



Episode 1,054: *Salon* Outraged: Kids Learning About Ayn Rand!

Guest: Connor Boyack

WOODS: All right, you have gotten *Salon* upset at you, which to me is half the fun of this whole thing. But this is another entry in that *Tuttle Twins* series, *The Tuttle Twins* and the *Search for Atlas*. So we'll go through and talk about what the storyline is here. But man, did that trigger *Salon*, because of course Ayn Rand and *Atlas Shrugged* are the only things they know about libertarianism, so you finally said something that they can understand without Cliff's notes or something, so they came after you. And I think there's just interesting lessons to be learned in this whole thing. So first of all, the *Tuttle Twins* series I've already explained is a children's book series that conveys a lot of important ideas in ways that are digestible for children and that are typically based on some classic book from our tradition, whether it's *The Creature from Jekyll Island* or *The Law* or *Economics in One Lesson* or *The Road to Serfdom* or whatever. In this case, it's *Atlas Shrugged*. Now, how do you make that digestible for children?

BOYACK: [laughing] By leaving a lot out.

WOODS: [laughing] How about that? Yeah.

BOYACK: I have to say at the outset here that the response from *Salon* reminded me in a lot of ways of Bob Murphy in your *Interview with a Zombie*, when you were pitching your *Nullification* book and his character in that video interview that you did, he could only say like a few words that the media latches onto – in your case, nullification, racist, and whatever. And in our case, it's like *Atlas Shrugged*, selfishness, and so forth. And so seeing the response from *Salon* was humorous because their lexicon of libertarianism is, as you point out, extremely minute. I mean, like you say all these other things about spontaneous order and economics and liberty and whatever and like it didn't touch their radar, but the moment we do a book on Ayn Rand we get the write-up. But so hey, it's great for marketing if nothing else.

But to your point, we have to leave a lot out. We're not touching objectivism. We're not getting into the extremes of the virtues of selfishness. We're not getting into all the sexual morality stuff that Rand likes to throw in a lot of her books. Really what we wanted to distill down for kids was kind of the more common-sense, more palatable lessons that you can learn in *Atlas Shrugged*: so the importance of hard work, the importance of keeping what you earn, the destructiveness of socialism, the value of hard work, supply and demand, production versus consumption, what happens when the producers in a society leave and people continue to want to consume the things to which they feel entitled.

These are all kind of lessons and ideas that we can extract from *Atlas Shrugged* in a very positive way, in a very pro-child way that parents, especially those — because remember, we're not just appealing to libertarians. We have kind of our core market, but these books, I would say more than half of our customers have never heard of Leonard Read or Henry Hazlitt or Hayek or any of these authors or their works that we're basing these books on. They just hear these are good books that teach my kids about important principles, and then they buy it and they read it, and we're introducing a ton of new people to these authors and these works and these ideas.

And so we have to make sure that the ideas that we're delivering in this format are palatable, are within the realm of common sense, and if we were to include some of Rand's other stuff, I think we would deviate. But again, that's what *Salon* latches onto. They think that we're only painting the extremes in this book and that we're introducing children to the more memorable and controversial ideas in Rand's work, and that's simply not true.

WOODS: Also, I think one of the, frankly, common ideas out there is pretty juvenile and needs to be addressed from a young age, which is, *This guy running the place is just some parasite. I could run this place better than he could. I know better than he does.* And yet, then you try to do it and the whole thing falls apart. You don't realize that, actually, it takes an awful lot more to hold this whole enterprise together than you think it does. It's not just some fat guy with a white mustache reclining in his chair and smoking a cigar, sitting around all day living off the proceeds, letting the thing run itself. That's not the way it works. So this presumption that you puncture in the book very nicely, that, *Look, let's just get rid of these terrible, bloodsucking parasites and replace them by us or just any old person*, has pretty bad results to the point where you start begging to get those people back after a while. I mean, that is the kind of thing you should have some fundamental understanding of, and yet a lot of people never break out of this childish approach to the world — infantile, really.

BOYACK: I'm so glad you pointed that out, because in sharing the *Salon* article on Twitter or when other people were sharing it, I was seeing the commentary that they were putting, and several times, people would say things like, *This is why we send kids to school, is to get this selfishness out of them and to help them understand the world.* And I thought, wait a minute. Tom, the very issue that you just brought up is one I think that our public education system exacerbates, and that is this arrogance, this presumption of understanding how the world works, this simplification of extremely elaborate processes, where if you and I were, taking the "I, Pencil" approach, really analyze the breakdown of all the people and parts and processes involved, I think that inspires humility to say, oh my gosh, it's amazing that we have a pencil, let alone an iPad and a car and whatever. Whereas I think our system, our culture, the education establishment exacerbates quite the opposite.

