

WE ALL BUILT THIS GREAT NATION TOGETHER:

Ayn Rand, Paul Ryan, and the Myth of Radical Individualism

I always go back to [Ayn Rand's vision] so that I know that what I'm believing is square with the key principles of individualism.

~Paul Ryan, 2005 Speech to the Atlas Society

The self in Ryan's self-reliance is a monster. I would not raise a child, let alone design a budget, on this stunted ideal.

~Leon Wieseltier, The New Republic (8/24/12)

What we're trying to accomplish today with the passage of this third stimulus package is to create jobs and help the unemployed.

~Paul Ryan, Speech to Congress, February 14, 2002

The man [Paul Ryan] who wants to make the world safe for risk-taking capitalists hasn't spent a day at economic risk in his entire life.

~Joan Walsh at Salon.com

You built a factory out there? Good for you. You moved your goods to market on the roads the rest of us paid for; you hired workers the rest of us paid to educate; you all were safe in your factory because of police forces and fire forces that the rest of us paid for.

~Elizabeth Warren, Massachusetts Senatorial Candidate

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for

*the common defense promote the general Welfare, and secure
the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity.*

~The U. S. Constitution

A recent *This Modern World* cartoon features Mitt Romney, Paul Ryan, and the ghost of Ryan's philosophical hero Ayn Rand. Rand believed in unfettered capitalism, radical individualism, and virtue of selfishness. The ever irascible Rand calls Ryan a "collectivist pawn" for using his Social Security Survivor benefits to pay for his college education. When Ryan objects by saying that the elder Rand took both Medicare and Social Security, he was inadvertently passing on a falsehood spread by Rand's critics. Trading in untruths is becoming a habit for Ryan, including dropping a full hour off his marathon time. Experienced runners simply do not accept this as a "simple error."

Roman Catholic Ryan now claims that he has forsaken Rand for St. Thomas Aquinas, but the great Catholic theologian would not want Ryan on his ticket either. Aquinas would remind Ryan that he owes his achievements to God and not to self-determination. Radical individualism is the first sin of Judeo-Christianity and the members of the Body of Christ are organically related not isolated social atoms. Rand most memorable (and insufferable) character is John Galt in *Atlas Shrugged*. When Galt talks about his "self-made soul" and its "radiant selfishness," this is religious heresy of the highest order.

Aquinas would also not support the Personhood Amendment, one of Ryan's legislative proposals and which was even voted down in Mississippi. Using a Greek view of fetal development, which is roughly supported by medical science, Aquinas believed that the fetus was not a person until it is "created by God at the completion of man's coming into being." It is deeply ironic that the philosopher that Pope Pius IX declared infallible would have supported *Roe v. Wade*.

A thinker who can switch from Ayn Rand to Thomas Aquinas is not the great intellectual the GOP has made him out to be; rather, he is a rank amateur philosopher. I love the inimitable Leon Wieseltier's quip that "Ryan's mind is inadequately aerated" and his observation that Ryan "gets his big ideas second-hand, from ideological feeders: for example, when he cites John Locke, it is John Locke that he found in Michael Novak." When Ryan praises Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, the founding father of free market capitalism, he does not seem to know that Smith believed in a strong public sector and spent his last years as a government employee. Wieseltier's wants to know if Ryan has ever opened Smith's great book: "Has he ever read its very first sentence on its very first page? "How selfish so ever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others."

See Wieseltier's superb "His Grief, and Ours: Paul Ryan's Nasty Ideal of Self-Reliance" in *The New Republic* (8/24/12).

The Ghost of Ayn Rand is right to condemn Ryan for feeding at the federal trough: he has worked for the government all of his adult life and he has never built anything. He has not "mixed his labor with nature," which is the definition of private property of John Locke, from whom our founders drew so many ideas. Salon.com columnist Joan Walsh states: "The man who wants to make the world safe for swashbuckling, risk-taking capitalists hasn't spent a day at economic risk in his entire life."

