

SYMPOSIUM ON THE
50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PUBLICATION
OF *ATLAS SHRUGGED*

2007 MARKS THE 50TH anniversary of the publication of Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*, a novel that has had an enormous impact on the libertarian movement. Simultaneously a mystery, a love story, a science-fiction adventure, a philosophical treatise, an ethical and political manifesto, a moral vindication of commerce and industry, and a dramatization of libertarian class analysis (as the industrious classes go on strike against the parasitic state and its privileged beneficiaries), *Atlas Shrugged* offered a powerful and inspiring case, both intellectual and emotional, for libertarian ideas at a time when such resources were thin on the ground. While the relationship of Rand and her ideas to the broader libertarian movement would often be a controversial and troubled one, *Atlas Shrugged* undeniably played a crucial role in helping both to create new advocates of *laissez-faire* and to radicalize existing ones, as well as encouraging libertarians to view their standpoint as an alternative to, rather than a branch of, conservatism, and to base the case for liberty on moral principle and not on pragmatic economic benefits alone.

The present issue of the *Journal of Libertarian Studies* features several pieces commemorating the novel and its legacy. A pair of contemporary "fan letters" about *Atlas Shrugged* from Ludwig von Mises and Murray Rothbard, two of the leading figures in the Austrian School of economics and indeed the libertarian movement more broadly, conveys something of the initial excitement produced by the book's publication, as does a present-day retrospective from Rand's biographer and former associate Barbara Branden. (The eventual rupture of Rand's relations with Rothbard and Branden casts a discernible shadow over their contributions—as presentiment in the former and memory in the latter. And it should be said that Rothbard's later assessment of Rand's ideas and influence was significantly less positive than the unbridled enthusiasm expressed in his 1957 letter.)

An additional early piece by Rothbard manifests his appreciation not only for the political ideas expressed in the novel but for Rand's aesthetic theories as embodied in its composition. Rounding out the symposium are a pair of essays on *Atlas Shrugged* and its ideas by rising libertarian scholars Geoffrey Allan Plauché (exploring the novel's relation to genre fiction, Randian aesthetics, and Étienne de la Boétie's theories of voluntary servitude) and Jennifer Baker (striving to separate the more from the less defensible aspects of the novel's portrayal of the relationship between virtue and success).

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