term goal. He uses the time to learn new things, develop a new skill, and save money for when he opens his own office in the future. Because his mind is full of creative ideas that can improve the world and plans to construct new structures, minor setbacks don't matter. Roark lives in the present by completing the task at hand with exceptional efficiency; the type of work doesn't really matter to him. According to Csikszentmihalyi's research, people (like Roark) who have developed this inner tranquillity even when external circumstances are not so favourable are psychologically healthy and more likely to experience the state of "flow." Confirming Aristotle's assertion that "happiness cannot be identified with pleasure" is a significant outcome of the "flow" idea (129).

Differentiating Pleasure from Happiness

Ayn Rand's "Objectivist Philosophy" adherent Leonard Peikoff argues that Rand's conception of happiness is distinct from two popular schools of thought: one views happiness as the same as pleasure, while the other views pleasure as "animalistic, unspiritual, immoral" (341-342). According to Randian philosophy, happiness and pleasure are not the same thing; in fact, happiness is a difficult-to-achieve mental state and is entirely moral. The picnickers in the scene that was introduced in this research paper feel a fleeting sense of enjoyment, but it is a passive condition that cannot be classified as "flow." The strong emotion that Aristotle and Rand refer to as "happiness" is what Roark experiences while he works, but it is in an active condition that is entirely within his control.

A person who has a creative aim and takes satisfaction in the productive use of his mind will experience a different kind of pleasure than someone who waits for the end of the workday to drown their conscience in alcohol, television, or a movie. "His enjoyment is fed by his unceasing concern to grow in knowledge and ability to think, to achieve, to move forward, to meet new challenges and overcome them..." is how Nathaniel Branden puts it (73). Therefore, it is only natural for someone who has such active control over his consciousness to understand the meaning of life. In *The Fountainhead*, Rand provides a straightforward answer to the question of life's purpose through a conversation between Roark and Gail Wynand, the newspaper editor.

Then, with his wrists and knuckles clenched against the resistance, Roark bent the branch slowly into an arc and said, "Now I can make what I want of it: a bow, a spear, a cane, a railing. That's the meaning of life. Your strength? Your work." Roark stood up and grabbed a thick branch from a tree, holding it in both hands with one fist closed at each end. "Look, Gail." "What you make of the material the earth gives you." (551).

Rand's greatest accomplishment as a novelist was to illustrate through her heroes how a passionate dedication to one's work can make every moment meaningful, give one a distinct identity, and contribute significantly to one's happiness. When each person is able to reach his or her full potential, he or she contributes significantly to society, and his or her productivity naturally benefits the entire world. For this reason, this is a problem that affects not only a person's self-esteem but also the fate of all of humanity.

According to Rand, those who are incapable of achieving personal success not only condemn achievers but also promote the idea of social service. This raises an important question: if "flow" is a state attained by a minority willing to put in the effort, what role does the majority play who have never experienced something similar?

Success and Volunteering

Andrew Bernstein cites Galileo and Socrates as examples of independent thinkers who faced fierce opposition, but they are the ones who have helped the world evolve into a better place. Historical evidence shows that the majority of countries that have not made much progress are those where the creative men have not been appreciated. Several historical examples demonstrate that great thinkers have been scorned, ridiculed, and rejected by society (61).

The character of Ellsworth Toohey, a newspaperman who tries to destroy Roark through his newspaper column, exemplifies Ayn Rand's reasoning: "Many people may be born with talent, but they are unwilling to set goals for themselves because it requires tremendous self-discipline; they wish to be appreciated but are not ready to live by the standards that success demands. Therefore, their natural instinct is to destroy any individual who realises his capacity for achievement and lives up to his highest and best potential." Roark is a reproach to Toohey, who rarely permits those who approach him for advice to pursue their passions because he knows that it is the only source of joy and independence, a state that he himself can never achieve. Toohey makes appropriate use of his oratory skills when the occasion arises, killing their desire to live and achieve.

It is wiser to choose a career that you can be calm, sane, and matter-of-fact about, even if you hate it. If I were you, I wouldn't pursue law because you are far too tense and passionate about it. (301) A hysterical devotion to one's career does not make for happiness or success.

The novelist-philosopher Ayn Rand, who exalts personal achievement in her fiction and non-fiction works, strongly advocates that an individual is what he does; only those who are unable to do anything worthwhile with their lives exalt social service. Ironically, society has gained more through the services of worthy men who took pride in their personal achievements than those who claim to have sacrificed their lives for the welfare of society. Rand argues that the key to a person's happiness should always be in his possession, and the moment he gives it to others, he becomes dependent on them.

Conclusion

Rand was asked the cliched question, "What is the purpose of life?" on a radio program. "There's no such thing as 'the purpose of life,' because life is an end in itself," she retorted. The aim of life is life itself. The novelist-philosopher's message is that rather than complaining that they do not understand the meaning of life and seeking some higher purpose or yearning for an afterlife that may not even exist, humans must realise that happiness is not a destination that one strives to achieve but a journey that can make life exciting and adventurous. Podritske & Schwartz in *Objectively Speaking: Ayn Rand Interviewed* says: "And nature has given us a very good way of knowing whether we are spending our lives properly or not - namely, whether we are happy or not" (246-247).

A person can only be truly happy if he accepts full responsibility for his actions and performs his job to the best of his ability; otherwise, he will not only be miserable but also a great loss of human talent and resources that, if properly used, could have made a significant contribution to the betterment of humanity. This is because the majority of a person's conscious hours will be spent on the work that he has chosen for his survival.

The very intention behind choosing Csikszentmihalyi's theory in this article was that this psychologist promotes the belief that people who often experience "flow" are more likely to be psychologically healthy individuals. Living in an age where mental health seems to be in a state of deterioration, where an increasing number of people seem to be plagued by depression, suicidal tendencies and behavioural disorders, it becomes all the more important to find ways and means to prevent psychological diseases. The best method to prevent any such pathology would be to create an environment that can only result in positive emotions; the fictional world of Rand thus proved to be an apt setting for a self-contained hero like Howard Roark. So the "flow" theory that falls under the category of positive psychology can play a predominant role in inducing an ambience that is conducive to the mental health of a country. Considering the fact that there are "romantic" authors such as Rand who strive to project human beings as they ought to be and "realistic" writers who present people in their depraved state, the "flow" theory can be applied to both kinds of fiction to paint a clear picture of what makes an individual neurotic and how the person can become self-sufficient by adopting the guidelines suggested by psychologist Csikszentmihalyi.

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