So to say that this crazy *Tuttle Twins* book, you've got to send your kids to school to breed that out of them and educate that away, no, I think it's quite the opposite. I think the system very much encourages this arrogance of, *Yeah, well, I could do that better than you can*, when really I think the world doesn't quite work that way. And so if anything, I think we need an antidote to what many of these kids are getting in school, are getting in our culture, and that's kind of one of the "sinister" ideas behind the book series and especially with this book, is to empower parents with that

antidote, because I think that is a huge problem that our culture and environment really fosters.

WOODS: I was actually going to make that same point, so I'm glad you did that. But it's this idea that everything you see around you, the abundance you see around you, it either happens automatically or the process by which it happens is so uninteresting that we don't even really need to tell you about it. It's much more important that we explain to you how a bill becomes a law, because that's really what makes the world go round, is bills becoming laws and people with bullhorns ordering everybody around — when in fact, what really makes the world go round is the complete lack of bullhorns, is just spontaneous cooperation across fields and industries and firms where there's this interlocking structure of production that makes possible what we see around us. And something as simple as a pencil, as we learned in that essay "I, Pencil" and in your book on that subject, actually has a very, very complicated series of steps that are necessary to follow to create it. And nobody gets that. No kid gets that in school.

BOYACK: Not only do they not get that, but they end up criticizing — Like, you look at people who believe the same things that this *Salon* writer does, you look at, oh, Occupy Wall Street and the Bernie Sanders people. They end up criticizing the very systems and processes that have produced the things that they use and take for granted. It's like people using iPhones to coordinate this protest to protest capitalism, right?

And so in this *Salon* article, you see them talking about — so here he says that the book introduces, let's see, "the joys of libertarianism through a capitalist nightmare centered around a circus." And just the phraseology, the way they introduce this stuff, shows that they don't understand this stuff at all. And as you point out, kids, not only are they not getting these ideas in school — in some cases they're just left out and that's understandable, but in some cases, ideas quite contrary and hostile to these ideas are being introduced. What I found most interesting in the *Salon* article was when they said that in the *Tuttle Twins* — it's says, "the *Tuttle Twins* teach us that it's okay to be selfish, so long as you can depict everyone less fortunate than yourself as lazy and entitled." and of course that's not what the book does. This writer did not read the book, and yet that is kind of the caricature of what a libertarian believes, that there's no rational basis for our principles, there's no objective metrics by which we can judge the veracity of the things we believe; it's just that we're bigoted, mean people who are painting our opposition as lazy and entitled.

When, in the book, if this guy were to actually pick up a copy and read it — in our version, I should point out — it's not that — in our case it's these clowns. I mean, I should maybe briefly mention kind of the overall landscape of the story.

WOODS: Right.

BOYACK: It takes place at a circus. The clowns end up being kind of the socialists, the people who feel that they're entitled to lounge around and yet still enjoy the fruits of other people's labor. Chief among them is a clown named Kroogie, who we named after Paul Krugman to kind of espouse those central planning ideas. And so here's Atlas, who's a producer; he's helping other people of his own free will and choice. He's

very strong. He's the strongman of the circus. He's kind of the star performer, and yet he begins to feel frustrated that everyone else, especially the clowns, feel entitled to the product of his labor.

And so he gets so frustrated that he ends up leaving. He says, "I quit." He takes off. And the circus begins to fall apart, because the very people who were relying on him for help to feed the animals, to set up the tent, to whatever now no longer have his assistance. Less people start coming to the circus, and so the ringmaster has less revenue. He has to start firing people. Things begin falling apart. And the clowns are like, what gives? We want stability. We want the status quo. And yet, they were not producing at a level to allow them to consume at the same level. They were mooching, to use Ayn Rand's term — they were mooching off of Atlas' production.

And so for the *Salon* writer to say that we're teaching kids "it's okay to be selfish, so long as you can depict everyone less fortunate than yourself as lazy and entitled" is flagrantly false. It's simply not true. But again, this is kind of the caricature of our idea rather than the underlying ideas. And frankly, I think these ideas can be simplified enough for even kids to understand — perhaps I should note, also *Salon* writers and congressmen, it's simple enough. If they were to pick up the book, I think they can understand. Unfortunately, they don't and so we get caricature writing such as this article.

WOODS: More with Connor Boyack after we thank our sponsor.

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Connor, you have an organization called the Association for Teaching Kids Economics. I'm sure *Salon* will be absolutely delighted to learn about this and what this organization is up to. What exactly is this organization up to?

BOYACK: So it's not enough to let homeschool parents or libertarian parents just buy these *Tuttle Twins* books for their children, an action to which *Salon* and others like them would object. They write this off as propaganda. They think it's wrong that parents are exposing their children to these ideas. Of course, it's totally okay for the school system and others to introduce them to quite hostile ideas. Parents for some reason aren't allowed to teach their children the values and ideas that they believe, but whatever.

