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Dear Friend of Reason, Freedom and Individualism:

Many of you are no doubt entering this festive end-of-the-year season in a dour mood due to the results of the 2006 elections. After all, it was a no-win affair no matter who won because no one leading the major parties truly wanted individual liberty and limited government. The Republicans spent their time in the majority spending your money at record levels. The now-majority Democrats likely will continue this spree, and the "compassionate conservative" president who wants to be "a uniter, not a divider" will likely unite with them to divide up your money rather than doing the right thing by writing across the bad bills from Capitol Hill that will bring you big tax bills that four-letter Latin word: Veto! Next year looks like political hell.

But next year can have a side as bright as a holiday season. Ayn Rand understood that ideas and their manifestations in human culture and in the hearts and minds of individuals must change in order to ensure liberty and that those ideas must be based on the principles of rational individualism. The good news is that we have those ideas!

And next year, which will mark the 50th anniversary of the publication of *Atlas Shrugged*, will offer opportunities for The Atlas Society, with your help, to offer clear philosophical illumination through the intellectual fog and confusion in today's arena of ideas.

The Poverty of Politics

Most of you know the nature of our political problems today. Advocates of liberty have won the intellectual debate. There is no real doubt about which system—capitalism—allows for individual achievement and prosperity in a peaceful society, and which systems—socialism and welfare states in all their forms—oppress and impoverish us all in a society based on using the force of government against one another. So why are things so bad on the political front?

Certainly the Republicans' lack of any coherent principles created confusion in the electorate. That party offered tax cuts and some social security privatization on the one hand and a huge new Medicare entitlement, more federal control of education and restrictions on political speech on the other. Its members in Congress approved a record number of spending earmarks for special pork-barrel projects in order to buy votes. That strategy didn't work but was no doubt a reason why a poll found that more voters identified the Republicans rather than the Democrats as the party of big government.

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Now Democrats like Henry Waxman are licking their chops at the opportunity to haul entrepreneurs before congressional committees to be damned for the sin of seeking profits by producing goods and services for willing customers. And Charles Rangel, not content with conscripting our labor indirectly through taxes, wants to reinstate conscription, literally taking unwilling young men and -- we presume, since he's an "egalitarian" -- young women off the streets to serve the state and perhaps to be killed.

The political landscape looks truly bleak.

Other fine organizations like the Cato Institute, the Competitive Enterprise Institute and Reason Foundation are to be congratulated for highlighting the adverse economic and social consequences of such statist policies coming out of all political parties. But the fight must go far deeper than this.

The Moral Principles Vacuum

The pathetic state of both major parties will mean that the battle for freedom must shift from the political arena to the arena of ideas, where it belonged all along. And only moral ideas based on rational individualism can turn back the statist onslaught.

America's Founders set up our government to protect the life, liberty and property of individuals. Yet individual liberty has been under attack since the founding. Why? For one thing, some of our cultural traditions and moral values actually clash with the political and economic principles of personal freedom.

How can people raised to believe that they have a moral duty to sacrifice their personal wealth to others accept an economic system based on the profit motive?

How can people taught that putting others above self is a moral ideal -- a message of defeated Republican Senator Rick Santorum -- sympathize with a political system based on "the pursuit of happiness?"

How can people indoctrinated to believe that governments exist to "do good" and "help others" endorse calls for limited government?

How can individuals reproached to feel guilty for making themselves prosperous take pride in their self-made prosperity?

The electorate and the elected often have a reciprocal, self-reinforcing dysfunctional relationship. On the one hand, pandering paternalist politicians push programs of government hand-outs and special favors on citizens, at the price of the citizens' independence. On the other hand, many citizens who might otherwise favor freedom acquiesce in their own addiction to government. Some do so out of frustration over the destruction of opportunities and freedom by government. Others are motivated by envy; they come to see themselves as not morally responsible for their own lives and thus morally entitled to take the wealth of others.

Thus politicians not only push statist programs on an unwilling public; they're often responding to popular demand created by moral confusion or malice. They're like doctors who break legs in order to create business for themselves, only in this case they must break the pride that individuals take in their own independence.

Today neither political party presents anything approaching the moral principles needed to halt the downward slide of the culture and the government into a war of all against all. There's a lot of talk about whether the Republicans should move to the center or to the right. Where they should be moving is towards individual liberty!

If Creators Loved their Creations

In *Atlas Shrugged* Ayn Rand painted a picture of a country collapsing under the epistemology of irrationality, the ethics of self-sacrifice and the politics of collectivism. She also presented a vision of a golden future based on:

*objective standards of knowledge, which contrast with today's post-modernist and "faith-based" assaults on the notion of a reality knowable by our minds;

*an unapologetic moral defense of the individual's life, liberty and pursuit of happiness;

*a recognition that laissez-faire capitalism is the only system compatible with the right of individuals to pursue their rational self-interest.

She showed that individuals who hold their own lives as their highest value and reason as their means for survival would understand that "as man is a being of self-made wealth, so he is a being of self-made soul." Such individuals would create the means of their survival and happiness and take pride in their own achievements. This love of the best within them would mean that they would have no desire to gain values by using force or fraud against others nor would they tolerate such assaults on their own well-being. Pride would be the best defense against tyranny!

