



# Journal of Social and Political Sciences

---

**Caivano, Dean. (2021), *E pluribus unum* Shrugged: Ayn Rand Against American Conservatism and Libertarianism. In: *Journal of Social and Political Sciences*, Vol.4, No.2, 180-191.**

ISSN 2615-3718

DOI: 10.31014/aior.1991.04.02.287

The online version of this article can be found at:  
<https://www.asianinstituteofresearch.org/>

---

Published by:  
The Asian Institute of Research

The *Journal of Social and Political Sciences* is an Open Access publication. It may be read, copied, and distributed free of charge according to the conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license.

The Asian Institute of Research *Social and Political Sciences* is a peer-reviewed International Journal. The journal covers scholarly articles in the fields of Social and Political Sciences, which include, but are not limited to, Anthropology, Government Studies, Political Sciences, Sociology, International Relations, Public Administration, History, Philosophy, Arts, Education, Linguistics, and Cultural Studies. As the journal is Open Access, it ensures high visibility and the increase of citations for all research articles published. The *Journal of Social and Political Sciences* aims to facilitate scholarly work on recent theoretical and practical aspects of Social and Political Sciences.



ASIAN INSTITUTE OF RESEARCH  
Connecting Scholars Worldwide

# *E pluribus unum* Shrugged: Ayn Rand Against American Conservatism and Libertarianism

Dean Caivano<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Professor of Political Science and History, Merced College. Email: dean.caivano@mccd.edu

## Abstract

The past decade has witnessed a renewed interest in the works of twentieth-century Objectivist philosopher Ayn Rand. Political events ranging from the rise of the Tea Party to the 2016 election of Donald J. Trump have only helped to spur this resurgence, further evident in film adaptations and reissues of her popular literary novels. Political pundits abound have, in turn, deemed the return of Ayn Rand as a victory for libertarian thought and the Republican Party, more broadly. However, in this paper I contest such a theoretical synergy and complicate the Rand/Republican Party interplay by suggesting that it rests on false grounds. Drawing from Rand's Objectivism, I argue that modern-day Republican Party politics, specifically conservative and libertarian strains of thought, fail on epistemological grounds. The philosophical writings of the Russian-born, turned-American philosopher therefore are not only incompatible, but function as a forceful critique *against* the governing platform of the Republican Party in preparation for the 2022 midterm elections.

**Keywords:** Ayn Rand, Party Ideology, Objectivist Philosophy, Republican Party, Conservatism, Libertarianism

“It relates to business, beauty, life and inner emotions.

That book relates to ... everything.”<sup>1</sup>

- Donald J. Trump

“If America perishes, it will perish by intellectual default.”<sup>2</sup>

- Ayn Rand

Ayn Rand is having a moment. Or, at least, so it seems. From *The Washington Post* to *Salon Magazine* to the commentaries of the progressive-liberal intellectual milieu, such as Robert Reich, the former-Trump administration had been baptized as the perfect embodiment, if not, the flat-out conquering of Rand's thought on

---

<sup>1</sup> President Trump described his affection for Rand's *The Fountainhead* in an interview with Kirsten Powers. Following his praiseworthy assessment of the text, he suggested that he identifies with the novel's protagonist, Howard Roark. In the novel, Roark was presented as an ambitious, highly individualistic architect, refusing to capitulate to the progress-stunted establishment. In many ways, Roark signifies the Übermensch in the Randian galaxy. For the full interview, see Kirsten Powers, “Donald Trump's 'Kinder, Gentler' Version,” *USA Today*, 11 April 2016. For an engaging study that looks at the parallels between Rand's archetypal man and Nietzsche's Übermensch, see Stephen L. Newman, *Liberalism at Wits' End: The Libertarian Revolt Against the Modern State* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1984).

<sup>2</sup> Ayn Rand, “For the New Intellectual,” in *For the New Intellectual* (New York: Random House, 1961), 46.

the American republic.<sup>3</sup> Of course, to suggest that the work of the towering twentieth-century Objectivist philosopher maintained no influence on the past administration is to ignore the facts, both real and alternative, to summon the dystopian parallels between the Orwell and Conway connection, so to speak. Former officials such as Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and CIA Director Michael Pompeo, defeated Secretary of Labor nominee Andy Puzder, and, of course, Speaker of the House Paul Ryan, and even the president himself – notorious for his anti-intellectual, philistine leanings towards reading – have cited Rand’s literary works as highly influential and key to their personal, financial, and political successes. In the words of President Trump, Rand’s 1943 novel *The Fountainhead* retains an important place in his narrow pantheon of essential readings, precisely because “It relates to business, beauty, life and inner emotions. That book relates to ... everything.”<sup>4</sup>

But with the 2022 midterm elections on the horizon and traditional red-state strongholds becoming up for grabs – from Georgia to Ohio to Wisconsin – it is important to assess how this striking image of a post-Trump Republican Party *qua* Ayn Rand influence is, quite *untenable*. It is thus timely to return to the works of Rand – not as a mode of theoretical or policy adoption – but rather to offer the tenets of her Objectivist philosophy to produce an immanent critique of the current state of the Republican Party, post-Donald Trump. By taking up Rand’s biting appraisal of both libertarianism and conservatism – two dominant poles of Republican thought that have functioned harmoniously and, at times, in opposition over the past four decades – a process of exposure unfolds. Specifically, an opening occurs establishing a fruitful theoretical plane to be envisioned within the enclosure of the American body politic, one that draws out the contradictory nodal points of modern-day American “Republican” thought. Moreover, an assessment of Rand’s view on these two strains of thought contained within the platform of the Republican Party helps to reveal an entrenched *incompatibility* with an Objectivist worldview.

