

Ayn Rand's sphere of influence

By [David Heim](#)

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The always brilliant David Bentley Hart [skewers](#) the thought of Ayn Rand in the latest *First Things*.

The occasion is the release of a movie based on Rand's 1,000-page novel *Atlas Shrugged*. Hart doesn't seem to have seen the new movie, however, devoting his attention instead to the 1949 film version of Rand's other major novel, *The Fountainhead*.

No matter. Either is sufficient for the critic to dissect Rand's aesthetically clunky and morally empty celebration of capitalist entrepreneurs, whom she imagined to be Nietzschean supermen, courageously shaping the world according to their own laws and necessarily trampling on any lesser breeds who get in the way. As Hart says, with what one takes to be a neat understatement, "I cannot find much common ground with someone who believed that the principal source of human woe over the last twenty centuries has been a tragic shortage of selfishness."

Yet only in a passing reference--to images of Rand held up at Tea Party rallies--does Hart acknowledge the political context of the film and the reasons for the renewed interest in Rand.

Hart notes that the new film premiered at "this year's CPAC convention," but he doesn't pause to spell out that this means the Conservative Political Action Conference.

Rand has never been taken seriously by those who know philosophy or care about fiction, but plenty of people take her seriously as a guide to politics. That number is on the rise, and it includes people like House budget chair and GOP economics guru Paul Ryan. Ryan has cited Rand's novels as the reason he got into politics, and he [reportedly](#) encourages his staff to read her books.

Other prominent politicians inspired by Rand include libertarian lawmakers Rep. Ron Paul and Sen. Rand Paul. The *Atlas Shrugged* film [has been pushed](#) by Fox News host Sean Hannity, by the Heritage Foundation and by FreedomWorks, the Tea Party organization headed by former House majority leader Dick Armey.

Few people are worried that Rand's "in praise of selfishness" ideas will take over university philosophy departments or that her novels will be hailed as great art. Hart and the rest of us can rest easy on that score. But there are reasons to worry that her thinking is shaping American economic policy and inspiring political leaders. Why didn't *First Things* call attention to that?