Atlas Shrugged was Rand's magnum opus and five decades later it's still a best seller. With the political arena devoid of a principled philosophy of freedom and a culture thirsting for a morality of self-fulfillment and celebration rather than self-denial and renunciation, its lessons are more relevant than ever.

Atlas on the Move

The Atlas Society, with its Objectivist Center, has been successfully promoting the principles promulgated by Rand on many fronts. We promised you we were going to make our magazine, *The New Individualist*, into a cutting edge publication in both content and appearance and you now are seeing the results each month in your mailbox. Our "Rand-Fan" issue highlighted the widespread interest and enthusiasm among activists, policy makers and Hollywood luminaries in the author of the *Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*.

Our "Mohammed" issue was the first to print on its cover one of the famous cartoons that provoked violent reactions from Islamo-fascists and cowardly reactions from those in the free world whose freedom was threatened. Our articles distinguished between sensitivity, tolerance and the right to free speech.

My article on immigration approached the matter of illegal aliens from a perspective missing in the current debate: rational individualism. My article on skeptics and humanists explored opportunities to bring our philosophy to new constituencies. My piece on "The Battle for the Soul of the Republican Party" forecast what would happen as that party abandoned what commitment it still had to liberty.

Of course, *The New Individualist* is one of our organization's tools for getting out our ideas, and these latter two articles led to just the leveraging of our work that we seek: I addressed a local skeptics group on "Objectivism and Skepticism: Are They Compatible?" And I gave a post-election address to a group of activists, intellectuals and others in Richmond, Virginia, which in turn led to still more speaking offers.

In *The New Individualist* we've also presented interviews with interesting individuals who are fighting for freedom and reason in this country and around the world.

Of course, we've also continued to get out our message in op-eds and articles in major newspapers; perhaps you caught my letter in the *Wall Street Journal* explaining that while this year's Nobel Prize winner in economics was right to distinguish true free markets from corporate statist systems, his criticism of Ayn Rand was mistaken because he mistakenly used as his standard the collectivist premises of John Rawls.

We've kept you updated with emails, *Reports from the Front* and postings on our website.

Our staff also was busy on the speaking circuit, on university campuses and at conferences across the country and around the world. I've spoken to groups and at colleges from coast to coast. David Kelley gave a major address at the prestigious Mont Pelerin Society, which met in Guatemala, on objectivity and the media. *New Individualist* editor Robert Bidinotto spoke in New York on the anatomy of cooperation with other groups and individuals.

Our Summer Seminar brought together around 170 people for some 50 lectures and discussions by over 30 faculty that provided intellectual as well as spiritual fuel. The graduate seminar in D.C. conducted by David Kelley and Will Thomas helped train the next generation of Objectivist scholars, as did our student scholarship programs.

And next year we're planning even more ambitious activities.

The Year of Atlas

Fifty years after its publication, *Atlas Shrugged* has become a modern classic. Most conventional bestsellers from 1957 are now forgotten or out-of-print while *Atlas*, with Rand's other works, account for hundreds of thousands of sales per year. Giant banners with that book's cover hang in major book stores. But most important, that book lunched a philosophical movement.

The anniversary of the publication of *Atlas* and a planned movie of that novel provide our theme for 2007: the Year of Atlas. Our plans for next year include:

Robert Bidinotto, with contributions from David Kelley, has produced a *Readers Guide to Atlas Shrugged* that will be the perfect companion for those reading *Atlas* for the first time or those enjoying it again. The book includes a chronology of the events, discussion of characters and discussion of the book's themes. (This would go well with our book *The Literary Art of Ayn Rand*, edited by Will Thomas!)

Speaking of Will Thomas, he's been working away on an "Objectivism Made Easy" book that will also be out for the *Atlas* anniversary. Those of you who love Rand's novel but are just getting into the philosophy behind it will find this a useful book to start you on your exciting intellectual journey. Those of you already familiar with the philosophy will find in this book helpful information concerning how to communicate about Objectivism to others or a nice gift book to give to future Objectivists.

Meanwhile, David Kelley's coming down the homestretch on his book, co-authored with Will Thomas, on the *Logical Structure of Objectivism*. (We will be sharing pre-publication chapters with our \$1,000 a year or over donors, so if you're in that group or want to be, you'll have the option of reading that cutting-edge work before it goes on sale in our Objectivism Bookstore and other outlets nationwide.)

The Atlas Society will put on a conference in Washington D.C. to mark the 50th anniversary of Rand's great novel. This event will highlight the revolutionary aspects of this novel. It will show the depth and breadth of its influence and why it is so influential. And it will be just plain fun! If you missed our gala 40th anniversary event in 1997, don't miss this one!

We'll also hold a conference focusing on the values and virtues of business to provide the moral ammunition so that entrepreneurs will stop apologizing for creating the richest country on earth and start to defend their right to make profits through their own productive efforts while shunning government favors and handouts.

Your Support

We thank you for your support in the past; for those of you who've contributed recently, thanks again! The next few years will be tough ones for freedom but we also have confidence from our past successes that we can influence the values on which our country and culture are based, with your continuing help. We hope, out of rational self-interest, that you will help us make 2007 a true year of Atlas!



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