This paper attempts to sketch out the crucial lines of Rand’s Objectivist philosophy. By turning attention to her bifurcation of three schools of thought – intrinsic, subjective, and objective – Rand constructs a system of thought that is adamantly anti-Kantian by denying a split between morality and practice. For Rand, Objectivism is a philosophy for living on this earth situated in a nexus of metaphysical realism instantiated by the axiomatic concepts of existence, consciousness, and identity. Negating the transcendental framework of Kant’s moral philosophical program, Rand represents a caesura with modern philosophical thought through her postulation of an open system.<sup>5</sup> Moving beyond the fixed totality of subjectivist philosophy, Rand reopens the universe to the actions and deeds of man through an Archimedean point that is redirected back towards the world. In turn, the essence of Rand’s Objectivist philosophy is epistemological as it is, in Rand’s view, the only system consonant with man’s nature as a rational being.

Directing focus to Rand’s Objectivist philosophy will enable me to demarcate her project from modern Republican thought, and, in turn, illuminate her critique *against* conservatism and libertarianism. The utilization of her philosophy in contemporary American politics, predominately expressed by the inner circle of Trump’s White

---

<sup>3</sup> For an engaging survey of how mainstream news media has linked Rand with the current political climate, see Firmin DeBrabander, “How Ayn Rand’s ‘Elitism’ Lives On In The Trump Administration,” *The Conversation*, 3 April 2017; Robert Reich, “Trump’s Brand is Ayn Rand,” *Salon Magazine*, 19 March 2018; Jonathan Chait, “How Ayn Rand’s Theories Destroyed ‘Never Trump’ Conservatism,” *New York Magazine*, 13 December 2016; Jonathan Freedland, “The New Age of Ayn Rand: How She Won Over Trump and Silicon Valley,” *The Guardian*, 10 April 2017.

<sup>4</sup> President Trump interview with Kirsten Powers, 11 April 2016.

<sup>5</sup> In a point of unexpected commonality, Frankfurt School critical theorist (Second Generation), Jürgen Habermas advances a line of critique against Kant in a similar manner as Rand. According to Habermas, the form of knowledge characterized within modernity is an aporia as it locates the cognitive subject, beyond the ruins of metaphysics, while still fully self-reflective of its finite power into a project that necessitates infinite power. This aporia was transformed by Kant, a move that was demonstrated by Foucault, by repositioning the cognitive subject within an epistemological framework through a reinterpretation of the finite faculty of a cognitive subject’s as “transcendental conditions of a knowledge that progresses on into infinitude.” Since Kant’s move to position the subject as a transcendental subject, the “I” has assumed a double function. On the one hand, the reflecting subject has maintained an empirical status as one particular object within a world of other objects. The knowing subject sees and experiences the world already in existence as an external, obscure object. On the other hand, reflective activity of the absolute “I” is situated as a transcendental subject that exists against the totality of the world by constituting the spectrum of objects available for reflection and experience. This methodological focal point provides reflection with a constituting force to transcend an object that exists *in itself* to a heightened level of awareness through the recognition of its *for itself* objective. In Rand’s Objectivist view, Kant is guilty of erecting the transcendental subject in opposition to the present-world, a critical violation of an intrinsic, subjective, and objective framing embedded within an open-system. See Jürgen Habermas, “Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present: On Foucault’s Lecture on Kant’s *What is Enlightenment?*” in *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate*, ed. Michael Kelly (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1994), 153.

House, but also noticeable in the rhetoric and governance behaviors of Senator Rand Paul (KY) and former Speaker of the House Paul Ryan (WI),<sup>6</sup> should thus be seen as an attempt to commodify, sensationalize, and co-opt a system of thought that is, in fact, antithetical to the platform of the Republican Party in its purest form and throughout its various iterations. Former President Trump and his cadre of self-professed and prophetically-anointed Rand acolytes are, therefore, faux disciples of the Objectivist movement;<sup>7</sup> bewildered in the political desert of the Republican Party their prayers have not been answered as they long for manna to rain down upon them in the form of a surefire ticket to prosperity, but misguided in their interpretations of the canonical texts of their political goddess.

To begin, I first turn attention to the loose, yet overly exaggerated association between Rand's philosophical writings and prominent Republican leaders. Next, I engage in a methodical exegesis of her Objectivist philosophy teasing out its salient features and tenets. Finally, I conclude by exploring how libertarianism and conservatism fail on epistemological grounds and thus cannot be embedded within an Objectivist methodology.

### 1. Modern Republican (Party) Thought

“What truly matters is not which party controls our government,  
but whether our government is controlled by the people.  
Today will be remembered as the day the people  
became the rulers of this nation again.”<sup>8</sup>  
- Donald J. Trump

“The expert state eliminates every interval of appearance,  
of subjectification, and of dispute in an exact concordance  
between the order of law and the order of the facts.”<sup>9</sup>  
- Jacques Rancière

Lost in the wilderness of an ideological abyss, the Republican Party searches for a viable theoretical vehicle to maintain the contours of institutional executive and legislative power following its resounding defeat in the 2020 General Election. Cobbled together by an assemblage of racist and xenophobic rhetoric, a slash and burn governance mentality of the federal system, and a tightrope balancing act of *appearing* compassionate while maintaining a fervent commitment to austerity policies and supply side economics, the Grand Old Party continues to drown in an aporia of contradictory ideological strains. While some Republican politicians and candidates are quick to assert their adherence to Reaganomics, others purport to ride the wave of the AstroTurf movement of the Tea Partiers, others remain devout Trump disciples. Imprisoned within a governing nexus that seeks to both conserve and repudiate the past (President Trump's acrimoniously infamous, “Make America Great Again” slogan in contrast to Gov. John Kasich's (OH) post-2016 election formed Super PAC, “New Day for America”), the Party of Lincoln finds itself trapped without an exit strategy inside a paradoxical ethos that not only hinders, but delegitimizes, its very own ontological grounding through an never-even game of ideological roulette.

The matrix of the ideological parameters of the Republican Party is, in turn, schizophrenic: a porous Frankenstein-esque corpus that alienates its disenchanting base by a mash up of myriad internal contradictory nodal points along the plane of Republican thought that cannot reconcile the altruism of Judeo-Christian morality with *laissez-faire* capitalism. In short, Trump devotees, Eisenhower Republicans, Reaganites, compassionate conservatives, and Tea Partiers are all united (or chained) by a singular vision: a theoretically deficient schema that is absent of a political

<sup>6</sup> On a number of occasions, typically placating to influential donors on the Right, both Senator Paul and former Speaker Ryan have articulated their respect and admiration for Ayn Rand. Both have, unequivocally, praised the thought of Rand as the catalyst for their entry into political office.

