

Rand's role model,  
and ours?: the  
positive and negative  
sides howard roark in  
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**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Humans have not yet achieved perfection in regard to performance, appearance, or character. The definition of perfection is subjective. To determine author Ayn Rand's view of perfection, one would need only to observe the character of Howard Roark in *The Fountainhead*. Howard Roark is the ideal human being. His convictions and bold actions make him a "fountainhead" to society, hence the title. Regarded by Rand and readers across the world both as a role model and hero, Roark is portrayed as a moral person when set against subordinate characters throughout the novel; unlike most characters of the novel, he harbors such traits as determination, patience, and self-confidence. However, when one deviates from Rand's perspective, Roark also harbors negative traits such as selfishness and arrogance.

Roark's traits in the novel are represented by his unique appearance. Rand portrays the architect's personality through his physical features and movement. He is so completely and utterly himself that his personality can be seen through his body. From his "body of long straight lines and angles" to his hair which is the "color of ripe orange rind," each physical aspect holds meaning and significance. His body is lanky and muscled, homage to his work ethic and lack of emotional "softness" (Rand 15). His hair is not only different in that it is red, but it is a specific shade of orange; this represents his position as an outsider of society and also represents his passionate nature, a nature associated with a stereotypical redhead for hundreds of years. Roark's face is "like a law of nature," his mouth "the mouth of an executioner or a saint" (Rand 15 and 16). Minute details such as these further reveal Roark's character.

In terms of description, Roark's sharp features and the set of his jaw indicate his determination and will. His audacious commitment to design and build structures is his sole purpose in life. This purpose is at his iron core, beyond the bounds of common persons' petty comments and opinions. No people's thoughts or actions prevent him from his noble pursuit of architectural expression and perfection. His dedication to his own style of architecture is so great it trumps all else; this includes possessions, personal connections, and comfort. The sacrifice of such aspects of humanity and Roark's iron resolve are portrayed through his actions.

Roark's recurring action throughout the novel is his refusal to compromise in any aspect of his buildings, building process, or design. He scorns the wishes of employers such as Guy Francon and John Erik Snyte, and rejects commission after commission. He does so at the cost of financial stability, his comfort, his career, his reputation, and his standing in society. He designs original and unconventional buildings despite public criticism and ridicule from even his lover Dominique Francon. His work is his life, and his reverence for his work can be seen when he holds one of his drafting papers that is "a surface charged with electricity [that] will hold the flesh of a man who has brushed against it" (Rand 103). In never sacrificing or compromising his art, Roark never sacrifices or compromises himself.

A refusal to compromise is prevalent in Roark's characterization throughout the entire novel. In the novel, Ayn Rand portrays him as the epitome of humanity. She sees him as the ideal person of the fictional world of *The Fountainhead* and the real world of herself and her audience. In the world of her novel, society functions as a single, shapeless entity composed of "<https://assignbuster.com/rands-role-model-and-ours-the-positive-and-negative-sides-howard-roark-in-the-fountainhead/>

second-handers," people who are sustained by the feelings of the majority and act and think like they are expected to act and think; second-handers are people such as Peter Keating, Gail Wynand, and Ellsworth Toohey's entire retinue of mindless and spineless artists. Keating and " his wishes, his efforts, his dreams, his ambitions are motivated by other men" (Rand 531). Other characters in the novel, such as Dominique Francon and Ellsworth Toohey, while not " second-handers," do not live up to Roark. When compared to the whole of society and each individual that society is composed of, Roark resembles a hyperphysical figure. As such an elevated person, Roark carries traits that readers would do well to emulate. One of Roark's distinctive traits is his determination. He knows exactly what he wants and will go great lengths to achieve his ends. Surpassing people and their varied opinions, Roark's drive and work ethic eventually brings him success. His determination to practice his own art, even going so far as to demolish a building, enables him to stand when he's fallen or been pushed down, and all readers can find value in adopting this trait to apply to their own endeavors.

Another trait of Roark that readers would find valuable is his patience. Roark takes years and the course of the lengthy novel to reach commercial success. Each choice he makes is deliberate, and he follows through with his decisions even though while knowing they could hinder the growth of his career and romantic life. Even after the rejection of promising proposals and commissions, Roark knows he will eventually reach the pinnacle of success. He watches his love, Dominique, hurt herself through different relationships and devices, and waits in peace because he knows she will return to him.

Patience is a valuable trait the audience could learn from Roark and apply to their own lives. The audience could also learn from and emulate Roark's self-assurance. Roark did not need to nor want to care about others' view of him. He has confidence in his own abilities and skills, and his high and intimate self-awareness is unaffected by any outside force. He believes a "man doesn't borrow pieces of its body. A building doesn't borrow hunks of its soul" (Rand 24). Some buildings constructed by Roark are composed of granite; like granite, Roark's self confidence is hard and unchanging. His self-awareness translates into confidence and is imperative to Roark's survival in a hostile population of second-handers. Readers should emulate this trait because self-awareness can help them reach their own success and happiness.

While readers might want to adopt Roark's traits, there are some which should not be emulated. The architect is emotionally disconnected from others, even those closest to him such as Henry Cameron. His coldness repels people, preventing the establishment of beneficial relationships or connections. This lack of emotion stems from his convictions and his great commitment to himself, features that contribute to his sometimes exasperating refusal to compromise — regarding the rejection of a group position, Roark says, "I don't work with collectives. I don't consult, I don't cooperate, I don't collaborate" (Rand 513). Coupled with his appearance of superiority, his disconnection intimidates and unsettles people. This is why not all of Roark's traits should be emulated— by damaging impressions, Roark also damages opportunities to further his career and his life.

Another trait of Roark's not worthy of emulation is his innate selfishness. Even while in love with Dominique, an emotion that invokes feelings and sentiments of selflessness, Roark only truly cares for himself. Roark sees aspects of himself in Dominique, so he values their relationship. He does not value family life, as no members of his family appear in the novel; when the Dean of Stanton questions Roark about his family, Roark replies, "I don't think I have any relatives" (Rand 25); he is even surprised at the question. He does not develop friendships in school or the workplace, and each friend he eventually acquires aspires to be him in some way, shape, or form. He finds a companion in Henry Cameron, Steven Mallory, Gail Wynand, and a few others who fit his strict social criteria. When looking at people, Roark "made people feel as if they didn't exist" (Rand 17). Not only does Roark have selfish tendencies, but he also denounces altruism, calling those who require assistance "parasites."

Despite having a few negative traits such as selfishness and aloofness, Roark's positive traits are worthy of being emulated by an audience. They include his self-assurance, his patience, and his determination. These characteristics are developed in a society composed of mostly mindless collectivists, and when compared to these inferior persons Roark resembles a god. His appearance, actions, and character juxtaposed with those of Peter Keating and other second-handers elevate Roark to moral superiority. According to Rand, his morals and convictions are the reason for Roark's perfection.