Congressman Ryan voted for the 2002 stimulus (he said, just Obama would say, it would create jobs), two unfunded wars, a new entitlement program (senior drugs), TARP, and the initial \$17 billion auto industry bail-out. He has brought millions of dollars to his own district, but then refused to ask for federal funds to rescue the GM plant that he says Obama failed to save. That facility was in Ryan's hometown Janesville, a transportation hub whose freeway was widened with \$1 billion in federal highway funds. Ryan's hometown is also benefiting from the Economic Innovation Center, started with \$1.2 million in Obama stimulus money. Uncle Sam is also chipping in a cool \$10 million for a high tech medical facility

The GOP delegates met at the Tampa Bay Convention Center, which was built with \$68 million in federal funds. Congress appropriated \$50 million dollars for security costs, and that did not include the 1,700 National Guard troops paid by the Pentagon. The Republicans received another \$18 million from the Presidential Election Fund. They also allowed a 7.4 square mile "no gun" zone to be established around their gun-loving delegates, who, one would think, should be able to defend themselves from all attacks.

The theme of the convention's first night was "We Built It," and one of the speakers was businesswoman Sher Valenzuela. The delegates loved her, but she failed to mention that her successful upholstery business was supported by none other than Uncle Sam. Relying on data from Media Matters for America, *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristoff reports that Valenzuela received "\$2 million in loans from the Small Business Administration plus \$15 million in government contracts (mostly noncompetitive ones)." In a more honest speech earlier in the year, Valenzuela said that federal aid is the entrepreneur's "biggest secret weapon."

Above the banner "We Built It" there was a counter for the \$15.9 trillion national debt, \$12 plus trillion of it brought to you by Reagan and the two Bushes. (Reagan's increase was 189 percent at high interest rates versus Obama's 49 percent and very low rates.) The Congressional Budget Office reports that Ryan's budget will reduce the deficit but its economists assume that he can actually achieve unspecified spending cuts

and tax reforms. Compared to Obama's budgets, this totally unrealistic plan would add trillions of more dollars to the debt. See the data at www.NickGier.com/DebtGOPObamaTables.pdf.

While I was googling Rand and Ryan, I ran across another delicious irony. Libertarians love the Austrian economist Friedrich Hayek as much as they do Ayn Rand. (Ryan makes his interns read both him and Rand and Michelle Bachmann recommends Hayek for beach reading.) When libertarian billionaire Charles Koch tried to get the aging Hayek to come to Koch's Institute for Human Studies, he was loathe to leave Austria's cradle to grave welfare state. Not surprisingly, no U.S. health insurers would take him because of preexisting conditions. Hayek finally agreed to come when Koch assured him that his earlier 10-year stint at the University of Chicago made him eligible for Social Security and Medicare.

Further destroying the "I built it" myth is the recent revelation that Bain & Company received a bail-out from Uncle Sam. In 1990 Romney took a leave from Bain Capital to save its parent company from bankruptcy. With federal records obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, Tim Dickinson of *The Rolling Stone* discovered that Romney, using his father's connections in the government, saddled the taxpayer-funded FDIC with a net loss of \$10 million. Dickinson states that "in an added insult, Romney rewarded top executives at Bain with hefty bonuses at the very moment that he was demanding his handout from the feds."

Russian-born Ayn Rand held a deep grudge all of her life: the Soviets confiscated her father's pharmacy business in St. Petersburg. She transferred her hatred for one evil government to all governments. She taught her disciples—including Paul Ryan—that there is one primary choice in life, namely, between individualism and collectivism. For her there is absolutely no compromise in the middle, where, as a matter of fact, most successful governments have found themselves. Read my arguments at www.NickGier.com/ThirdWay.pdf

The GOP and FOX News have made much of Obama's awkward statement "you did not build that." In response to critics who say that he rips it out of context, Romney curiously and outrageously says that it is far worse in context. Ironically, Ryan charges that Obama offers a false dilemma between individual liberty and government. He says that he believes that infrastructure is important, but his draconian budget will not allow the massive improvements that will be necessary in the 21st Century. In this essential area nearly all industrialized countries spend much more government money.

The Ghost of Ayn Rand calls Ryan a "moocher," but we should be glad that he and other Republican Congressmen indirectly acknowledge that we all built this great country together. But their budget cutting and tax aversion will ensure our demise in the decades ahead.

Nick Gier taught philosophy at the University of Idaho for 31 years. Read his columns on the 2012 election at www.NickGier.com/2012.pdf.