<sup>7</sup> For a litany of those members of Trump's key advisory circle – past and present – and their admiration of the works of Ayn Rand, see James Hohmann, “Ayn Rand-Acolyte Donald Trump Stacks His Cabinet with Fellow Objectivists,” *The Washington Post*, 13 December 2006.

<sup>8</sup> This passage cuts to the very core of President Trump's inaugural address. For the full transcript, see <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/the-inaugural-address/>

<sup>9</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Dis-agreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 112.

philosophy, effectively devoid of a vision of the future beyond the ill-fated insurrection of 6 January 2021. The instantiation of this *anti*-ideology – an articulation that is analogous to the bankrupt culture of post-modernity – materializes not in policies, or ideals, or even bipartisan dialogue, but rather, through the articulation and dissemination of fear.<sup>10</sup>

As the Republican Party wallows in its own philosophic indeterminacy, attempts have been launched within its own register to rehabilitate the ailing party. Most notably, two strains of thought have emerged, only to dissipate at various points, which aim analogously to deflate the monstrous size of the American federal government and re-center its orientation towards an atmosphere of first order principles fixed in a calculus of market efficiency terms. The first strain of thought – one that persists as a tentative framing on both ontological and epistemological grounds – is conservatism. I take American conservatism to express a disaggregated assembly of political and economic beliefs that are underscored by i) a devout affirmation of capitalist-relations and solutions, ii) a loose heritage of Judeo-Christian ethics, and iii) a permanent retention of fear triggered by foreign or external threats (ranging from Islam to left-wing politics to the foreign worker) as typified in the writings of William F. Buckley and George Will and the governing practices of Senators Ted Cruz (TX) and Mitch McConnell (KY) as well as Supreme Court Justices Neil Gorsuch and Amy Coney Barrett. On the other hand, libertarianism represents a subunit, yet distant entity of conservative thought, defined by i) a crusade to trim the fat of the federal government and eradicate the obstacles that inhibit individual achievement and success via a free market system, ii) a commentary on the moral fiber of America that has allegedly been undone by welfare handouts, bloated defense budgets, and a sprawling military that serves as the police of the world, and iii) a strong promotion of civil liberties through a hands-off approach to governance. Drawing heavily from the camp of anarcho-capitalism, the modern-day American libertarian movement has shifted since the 1970s, disavowing its more anarchist and radical leanings, instead offering the capital market as the *only* appropriate arena for individual economic prosperity.<sup>11</sup> The transformation of libertarianism in the American context – a move that empties out its anti-state and anti-capitalism orientation – can be seen in the writings of Milton Friedman and the Cato Institute and in governance by modern-day libertarian icon Rep. Ron Paul (TX) and former governor and ill-fated presidential nominee Gary Johnson (NM). I take these two hegemonic strains contained within the incomplete, undeveloped political philosophy of the Republican Party not as a unitary articulation of thought, but rather as two different modes of governance that operate in concert under the neoliberal order. While neither of these registers properly captures the totality of the Republican base, I suggest that these respective programs produce a type of political, economic, and cultural saliency and efficacy that help to illustrate a broad conceptual picture of Republican Party politics. Taken collectively – while still cognizant of key ideological differences – it signals *an obfuscation of any vision of American society*, opting for a reconfiguration of classical republican civic values into a polity defined by a myopic subjectification of *homo economicus* into a disordered, disinterested, de-totalized state-reliant-subject.

Ostensibly, the political programs of proclaimed Rand acolytes stem from the philosophical writings of Ayn Rand as they are quick to publicly assert that the specificities of their own governing patterns are highly influenced by the twentieth-century Russian-born, turned-American philosopher. In many ways, Rand's works have garnered a resurfacing effect due to the linkage between her Objectivist philosophy and the emerging libertarian strain of American politics from the rise of the Tea Party to the electoral success of Trump in 2016. Reissues of her seminal novels *Atlas Shrugged* and *The Fountainhead* have splashed across the counters of American coffee shops and the bookshelves of big box retailers as well as Hollywood film adaptations that sought an even wider consumer audience.

As the Rand acolytes ground their political thinking and, in turn, their approach to governance, in the philosophic writings of Ayn Rand, it is crucial to analyze if the salient lines of conservative & libertarian thought run analogous to Rand's philosophical system of Objectivism. At a quick glance, political pundits and even the American populace would situate the Rand acolytes' rhetoric and voting records within the cosmos of Randian thought. For example, two emblems of their perceived ideological affiliation can be identified in Senator Rand Paul's anti-

---

<sup>10</sup> Ayn Rand, "The New Fascism: Rule by Consensus," in *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal* (New York: Signet Books, 1967), 203.

<sup>11</sup> See Saul Newman, *The Politics of Postanarchism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010).

governmental philosophy that pays homage to Ayn Rand as he ‘cut his teeth’ on her works and former Speaker Ryan’s disclosure that he requires his staff interns to read *Atlas Shrugged*.

But to situate the modern-day Rand acolytes within the constellation of the Randian universe would be to ignore Ayn Rand’s scathing and unflinching critique of not only conservatism, but also, more importantly, libertarianism. For Rand, both conservatism and libertarianism ultimately fail on epistemological grounds as they advance a philosophical system that lacks an ontological grounding. Without any foundational points, these systems of thought recede into a morally subjective aporia essentially detaching politics from an ethical structure. The aversion to ground political principles within a moral philosophy renders conservatism and libertarianism as a subjective value-system that is directed towards the good of man’s consciousness, but *independent of reality*.<sup>12</sup> Bent on forcing men to find or discover their own good, the subjectivism of conservatism and libertarianism negates man’s nature.

