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How Bad Writing Destroyed the World: Ayn Rand and the Literary Origins of the Financial Crisis

Adam Weiner

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Literature can be used to disseminate ideas with devastating real-life consequences. In *How Bad Writing Destroyed the World*, Adam Weiner spans decades and continents to reveal the surprising connections between the 2008-2009 financial crisis and a relatively unknown nineteenth-century Russian author.

A congressional investigation placed the blame for the financial crisis on Alan Greenspan and his deregulatory policies-his attempts, in essence, to put Ayn Rand's Objectivism into practice. Though developed most famously in Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*, Objectivism sprouted from the Rational Egoism of Nikolai Chernyshevsky's *What Is to be Done?* (1863), an enormously influential Russian novel decried by the likes of Fyodor Dostoevsky and Vladimir Nabokov for its destructive radical ethics. In tracing the origins of Greenspan's ruinous ideology, *How Bad Writing Destroyed the World* combines literary and intellectual history to uncover the danger of hawking “the virtues of selfishness,” even in fiction.

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