So it's not enough to simply do that. We've done over I think 120,000 books now, which is amazing. I'm super excited by that. But late last year, mid last year, we started this side project where we wanted to get the books into school classrooms. We recognized that, for all the work that we can do to introduce one family at a time to this series and the children that they have, there are so many more children out there that we need to reach that maybe their parents would never buy the books.

And so we set up this organization, the Association for Teaching Kids Economics. It's not for "Teaching Kids Libertarianism" or anarchism or politics or anything. It's economics. The beauty of that is that it's benign enough that school teachers are very open to it. In fact, a lot of curriculum requirements require teachers to teach

economic ideas. And of course, as your listeners know, economics and politics are so inherently intertwined – it's basically human interaction, the foundation of that which I think leads them to different applications if we're talking about economics or politics. But using economics as the vehicle, we can talk about political ideas because they're inherently related.

And so this association is designed to raise money from donors to buy copies, print special edition copies of the *Tuttle Twins* books, especially the *Miraculous Pencil* book, because that's a really easy book to kind of get in the door for someone new, and then we build curriculum around it, lesson plans, activities that we give to the teacher for free. Every kid in the class gets their own copy of the book. We're setting up these classroom ambassador programs where someone from like Young Americans for Liberty or whatever could go into the classroom and do a little presentation or an assembly and talk about these ideas a bit more.

So we've had some early success. We've been starting primarily in states that myself and our executive director are in, Utah and Arizona. We're just now starting in Idaho. We're doing a little bit in Texas, and then we'll expand from there. We've been sending thousands of books in the past few weeks alone to classrooms in those states because we've been able to find donors to fund that operation. The response has been awesome. We've heard from a ton of teachers who are really excited by this because, either they're likeminded and so they want to pass these ideas to their students, or they're not likeminded but they recognize the value of teaching their students about economics. And in some cases, hey, I have this curriculum requirement. I always struggle to figure out how to talk to kids about economics, so here's an off-the-shelf thing, all the kids get a book, win-win situation.

And so we're at the very early stages of this, but as we develop the organization, every *Tuttle Twins* book is going to get its own curriculum and activity workbook and lesson plan and so forth, and then teachers will have training. We're going to have this online training portal where teachers can learn themselves more about economic ideas so that we can have a lasting impact in the years ahead as they continue to talk to new groups of students that come through their classroom.

And we're focused, I should note, on the K through 8 grade ranges, primarily 3rd to like 6th grade, but we'll do all of K through 8. And no one else is working in this space. There's a few organizations like FEE and IHS that are now moving into the high school arena, but no one is working in K to 8, and so we have a lot of opportunity, a lot of need and, what we've seen so far, a lot of demand, and so that's a really exciting thing, that we have all these resources with these books and we're able to now start delivering them straight into the classroom.

WOODS: So that's roughly the age range for these books, and that leaves, as you later noted, a bit of a gap for – what about our older children who maybe we wouldn't even classify them as children? I don't want to be scolded by Robert Epstein. But in other words, at some point, you want to start introducing ideas at a somewhat higher level but maybe quite in a graduate school level. So you now have yet another book. I think I'm violating some principle of book marketing by talking about two books in one episode, but who cares? This one is called *Lessons from a Lemonade Stand: An*

Unconventional Guide to Government. First, let me just ask you just quickly what is the age range that you recommend for this book.

BOYACK: So I intended this book to be targeted towards teenagers when I —

WOODS: Okay, all right, I'll give you more time to talk about it in just a minute, but I want to situate people in this by reading my blurb from the back cover, if you don't mind, because I want them to get a sense of what's going on in this book.

BOYACK: Great.

WOODS: I don't think I've ever read one of my blurbs on the air before, but here we go. This is my endorsement of *Lessons from a Lemonade Stand*:

"Take all the sweet platitudes you've ever heard about government — These wise public servants are innocently pursuing the common good! Government gets its just powers from our consent! — roll them into a ball, and throw them away. In their place, read *Lessons from a Lemonade Stand*, which contains more plain truth about the nature of government than any student ever heard in what we laughingly call our institutions of higher learning."

Yeah, okay?

BOYACK: That is a Tom Woods blurb if ever I read a Tom Woods blurb.

WOODS: [laughing] Yeah, so now you've got to go ahead and justify this. Explain to me why this isn't just the same old, *Hey, kids, call your congressman* kind of book.