## 2. Rand’s Objectivist Philosophy

“Truth isn’t truth.”<sup>13</sup>

- Rudy Giuliani

“What we are witnessing is the self-liquidation of philosophy.”<sup>14</sup>

- Ayn Rand

In her essay, “What is Capitalism?” published in *The Objectivist Newsletter* in late 1965, Rand provides a scathing critique of modern philosophy and political economy accentuating the strong current of collectivism that runs throughout their application. For Rand, philosophy has essentially collapsed in the twentieth century as primitive mysticism has rear its ugly head within the field of scientific development *qua* technological advancements. In the humanities, the collapse has crystalized with new fields sprouting up in the form of psychology and political economy in the attempt to study human behavior. But these branches of scientific inquiry are short-sided and misguided for Rand as both adamantly ignore man as a rational being. Instead, psychology and political economy shift attention away from man as a conscious being by elevating the collective *over* man. What we are left with, then, is a conceptualization and instantiation of a social system that is essentially absent of man. This is the great failure of modern philosophy – a degeneration that commenced in the nineteenth century through a post-Kantian disintegration – the coupling, or more precisely, the uncritical acceptance of the tenets of collectivism as the central axioms of modern day thought.<sup>15</sup>

Central to her critique of political economy is the way in which capitalism is misunderstood in the field. For Rand, political economy has advanced a tribalism culture that affirms altruism while ignoring the true creator and producer of wealth and value: man himself. Rejecting the notion that social surplus is created by a collective and thus facilitates an expansion of productive capacities, Rand vigorously opposes, writing, “There is, of course, no such thing as ‘social surplus.’ All wealth is produced by somebody and belongs to somebody.”<sup>16</sup> Rand’s assertion here cuts directly to the heart of her main problem with political economy, and, more broadly speaking, modern philosophical inquiry. It is precisely this notion that man is wedded to a tribal (or collective) entity that, for Rand, undoes and strips man of his rational, creative, and productive powers. To truly understand capitalism, the tribal premise of man *qua* man must not only be challenged, but also jettisoned for man to regain his place in the world.

This is *why* and *how* Rand’s entire objectivist philosophy rests upon epistemological grounds. Rand’s objections to the contemporary understanding and, ultimately, the fatalistic implications of the linkage between capitalism

<sup>12</sup> Ayn Rand, “What is Capitalism?,” in *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal* (New York: Signet Books, 1967), 21.

<sup>13</sup> Giuliani made this highly Orwellian/Nixonian claim on “Meet the Press” in defense of President Trump’s actions surrounding the ongoing investigation by special counsel Robert Mueller. For an analysis of the interview between Giuliani and Chuck Todd, see Rebecca Morin and David Cohen, “Giuliani: ‘Truth isn’t truth,’” *Politico*, 19 August 2018.

<sup>14</sup> Ayn Rand, *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology* (New York: Signet Books, 1967), 163.

<sup>15</sup> Rand, “What is Capitalism?,” 11.

<sup>16</sup> Rand, “What is Capitalism?,” 14.

and society, are generated by the epistemological foundation of her thinking. In her 1957 novel, *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand first alludes to the ontological core of her epistemological schema of thought, primarily, the assertion that man is a living being and thus our observations, understanding, and, in turn, our philosophical system must reconcile with. Rand succinctly writes, “There is only one fundamental alternative in the universe: existence or non-existence – and it pertains to a single class of entities: to living organisms.”<sup>17</sup> Rand continues, and it is here that we can start to see the extension of man as a living being in context to her critique of the collectivist ethos of political economy, “Life is a process of self-sustaining and self-generated action. [...] It is only the concept of ‘Life’ that makes the concept of ‘Value’ possible.”<sup>18</sup> This central axiom of Rand’s epistemological project gets reincorporated and further flushed out in her critique of political economy, postulating, “A great deal may be learned about society by studying man; but this process cannot be reversed: nothing can be learned about man by studying society [...]”<sup>19</sup>

For Rand, the reason why nothing is to be gained by directing our focus to society is because it ignores the second axiom of her epistemological framework: man’s means of survival is *by* and *through* the utilization of reason. Constructing a social system premised upon the systematic flows of an aggregate population conceals the rational powers of the individual, essentially negating man’s essential characteristic: his rational faculty. In her 1961 essay, “The Objectivist Ethics,” Rand stresses this point, posting, “Consciousness – for those living organisms which possess it – is the basic means of survival. For man, the basic means of survival is reason. Man cannot survive, as animals do, by the guidance of mere percepts.”<sup>20</sup> This second axiom of her epistemological project gets tied back into her critique of political economy via modern philosophy. For Rand, a basic premise of political economy (and its extension to a social system) is that when evaluating production, it starts with a tribal premise rather than with man. What is necessary, therefore, is a reversal of the driving agent of production and innovation. To properly approach political economy, Rand contends that a rejection of the tribal premise is crucial to enable an identification of man’s nature. Moreover, his nature is his rational faculty, as his survival impinges upon the utilization and degree of his rationality. “Production,” then, Rand argues, “is the application of reason to the problem of survival.”<sup>21</sup>

Since thinking, and thus in turn, rational action is central to the Randian man, it is necessary to see how capitalism fits into her Objectivist philosophy in relation to the third axiom of her epistemological foundation. As man is a living being, one that utilizes reason as *the* means for survival, the articulation or exercise of reason itself is volitional. This is crucial to Rand’s philosophical project because it is from the focal point of a process of a cognitive, voluntary choice that the Randian actor must find himself embedded within the proper social system, one that fosters and protects the autonomy of individual choice. Rand first alludes to the act of freely making a choice in her 1938 novelette *Anthem*. In strikingly short, yet emphatic prose, Rand writes, “I am. I think. I will.”<sup>22</sup> We can see in just three brief declarations the entire underpinnings of her Objectivist philosophy: man as a living being (‘I am’); survival of man via reason (‘I think’); and the exercise of reason as volitional (‘I will’). It is this latter claim, the volitional of man’s rational faculties, that provides the impetus for her entire understanding of capitalism as well as her critique of statism. In Rand’s view, capitalism is the only system that answers the question, “Is man free?” in the affirmative. In her 1961 essay, “For the New Intellectual,” Rand argues that “Man is the only living species who has to perceive reality – which means: to be *conscious* – by choice. [...] For an animal, the question of survival is primarily physical: for man, primarily epistemological.”<sup>23</sup> Choice, then, for Rand, must be situated within a social system that enables voluntary exchange. It is the connection – this interplay – between man’s epistemological ontology of reason and his survival as a living being in the world that “capitalism recognizes and protects.”<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, selections, in *For the New Intellectual*, 121.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>19</sup> Rand, “What is Capitalism?,” 15.

