

On This-and-That  
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In January of 2015, a reader of my writings, both in journals and on this web site, wrote me several times using the “contact me” email address on this site. I was very impressed with his messages. In his last correspondence before this reply to him, he referred to the novelist and philosopher Ayn Rand (1905-1982).

This was my emailed reply:

Dear [writer’s name]--

My gosh, you are sophisticated. I am so flattered that someone of your capability finds what my writings worth your time.

On Rand, I suppose I have read just about everything she wrote, but I stayed pretty much on the surface of her ideas. I believe there is a place, intellectually and otherwise, for just about everything. Sometimes it is good to explore every nuance and implication of a concept or perspective, whatever it is, and sometimes it is good to just touch down on it. Oscar Wilde, with reference to dealing with people, said something to the effect that you should go by surface impressions. Get too deep about people, probe their motives and the reasons for behaviors and all, and you too often wind up wasting your time, or worse, taking crap.

Rand was the first prominent thinker who told me I matter--me, this flesh-and-blood person typing these keys, I count. All my life it seems, I was either worthless or nobody, or I got the message that someone else or something else mattered and I didn't. Rand got through to me--and, unlike most people, I wasn't young reading her, I was in mid-life when I encountered her writings--that I am valuable, unique, one of a kind, and that I, even me, nobody, nothing, could live an honorable, even heroic, life. That was so inspiring and freeing to me. I understand the reservations people have about her, and I respect all the detailed analyses and criticisms of her formulations, and the concerns people have about her personal life, but too often that obscures important surface realities and consequences of the sort that have made such a difference to my life.

F. Scott Fitzgerald's point about a measure of a first

class mind being the ability to recognize the validity of apparently contradictory ideas, and incorporate them both in one's thinking, applies; that is to say, being able to perceive what appear to be dichotomous opposites as complementary polarities. A problem I see with the white racial movement [the correspondent had attended particularly to my writings, both books and short pieces, on race from a white perspective] is its tendency to see things as this-or-that and miss the possibility that they are better viewed as this-and-that. Too often, the presumption, the argument, the insistence, is that there's one way to see things, one way to operate, get on board with that or there's something wrong with you. The white movement has been, I think, too locked into a collectivist mind set: the whole of the white race, its status and fate; it's all of us versus all of them; our problem is too much individualism; Ayn Rand, to speak of her, is the bogeyman; enough said, case closed.

In fact of the matter as I see it is that, depending on the particular situation and the particular person, there are multiple ways to see things and many ways to operate. If you look at successful movements in our time--I'm thinking particularly of the black civil rights movement, modern feminism, and the gay rights movements--they have embraced multiple perspectives and approaches. (Back to this-and-that, as I was writing these last couple of sentences, it hit me that those movements have been both very successful and very unsuccessful.) And if you look at effective, happy individuals, they do what is right for them in their particular situation, and come at things differently. You have to make it work for you as the person you are, at the stage of life you are, in your circumstance in [his home state], and that's going to be different from what I do or anybody else does.

I wrote an article in 2012 for *The Occidental Quarterly* [a journal] that was also published in *The Occidental Observer* [a webzine] I feel good about—it's in the writings section of my web site--called "Are Whites Pathological: Yes and No?", which I feel good about. In it, I discuss Rand and offer that it would be helpful if we didn't stereotype her and write her off, and that both the collective and the individual matter, and that depending on how you look at something and why, the same phenomenon can be this way and that way, both. As far as I can see, however, that piece didn't have any impact, on anybody who was going public anyway. The discourse in those two journals stayed on its exact same

course. And that's to be expected: a point I made in the article is that, whether they realize it or not, people lock into a perspective and set of answers and stick with them no matter who shoots holes in them and what the reality reveals about them, and they believe whatever works for them personally (makes them feel in the know, gets them accepted by their reference group, etc.).

Which brings me back to Steve Ditko. [In earlier correspondence, I had indicated that I identify with the aging cartoonist Steve Ditko, whom I wrote about in an August 2008 thought for this site, "On Steve Ditko."] I've made the call that I'm going to stop writing anything for outlets other than my web site, and that I'm going to do it the best I can with it, but not to expect anyone will get it or like it or find it worth their time. And while I'm doing that, I'm going to stay humble and realize that I'm for sure not the source of any great measure of insight and wisdom. Other people, and that likely includes you, are at least my equal, and many, including, I suspect, you, are superior to me. All I do, all I can do, all I find gratifying, is simply to write what I think is most expressing, and to do it the best I can, and then eat dinner.

Regards and best wishes,

Robert