



It's Ayn Rand Bashing Time, Once Again

by [Walter Block](#)

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It's Ayn Rand bashing time once again. Our "friends" on the left are on the warpath for a change, and have Miss Rand in their crosshairs. See [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).



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What, pray tell, are the

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charges? It would appear that Ayn Rand, one of the greatest libertarian minds as far as I am concerned in the entire history of mankind, is, wait for it; no, you had better be sitting down when you read this or I won't be responsible for your doctor bills, is, yes, *a socialist!* And *a hypocrite to boot.* And why is this? It is because while she railed against Social Security and Medicare, she availed herself of payments from these funds. Isn't that

horrible?

But these leftie critics are pikers. This leader of Objectivism also favored the gold standard. Yet, when she went to the store, she never offered anyone gold coins. Instead, like everyone else, she paid in fiat coin of the realm, even though she properly detested this system. She also favored the privatization of the post office, but she mailed letters care of the hated government monopoly post office. Shall we indict her, too, for hypocrisy on these grounds? But wait, the charges against her mount up even more. Ayn also

opposed subsidies to farmers, and yet, *ate food* produced under this system. Isn't she really despicable? She thought the New York City taxi medallion system was a socialist disgrace, and yet, upon occasion, could be found ensconced in a Yellow Cab.

I hope and trust everyone realizes where I am going with this. I am not at all joining her critics and "piling up" on Ayn Rand. Very much to the contrary, I am demonstrating, via the *reductio ad absurdum* method, that the argument of these real socialists has not a logical leg to stand upon.

And, full disclosure here, I am an avid admirer of Ayn Rand. When I was 22 years old and a senior in college, I was converted to my present political economic philosophy by her, personally, and by reading her monumental *Atlas Shrugged*. I read it for the first time then, in a fevered heat; I got very little sleep during the weekend that I first read that book. I have read it every decade since (albeit at a more leisurely pace), and have benefited from new insights upon each rereading.



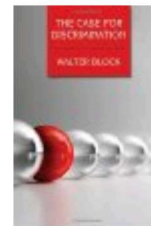
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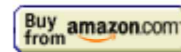
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The critics entirely misunderstand the Randian philosophy. Suppose Ragnar Danneskjold (my favorite character in *Atlas*) breaks into the illegitimate government's coffers, liberates (it is logically impossible to steal from an illicit state) some treasure, and turns it over to Hank Reardon. Is that a just act? Of course. Indeed, it is one of the high points of *Atlas*, a book which, I assume, has never been read and understood by her present critics. But the act of liberation and then transfer to Reardon consists of two parts. One, seizing the money from the government, and, two, subsequently giving it to Reardon. If the entire act is to be legitimate,

then *each* of the two constituent parts of it must be proper. Two wrongs cannot make a right. Thus, in Rand's view, it is entirely proper to relieve the (illegitimate) government of its ill-gotten gains (the first part of this dual act). Was the U.S. a legitimate *laissez faire* government during the years that Ayn Rand accepted payments from Social Security and Medicare? To ask this question is to answer it: of course not. Thus, it would have been entirely proper for Ragnar to raid the Social Security and Medicare offices and make off with their stolen wealth, and, then, to give the proceeds to an innocent, such as Ayn Rand. If so, where is the hypocrisy of Ayn Rand accepting payments directly from these government bureaus? It simply does not exist. Similarly, she and all other libertarians are fully justified in mailing letters with the US post office and thus accepting the implicit subsidy therein, and, also, walking on the [socialist](#) sidewalks, driving on the [socialist roads](#), using money issued by our central bank, eating subsidized food, etc. It is improper to *give* money to the illicit state, not to *take* from these bureaucrats. Did Ayn Rand ever contribute money to the semi-socialist-fascist government? If she did, then and only then would her critics have a case. But, of course, she



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never came within a million miles of doing any such thing. I have made this "Ragnar" case [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#). I write so often about this issue because even libertarians (see below) misunderstand it.

But wait. One of the critics of Miss Rand cited above makes great play over the following: "Rand is one of three women the Cato Institute calls founders of American libertarianism. The other two, Rose Wilder Lane and Isabel 'Pat' Paterson, both rejected Social Security benefits on principle. Lane, with whom Rand corresponded for several years, once quit an editorial job in order to avoid paying Social Security taxes. The Cato Institute says Lane considered Social Security a 'Ponzi fraud' and 'told friends that it would be immoral of her to take part in a system that would predictably collapse so catastrophically.'" [Privacy Information](#)



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My response is that no matter how well intended were Lane and Paterson, both misconstrued the libertarian philosophy on this point. Again, what is improper is to *give money to* the illicit government, *not* to take money away from these thieves. If it was a rights violation for Lane and Paterson to accept Social Security payments, why was it acceptable for them to use streets, subways, taxis, the post office, currency, etc., which these two women most obviously did. Lane and Paterson were staunch libertarians in many ways, but neither was, God bless her (so to speak), an Ayn Rand.

These horrid criticisms of Miss Rand bespeak a serious misunderstanding of her philosophy. These critics would do well to read *Atlas Shrugged* (I greatly envy them; never again shall I be able to read this magnificent book for the first time), with special emphasis on the relationship between Ragnar and Hank Reardon.

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Dr. Block [[send him mail](#)] is a professor of economics at Loyola University New Orleans, and a senior fellow of the Ludwig von Mises Institute. He is the author of [Defending the Undefendable](#) and [Labor Economics From A Free Market Perspective](#). His latest book is [The Privatization of Roads and Highways](#).

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