<sup>20</sup> Ayn Rand, “The Objectivist Ethics,” in *The Virtue of Selfishness* (New York: Signet Books, 1964), 21.

<sup>21</sup> Rand, “What is Capitalism?,” 17.

<sup>22</sup> Rand, *Anthem*, selections, in *For the New Intellectual*, 64.

<sup>23</sup> Rand, “For the New Intellectual,” in *For the New Intellectual*, 15.

<sup>24</sup> Rand, “What is Capitalism?,” 19.

For Rand, capitalism is not legitimized or justified on practical grounds. It is not, as the collectivists assert, a mechanism that enables the most efficient and equitable distribution of resources. Rand's opposition to this claim should not surprise us. Just as she denied the possibility of a social surplus, here too, Rand rejects the claim that man is a "national resource," one that possesses raw materiality that can be shaped, transformed, and exploited for the benefit of the nation-state.<sup>25</sup> Rather, Rand argues that capitalism proceeds and, in turn, is justified along moral grounds. Rejecting the assertion that capitalism is the best way to articulate and realize a common good, Rand contends, "The moral justification of capitalism lies in the fact that it is the only system consonant with man's rational nature, that it protects man's survival *qua* man, that its ruling principle is justice."<sup>26</sup>

Capitalism, for Rand, then, is the social system that effectively protects individual rights, including, and central to her articulation, the vital recognition of privately owned property rights. Within a truly *laissez-faire* market society, all relationships are voluntary with a governmental apparatus retaining only a retaliatory function. What results is not only a reduction of conflict between rational men, but rather a harmony of interests. Conflict, in a physical, coercive sense, is eradicated in a *laissez-faire* society precisely because man's fundamental interest is to live, or more aptly put, to live as a rational, just, productive, independent being. In an emphatic tone to begin her 1962 essay, "The 'Conflicts' of Men's Interests," Rand asserts, "there are no conflicts of interests among rational men."<sup>27</sup> For Rand, conflict arises when we consider the interests of men as undefined, left open to the subjective interpretation of each particular actor or to the dubious conceptual device of the collective common good. Rand accentuates her rejection of a cognitive collective thought process in *The Fountainhead*, postulating, "[...] the mind is an attribute of the individual. There is no such thing as a collective brain. There is no such thing as a collective thought."<sup>28</sup> Here, once again, Rand stresses the third axiom of her epistemological project: the exercise of reason as volitional and its compatibility *only* with capitalism. In "For the New Intellectual," Rand provides us with her most succinct description of capitalism and the voluntary nature of its processes, which directly leads us to the core of her Objectivist philosophy. I quote at length to highlight the three axioms of her project as well as the role that objectivity will play out in her work as *the* proper school of thought:

Capitalism demands the best of every man – his rationality – and rewards him accordingly. It leaves every man free to choose the work he likes, to specialize in it, to trade his product for the products of others, and to go as far on the road of achievement as his ability and ambition will carry him. His success depends on the *objective* value of his work and on the rationality of those who recognize that value.<sup>29</sup>

The voluntary nature of *laissez-faire* capitalism thus facilitates and protects man's nature because it is the only morally justifiable social system that provides for man's total freedom. For Rand, our current world is inherently a struggle over freedom *qua* free market capitalism versus exploitation and repression through statism.<sup>30</sup> This is not to suggest that Rand is a thinker of continuity or consensus. A free market society, one that protects private property and rewards the industrious of the world, is not a homogeneously governed society. Rather, in a capitalist society it is the right to disagree *qua* the institution of private property that "keeps the road open to man's most valuable attribute [...]: the creative mind."<sup>31</sup> What we find in all three of these various iterations of a repressive society – socialist, fascist, and statist – is the denial of man's rational faculties and a ruling governance system that is based on consensus. This type of governance – a cultural malaise of consensus – is emphatically an anti-ideology instantiated by a dissemination of fear rather than freedom, which stands in opposition to the three central axioms of Rand's Objectivist philosophy. Rand, then, in a rejection of the deficiencies of modern philosophy and its collusion with state theory is a thinker of anti-consensus.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Rand, "What is Capitalism?," 20.

<sup>26</sup> Rand, "What is Capitalism?," 20.

<sup>27</sup> Rand, "The 'Conflicts' of Men's Interests," in *The Virtue of Selfishness*, 50.

<sup>28</sup> Rand, *The Fountainhead*, selections, in *For the New Intellectual*, 78.

<sup>29</sup> Rand, "For the New Intellectual," 26.

<sup>30</sup> Rand, "Extremism, or The Art of Smearing," in *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal*, 178.

<sup>31</sup> Rand, "What is Capitalism?," 19.

<sup>32</sup> Rand, "The New Fascism: Rule by Consensus," 202.



