

BOOK REVIEW
ATLAS SHRUGGED
by Ayn Rand
(Deusto Editions, 10th edition,
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It would, of course, be presumptuous and arrogant of me to present a review here of this most remarkable book, published precisely in the year I was born, 1956, and about which, moreover, rivers of ink have been spilled. But whilst speaking with my good friend, the great Mario Vargas Llosa—who left us not long ago, on a day not too far removed from the very last ones he spent in Madrid—I had the audacity to ‘reproach’ him, very cordially, for not having included in some of his masterpieces a clearer, more resounding and systematic message in favour of liberalism and the free system of social cooperation that he held in such high regard; further committing the tremendous impertinence of citing her as an example and adding at the end of my well-intentioned reproach, ‘as the remarkable writer Ayn Rand did in her works and, specifically, in *Atlas Shrugged*’. Mario’s reaction was immediate, and bearing in mind his kindness and ever-exquisite manners, I would say it was, to a certain extent, ‘violent’. But rather than being directed at me – which would have been appropriate given my utter impertinence – it was directed at Ayn Rand, as he told me, emphasising several times in a loud voice that ‘Ayn Rand was a terrible writer (and her works a literary disaster)!’

This anecdote about my exchange with the Nobel Laureate regarding Ayn Rand remained deeply etched in my memory and subconscious, to the extent that, recalling it once more following Vargas Llosa’s death in Peru, I decided to tackle *Atlas Shrugged* again (which I had read in its original version when I was young and in a great hurry), but this time much more leisurely in Spanish, a task I completed over the course of six months on 13

February 2025. And I have read, I would even say 'studied' this great book, focusing above all on both its potential literary merits and achievements and its ideological and doctrinal content (although, given Ayn Rand's writing style and passion, the two are inextricably linked).

It is true that I am not a literary critic, nor do I in any way consider myself qualified to comment on literary matters with the same confidence with which I do so in the fields of economic theory and political philosophy, which are my specialities. But on rereading *Atlas Shrugged*, I have once again found myself faced with a monumental work of over 1,200 pages, yet one that is practically a delight to read and highly rewarding; on many occasions, it is so gripping that it is very difficult to put down, and it rarely becomes tedious (perhaps, if at all, during the sixty pages of the legendary radio address by John Galt, the protagonist, which Ayn Rand includes near the end of the book —pp. 1059–1120— as a summary and ideological testament to her entire libertarian doctrine). Furthermore, the characters in the novel are presented with vigour and are very clearly defined. Some are true heroes—even mythological ones—of freedom; starting with the book's true protagonist, Dagny Taggart, a young woman of principle, endowed with great vigour for entrepreneurial action, and who, to a certain extent, makes *Atlas Shrugged* a 'feminist' work in the best (that is to say, uncorrupted) sense of the term; followed by the entrepreneur Hank Rearden, who defends his major business project against all odds until he falls victim to the State and its officials; and including the other entrepreneurs who, faced with the prospect of being manipulated, taken over and expropriated, decide to 'go on strike', abandon their businesses and retreat to a truly free place where they cannot be harassed. At the same time, it equally skilfully depicts the petty, irresponsible, arrogant and, above all, profoundly immoral characters, not only of the 'privileged' entrepreneurs (as Javier Milei would say) who end up capitulating and joining forces with politicians to secure personal advantages (represented by Dagny's own brother); but also, and above all, of the network of politicians and civil servants who, under the pretence of serving the 'people' and the common good, devote themselves literally to destroying the social order. In short, an argument whose

originality no one can deny, and written with such force and conviction that it makes me think perhaps my dear Mario Vargas Llosa was a little hasty in his disparaging comment (the reasoning behind which, incidentally, he never explained to me in detail, which is why I was always left with the feeling that he might have been influenced more by 'liberal jealousy' – by the realisation that, as the great liberal that he was, he had missed the opportunity to write a work which, far surpassing Ayn Rand's in literary merit, would have been capable of conveying his own liberal message with such conviction, force and energy).

And, as for the substance or doctrinal content of the book, I can add little more to what has already been written by the great libertarian authors who, starting with Mises and Rothbard themselves, have been commenting on it to this day. It must also be acknowledged that millions of copies have been sold and, consequently, that over the decades millions of people have come into contact with the ideas of liberty thanks to Ayn Rand and her novels, such as *The Fountainhead*, *We the Living* or *Atlas Shrugged*, which we are discussing here. To conclude this brief commentary, I shall simply point out that there are three aspects of Ayn Rand which, whilst acknowledging her great merits, have always kept me at a distance from both Ayn Rand herself and her 'Objectivist' philosophy. Firstly, I must highlight the sectarian nature of Ayn Rand and her circle—which would be hard to believe were it not described in such vivid detail in her biographies and numerous other writings. This sectarian exclusivism was even suffered by Rothbard himself when he was literally expelled from the Randian circle on the pretext of failing to cite the novel *Atlas Shrugged* as the original source for one of the theoretical contributions included by Rothbard in one of his academic articles! To this sectarian and exclusivist attitude of Ayn Rand and her acolytes (some of whom, such as Robert Hessen, were my lecturers at Stanford University), I must add, secondly, the inconsistency that strikes me in the fact that a thinker as purist as Ayn Rand never ceased to justify the necessity of the existence of a state, however minimal; whereas from her works in general, and *Atlas Shrugged* in particular, if anything can be deduced from the analysis and the principles set out therein, it is that 'minarchism' is also immoral and doomed to failure, and therefore the only

defensible alternative—as Rothbard soon discovered—is the unqualified defence of ‘anarcho-capitalism’ as the sole system of social cooperation consistent with human nature. Finally, and thirdly, what sets me apart from Ayn Rand is the profound atheism that permeates her works and her philosophy (although this is explicitly stated in only a few places in *Atlas Shrugged*, for example, on pages 1061, 1068 and 1072). The fact is that eliminating God as the Creator-Father—who, out of love and in freedom, created all things in the Universe and, above all, human beings—greatly weakens the message and the strength of the libertarian movement and, consequently, its ability to spread and prevail amongst humanity (see, for example, my article-lecture ‘Anarchy, God and Pope Francis’). So much so that I am convinced that the fusion of anarcho-capitalism and Catholicism is the most important moral and ideological milestone of this century, in which I have had the honour of participating, and which will undoubtedly make possible the triumph of truth and freedom in a future far less distant in time than most might imagine.