

Response to Chris Matthew Sciabarra

Gus diZerega

I am grateful to Chris for his comments.¹ Yes, we differ in our reading of Ayn Rand, and his knowledge of her work is far greater than mine. I will not challenge his understanding of the depths of her thought.

But I was not seeking to explore Rand's philosophy in much depth in this essay.

I was using her to the degree her work was a powerful impetus for the rising *libertarian* movement, a term which she herself disliked. It was Rand as understood by libertarians that I criticized as my jumping off point to challenge the coherence of libertarian thought as a whole. As Chris acknowledges, most of her followers never got much beyond *Atlas Shrugged* in their thinking – and I remind him now that another lodestar in the libertarian firmament, Ludwig von Mises, wrote her that he loved the book for putting inferior people in their place with respect to the superior. So this level of reading and comprehension was what mattered most in her political impact, from college students to a brilliant economist.

The same holds regarding her comments about Indians. She was factually mistaken, but in terms of my interpretation of her philosophy, I think it was significant that she had no problem with killing “savages” who fought to preserve their access to land which she said could be better used by European invaders. This supports my less charitable interpretation of her as a kind of Nietzschean who, while opposing robbing from the weaker because that made you a mere parasite, had no trouble with walking over the weaker to achieve plans where they were simply in the way. That some of her followers rejected her position is all to the good, but she never did.

I like Chris's interpretation of Rand, and hope it is true, though I think it reflects Chris's character at least as much as it reflects hers. Alternatively, it may be that there is a deep inconsistency in Rand's thinking. Deep principles

¹ Chris Matthew Sciabarra, “Reply to Gus diZerega on His Essay, “Turning the Tables: The Pathologies and Unrealized Promise of Libertarianism,”” *Molinari Review* 1.2 (Autumn 2019): 93-100.

can take on a life of their own distinct from an author's intent. Or perhaps there was a failure on her part adequately to link her more subtle philosophical points with her extremely popular novels. I think Chris would be sympathetic to this interpretation. But again, my use of her work focused on how she influenced libertarian thinking – and how this influence runs like a thread through many other people associated with libertarianism, such as Mises, Murray Rothbard, Milton Friedman, Ron Paul, and many others.

I recently came across an essay on the FEE (Foundation for Economic Education – a long time free market outfit) website suggesting millennials choose Ayn Rand over Karl Marx.² For me, it was an odd piece, since I suspect hardly any millennials read Marx. But when I got to the comments section, I discovered her advocates had read plenty of her novels and apparently nothing by Chris. I engaged a little bit, receiving the usual insults, and in one case dishing it back, but hopefully sparking some deeper thinking among some readers. The issues I discussed in my essay are still very much embedded in libertarian and free market thinking.

Regarding pollution, class action suits and such have long been possible in this country, but it took legislation to clean our rivers and air to the degree they have been. And when conditions change, and existing principles no longer work, as in Missoula, Montana's air pollution problems, I think legislation is better than waiting till enough people have been harmed so a class action might theoretically work. When I first visited the SF Bay area years ago, in the Fall it was often difficult to see San Francisco from Berkeley, and if I drove down the Peninsula to San Jose, my eyes would burn. Today, with a much larger population and many more cars, the city was always easily visible when I was there in the Fall and my eyes no longer burned driving to San Jose. Cars were much cleaner, and this was a direct result of regulations. Yes, legislation can be captured by industry, as in the nuclear case, but that is not an argument against legislation as such, it is an argument against business having more influence than people.

I am in substantial, even enthusiastic, agreement with Chris's last three paragraphs.

² Leisa Miller, "3 Reasons Millennials Should Ditch Karl Marx for Ayn Rand," Foundation for Economic Education (December 18, 2017): <https://fee.org/articles/3-reasons-millennials-should-ditch-karl-marx-for-ayn-rand/>