Viewing Rand, as a proponent of an anti-consensus model, requires us to examine her crucial bifurcation of three schools of thought: intrinsic, subjective, and objective. The intrinsic school of thought posits that the concept of good is inherently a good-in-itself. Certain actions or objects independent from the social experiences in which they occur are intrinsically good. This vulgar insistence on the optimal value of activities delinks the conceptual parameters of value from purpose. From a position of intrinsic goodness, man will do anything – including excessive force – to accomplish his task. Similar to the intrinsic theory, subjective thought “holds that the good bears no relation to the facts of reality, that it is the product of a man’s consciousness, created by his feelings, desires, ‘intuitions’ or whims, and that it is merely an ‘arbitrary postulate’ or an ‘emotional commitment.’”<sup>33</sup> For Rand, both the intrinsic and subjective theory are congruent, and in fact, essential to every dictatorship and the absolute state. Highlighting the inherent violence in these schools of thought, Rand argues, “Whether they are held consciously or subconsciously [...] these theories make it possible for a man to believe that the good is independent of man’s mind and can be achieved by physical force.”<sup>34</sup> The sharp dismissal of these theories by Rand functions not only as a critique of the modern Weberian state, but also as a rejection of the entire theoretical underpinnings of modern philosophy. In an unequivocal tone, Rand assails Kantian thought as the central force that has unleashed horror, oppression, and slaughter, succinctly asserting, “It is not an accident that Eichmann was a Kantian.”<sup>35</sup>

Contra the intrinsic and subjective schools of thought, Rand advances the objective theory as a morally justifiable, anti-force theory of values. For Rand, the objective theory is the only moral theory that is fully *incompatible* with a rule by force. The good – unlike the intrinsic model that locates it immanently within an object/action and in the subjective model locatable through man’s emotional responses – for objective theory exists in an “evaluation of the facts of reality by man’s consciousness according to a rational standard of value.”<sup>36</sup> The good, then, is an element, or an aspect, of reality in direct relation to man as a living, rational being in the world. Value and purpose remain in concert, not separated, or delinked as in the intrinsic and subjective models. For Rand, the good is objective, “determined by the nature of reality,” but discoverable by the rational faculties and capabilities of the mind.<sup>37</sup> This is precisely why capitalism, according to Rand, is the only social system that is based on an objective theorization and actualization of values. The free market represents the application of an objective theory of values in a *social* context not by coercive governmental force or majoritarian rule, but rather by constructing a space free from conflict to ensure that the determination of values is rendered by the nature of reality discernible through reason. In an astute observation, Rand suggests that this type of free market society *has never existed* due to the vicissitudes in market stability directly affected by a philosophy that advances both altruism and statism. For Rand, pure capitalism – a social system not yet instantiated – contains an immanent philosophical foundation. Not surprisingly, this theoretical base is formulated on and through the objective school of thought.

What our examination of Ayn Rand’s Objectivist philosophy has illuminated is a critique of both modern philosophic thought – in the form of intrinsic and subjective theory – and its socio-political ramifications as well as the tribal premise that is immanent within collectivist conceptions of political economy. By turning to the three central axioms of her philosophical thought and her prioritization of the objective theory, the lines of her theoretical plane have been demarcated in contrast to dominant concretizations of Kantian morality, a Weberian vision of the legitimate state via the monopolization of force,<sup>38</sup> and Keynesian state economics. Rand is, in turn, a wholly original and systematic thinker offering an alternative vision of the political-philosophical world. Sketching out the theoretical underpinnings of her Objectivist philosophy will now enable us to elucidate her thought as a critique *against* conservatism and libertarianism. In what may present itself in a surprising fashion, especially considering the co-opting of Rand as a, if not, *the* prominent thinker in the cosmos of the modern-day American conservative

---

<sup>33</sup> Rand, “What is Capitalism?,” 21.

<sup>34</sup> Rand, “What is Capitalism?,” 22.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 22. This claim is confirmed by Hannah Arendt’s coverage for *The New Yorker* of Adolf Eichmann’s 1961 trial. Arendt writes, “[...] he suddenly declared with great emphasis that he had lived his whole life according to Kant’s moral precepts, and especially according to a Kantian definition of duty.” Arendt, however, is clear that Eichmann should not be considered as acting in accordance with Kantian principles as he followed the will of the Führer rather than practical reason. See Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking Press, 1963), Section VIII: Duties of a Law-Abiding Citizen.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>38</sup> See Max Weber, “Politics as Vocation,” in *The Vocation Lectures*, ed. David Owen and Tracy B. Strong, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2004), 33.

and libertarian movements, Rand offers a biting and philosophically consistent assault against the embedded layers of statist theory intrinsic to these respected theoretical projects.

### 3. Conservatism and Libertarianism: An Obituary

“America, fashionable observers say, is a non-ideological nation.”<sup>39</sup>

- William F. Buckley

“So much for those American ‘conservatives’ who claim that religion is the base of capitalism – and who believe that they can have capitalism and eat it, too, as the moral cannibalism of the altruist ethics demands.”<sup>40</sup>

- Ayn Rand

Rand’s rejection of conservative thought found its first instantiation in her 1957 novel, *Atlas Shrugged*. In this work, Rand outlines, to a strong degree, the main thrust of her Objectivist philosophy in relation to politics. Primarily, her rejection of religion through a repudiation of altruism and traditional Judeo-Christian ethical values sent shockwaves throughout the conservative constituency. Leading figures on the Right, such as William F. Buckley and Whittaker Chambers, dismissed Rand’s abhorrence to religion. But her philosophy was not totally denounced and deplored by the Right. Rand’s advocacy of a purely unfettered *laissez-faire* capitalist social system resonated strongly with right-wing populist. Her advancement of egoism found in *Atlas Shrugged* and then in a fuller articulation in *The Virtue of Selfishness* still resonated with leading figures on the Right. Even with her adamant rejection of religion and traditional values in place, conservatives were reluctant to throw the baby out with the bathwater due to her stringent promotion of capitalism. Republican Party leaders and popular public conservative intellectuals maintained the thrust of Rand’s critique against socialism as well as her unwavering support of capitalism while keeping at bay her rejection of an altruistic ethical system.

The tepid relationship between Rand and the Right took a schismatic turn with her 7 December 1960 lecture held at Princeton University, titled, “Conservatism: An Obituary.” In this lecture, later reprinted in 1963 by the Nathaniel Branden Institute, Rand unleashed her most ferocious critique of the Right. For Rand, conservatism cannot reverse the brutalizing and sweeping trend towards statism as what they seek to conserve is generated from an altruistic moral system that is inherently antithetical to capitalism. Assailing conservatives for not properly defending or attempting to ‘conserve’ capitalism, Rand asserts, “[...] capitalism is what the ‘conservatives’ dare not advocacy or defend. They are paralyzed by the profound conflict between capitalism and the moral code which dominates our culture: the morality of altruism.”<sup>41</sup> It is the inherent contradictions of conservative thought, then, for Rand that leads to an incompatibility between capitalism – and, effectively, her Objectivist philosophy – and the altruism of the hegemonic Judeo-Christian morality. The irreconcilability of the two, and, in Rand’s view, the lack of a challenge against altruism makes conservatives complicit in the alienating trend towards statism. “So long as the ‘conservatives’ evade the issue of altruism,” Rand argues, “they cannot escape the question of: back to what?”<sup>42</sup> For Rand, unequivocally, capitalism, and the possibility of *laissez-faire* capitalism, was destroyed by altruism. Returning to a prior age does not suffice for Rand, because pure capitalism did not exist in the past; rather, capitalism, like the rational faculty of man, is *future-oriented* and only implemented through “man’s right to exist – from man’s inalienable individual right to his own life.”<sup>43</sup>

What Rand’s opposition to conservatism enables us to do is to ask how and in what ways her critique could be applied to a libertarian lens. Although Rand only briefly addressed the emerging libertarian movement, her lines of thought against American conservatism open a new terrain for the issue to be explored. Central to a Randian

<sup>39</sup> William F. Buckley, *Up From Liberalism* (Cambridge: Ravenio Books, 2012), introduction.

<sup>40</sup> Ayn Rand, “Requiem for Man,” in *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal*, 315.

<sup>41</sup> Ayn Rand, “Conservatism: An Obituary,” in *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal*, 195.

<sup>42</sup> Rand, “Conservatism: An Obituary,” 200.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

critique against libertarianism is the saliency that toleration plays in libertarian thought. Essentially, and we can see this most strongly in the rhetoric of Senator Rand Paul, in a bifurcation of politics from ethics. Libertarians argue that civil liberties must be protected from infringement and excessive encroachment of governmental forces while maintaining the autonomy of an ethical value system *independent* from politics. This stands in clear opposition to Rand's Objectivist philosophy as every political theory is an ethical system and must be morally justified.<sup>44</sup> As we have seen, capitalism, in Rand's view, is the only morally justifiable social system because it is fully congruent with man's nature. For Rand, then, any attempt to bifurcate politics from ethics, as in the clear delineation found in libertarian thought, is principally a mitigation of man's freedom. This detachment of politics from an ethical system is problematical for Rand as it demonstrates a political system that is not grounded in a moral philosophy. A *hands-off* approach to ethics and the instantiation of an onto-political body, one that is devoid of an ethical foundational point, results, in turn, in a slippage into moral subjectivism. For Rand, all values – social, political, and economic – must be objective.

Rand would also find problems with the libertarian understanding of capitalism. Following closely in line with anarcho-capitalism, the American libertarian movement has maintained that getting the government out of the market would result in a maximization of efficiency. The removal of governmental barriers manifesting in the form of tariffs and regulations as well as in the intrusion of the government in the market via subsidizations has been, and continues to be, a rallying cry for the anti-federal governmental mentality of libertarians. But the linkage of this premise with Randian thought is short-sided. Although Rand is a proponent of exculpating the market from the hegemony of the modern state, her argument is not justified upon grounds of productive efficiency. Rather, as we have explored, Rand's justification of capitalism proceeds from a moral justification, not from a position in which a social system merely maximizes wealth for particular individuals.

Production, for Rand, is the extension of man's reason in relation to the second axiom of her Objectivist epistemological thinking: the objective necessity of man's survival impinges upon his application of reason. In the 1965 essay, "The Obliteration of Capitalism," Rand further articulates this understanding of production – a crucial element of her thinking first outlined in *Atlas Shrugged* – as a morally justifiable cognitive process of thinking and action to ensure man's survival. Rand writes, "Capitalism was the only system in history where wealth was not acquired by looting, but by *production*, not by force, but by trade, the only system that stood for man's right to his own mind, to his work, to his life, to his happiness, to himself."<sup>45</sup> The libertarian claim of efficiency as the justification for a free market society – a claim that is espoused and embedded within typical Republican Party rhetoric – thus, for Rand, fails on an epistemological account because it negates an objective theory of action and rational selfishness in favor for an ontology of moral subjectivity.

The role that productive efficiency via competition plays in libertarian thought draws its theoretical origins from the anarcho-capitalist movement of the 1970s,<sup>46</sup> which extended the notion of competition *beyond* the economy into the political realm. For the anarcho-capitalists, competing governments within the same geographical territory would compete for citizens as governmental alliance and support would be facilitated through a producer-consumer paradigm. With citizens free to choose the government that best suits their own interests the playing field of competition would permeate all aspects of society. The germ of this thinking still manifests itself within the modern American libertarian movement. Calls for the privatization of local police forces and public transit systems, including formerly publicly controlled roads, finds its theoretical impetus from the belief of a proliferation of competition to ensure market efficiency. In one of her last writings, "The Nature of Government," written in 1974, Rand focuses on this percolating move towards hyper-competition. Dismissing it not necessarily because it is contradictory, Rand asserts that the claim cannot be substantiated because it is conceptually flawed regarding the treatment of both government and competition. Rand is persistent that a government is "an institution that

---

<sup>44</sup> Rand, "Requiem for Man," 301.

<sup>45</sup> Rand, "Conservatism: An Obituary," 191. Emphasis Added

<sup>46</sup> By this claim, I am drawing upon the highly influential anarchist literature of the 1970s, particularly David D. Friedman's *The Machinery of Freedom* (1973) and Murray Rothbard's *Power and Market: Government and the Economy* (1970) as well as *For a New Liberty: The Libertarian Manifesto* (1973).

holds the exclusive power to enforce certain rules of social conduct in a given geographical area.”<sup>47</sup> Rand continues, linking the territorial boundaries of a government with the objective theory of value, arguing, “A government is the means of placing the retaliatory use of physical force under *objective* control [...]”<sup>48</sup> Government, and in turn, competition is morally bound to an objective ethical position: the genesis and implementation of law (and force) is determined by reality as perceived by reason. Rand thus rejects the extension of unethical competition to the sphere of competing governments, posing a rhetorical situation:

Suppose Mr. Smith, a customer of Government A, suspects that his next-door neighbor, Mr. Jones, a customer of Government B, has robbed him; a squad of Police A proceeds to Mr. Jones’s house and is met at the door by a squad of Police B, who declare that they do not accept the validity of Mr. Smith’s complaint and do not recognize the authority of Government A. What happens then?<sup>49</sup>

What we can locate in Randian thought, therefore, is a clear, coherent, and trenchant critique of both conservatism and libertarianism. On both fronts these projects fail to jettison altruism thus logically drowning in the incompatibility of it and its affiliation with capitalism. For Rand, her attack on conservatism placed her outside the mainstream cadre of Right thinkers, yet her veneration of the free market still loosely connected her to the Right. Using the main thrust of her criticisms against conservatism, we have been able to apply it to the American libertarian movement. Based on the central premises of her epistemological philosophy and her critique of conservatism, libertarianism fails on myriad fronts for her thinking. This conclusion thus challenges the affinity between her philosophical project and prominent political leaders of the Republican Party.

#### 4. Conclusion

What then lies ahead for the American republic, the prominent empty signifier of democracy? To buttress the creative and autonomous potentialities of the American *demos* as well as open new spaces for the articulation of equality and liberty a *return* is necessary. Perhaps this *return* summons an invocation back to the heart of the libertarian tradition, namely the co-harmonious possibilities of equality and liberty, while still remaining cognizant to the forces of late capitalism à la the project of post-anarchism. While I argue that it would be a fatalistic philosophic move to suggest that the ills of American political philosophy and the republic at-large can be overcome through a reactionary plane,<sup>50</sup> I affirm that a critical interrogation of both the Republican and Democratic parties offer valuable insights and possible avenues for an invitation for a renewed sense of American civic-life. There is much to be gained by looking within the republic and asking, “Why has the American populace become so disenchanting? Why, indeed, has *E pluribus unum* shrugged?”

The implication of a perceived affiliation between popular Republican political leaders and Ayn Rand’s thought has resulted in an oscillating party platform that is highly inconsistent. Utilizing Randian thought as a catalyst for governance further obscures the muddled base of the Republican Party. For Republicans, the lack of a clear vision of American society will continue to hinder their electoral stability as midterm elections approach. Attempts to fill-in the theoretical gaps of the Republican platform with tenets of Randian thought have been misguided producing an inarticulate and theoretically disembodied party. The panacea for the Republican Party does not rest in an embrace of the Randian universe, but rather through a unified, moderate, and logically sound ontology capable of articulating policies that reflect the changing socio-political realities of America. The thought of Ayn Rand does not vehicle the Republican Party to where it needs to be to situate itself within the complex and changing psyche of the American electorate; it does, however, help us to shine light on the inherent deficiencies and contradictions that continue to undermine and strangle the Grand Old Party.

---

<sup>47</sup> Ayn Rand, “The Nature of Government,” in *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal*, 329.

<sup>48</sup> Rand, “The Nature of Government,” 331. Emphasis Added.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 335.

<sup>50</sup> In this sense I am arguing against the total critique of modernity that has emerged from reactionary tribalism through paleoconservatism and radical conservatism. Primarily, I am drawing from Robert Antonio’s insightful article, “After Postmodernism: Reactionary Tribalism,” *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 106, No. 1, (2000): 40-87.

**References**

- Antonio, Robert. "After Postmodernism: Reactionary Tribalism." *American Journal of Sociology*. Vol. 106, No. 1, (2000): 40-87.
- Arendt, Hannah. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. New York: Viking Press, 1963.
- Buckley, William F. *Up From Liberalism*. Cambridge: Ravenio Books, 2012.
- Chait, Jonathan. "How Ayn Rand's Theories Destroyed 'Never Trump' Conservatism." *New York Magazine*. 13 December 2016.
- DeBrabander, Firmin. "How Ayn Rand's 'Elitism' Lives On In The Trump Administration." *The Conversation*. 3 April 2017.
- Freedland, Jonathan. "The New Age of Ayn Rand: How She Won Over Trump and Silicon Valley." *The Guardian*. 10 April 2017.
- Friedman, David D. *The Machinery of Freedom*. Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 1973.
- Habermas, Jürgen. "Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present: On Foucault's Lecture on Kant's *What is Enlightenment?*" In *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate*. Edited by Michael Kelly. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1994.
- Hohmann, James. "Ayn Rand-Acolyte Donald Trump Stacks His Cabinet with Fellow Objectivists." *The Washington Post*. 13 December 2006.
- Morin, Rebecca and David Cohen. "Giuliani: 'Truth isn't truth.'" *Politico*. 19 August 2018.
- Newman, Saul. *The Politics of Postanarchism*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010.
- Newman, Stephen L. *Liberalism at Wits' End: The Libertarian Revolt Against the Modern State*. Ithaca: Cornell University, 1984.
- Powers, Kirsten. "Donald Trump's 'Kinder, Gentler' Version." *USA Today*. 11 April 2016.
- Rancière, Jacques. *Dis-agreement: Politics and Philosophy*. Translated by Julie Rose. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.
- Rand, Ayn. *Atlas Shrugged*. London: Penguin Books, 2005.
- . *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal*. New York: Signet Books, 1967.
- . *For the New Intellectual*. New York: Random House, 1961.
- . *The Fountainhead*. London: Penguin Books, 2007.
- . *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*. New York: Signet, 1967.
- . *The Virtue of Selfishness*. New York: Signet, 1964.
- Reich, Robert. "Trump's Brand is Ayn Rand." *Salon Magazine*. 19 March 2018.
- Rothbard, Murray. *For a New Liberty: The Libertarian Manifesto*. London: Macmillan Publishers, 1973.
- . *Power and Market: Government and the Economy*. Arlington, VA: Institute for Humane Studies, 1970.
- Weber, Max. "Politics as Vocation." In *The Vocation Lectures*. Edited by David Owen and Tracy B. Strong. Translated by Rodney Livingstone. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2004.