BOYACK: So this book was born out of a presentation I did about a year ago. It just was a PowerPoint I had put together; it was about an hour long; it was for a youth group. I don't know, there were 70 to 80 kids in the room, and I talked about all these ideas. I talked about common law, natural law, statutory law, positive law, *malum prohibitum* versus *malum in se*. I talked about *mens rea*, consent of the governed. And so I was walking through all these ideas connected to law and government, and this kid comes up after and is like, "Hey, that was good." "Yeah, okay, thanks. I'm glad you liked it." He goes, "No, it was really good. You should turn that into a book." And I'm like, "Hmm, okay. Maybe there's the next book idea." So it was born out of this initial presentation where not only that kid, but a lot of other kids after him came up and were like, I've never heard this stuff before. And I thought, okay, yeah, kids aren't being taught this. I'm already doing this with younger kids in the *Tuttle Twins*; why not expand this?

So the idea initially was to target teenagers, but then as I started sending the draft around, I had a lot of response from college students, so the young adult kind of crowd. And then I sent it to some parents who have *Tuttle Twins* books for their kids, and these are parents, again, who have never read original works. They've never picked up Mises. These aren't people who are scholars and studious people within the liberty movement at all. They just like these ideas and they're very new and they're very newly being exposed to them.

And so I found that the age range, while it was intended to be for teenagers because that was kind of the core audience that I had in mind when I wrote the book — it's more of an informal style. It's not long. I wanted to pack a lot into a book that wouldn't be very thick, so it's not intimidating. But that non-intimidating format — I've mentioned this, Tom, before on a different podcast episode that we did. We didn't plan this at all, but with the *Tuttle Twins*, we have this secondary audience that was unintended, where, yes, we were trying to teach kids, but in the same vein, we're now teaching a lot of parents who, as I've said, have never read these original books but now they're reading a fun book with their kids and the parents are learning as well.

That's the same thing I've found at least right now early on with this *Lemonade* book. We're intending this for teenagers, but we're getting great response so far from young adults and even adults as well who are unfamiliar with these ideas, because the tone is very introductory, but it's all based, as the title has pointed out, around a lemonade stand. We've heard these stories around the country of lemonade stands getting shut down by cops and bureaucrats, and so I used that as the hook in the book to say, look, everyone gets upset when that happens. Why? Why is it that people object to that? Yeah, they didn't have a permit. They do have to pay 400 bucks. They should have to jump through those hoops, right? And if not, then why not? And if they don't need to for lemonade stands, then why do they need to for selling things online in their basement? Why do they need a business license? And on and on to kind of expand that idea, tease it out, and understand the underlying principles.

So this is kind of in response to a lot of our *Tuttle Twins* parents saying we need more for older kids, we need more maybe for ourselves. And so now we have an introductory book of these ideas for a little bit older crowd as well.

WOODS: And let me make clear that this book is — I tried to make it clear in my endorsement of it, but this book introduces people to figures, not just the usual, safe libertarian figures like John Locke. John Locke deserves to be mentioned and learned about. I am not disparaging John Locke. But you're not going to get into any trouble with anybody by teaching John Locke. Or even if they want to be really edgy, they might trot out Milton Friedman if they really, really —

But this book is going to also introduce them to Lysander Spooner and Murray Rothbard and people of that caliber. That's exactly the age when people should have the opportunity to hear and evaluate those ideas, not to say that they have to be propagandized, but that they have to at least have a chance. I mean, what is wrong with just giving them a chance to hear ideas that are obviously significant and these are people who would be listened to — if people of this level of intelligence and output, if they were saying the opposite of what they were saying, you'd better believe everybody would be learning from them. So, good that people get a chance to learn this.

But I just want people to understand this is a chance to introduce teenagers to ideas that are going to challenge them and not put them to sleep.

BOYACK: And this will be a challenge, because some of these ideas are very radical. As you point out, we're introducing controversial figures, but we're talking about the illegitimacy of the state in a tone and in a format that is accessible to teenagers.

We're talking about civil disobedience, and I give many examples. And all of this is kind of built throughout the book as we first start talking about what is law, what is authority, is it possible at all to give consent to the government and what are some ways in which that may or may not happen. And once we show that we basically can't give consent to the state, then we talk about why the state is illegitimate and in what cases civil disobedience might be justified.

So for a lot of parents who pick up our *Tuttle Twins* books and think, *Oh, yay, this can teach my kid important values*, I'll be very interested to see — because this book is coming out in just a few days — I'll be very interested to see what their response is when they pick this up, because it is going to be more controversial. But I believe — I agree with you, Tom, that at a minimum I think, especially teenagers but young adults and adults as well, need to be at least exposed to these ideas so that they can consider them.

WOODS: You've got a number of websites. I'm going to have them all linked at TomWoods.com/1054. Everything will be linked. *Libertas*, *TuttleTwins.com*, *LemonadeFreedom.com*, everything will be linked there. But if people want to get these books, how would you direct them as the best way to do it?

BOYACK: So they can go to *TuttleTwins.com* to get those books. That's the easiest place. We have a combo package where we throw in activity workbooks and other bonuses, and so imagine, Tom, like 99% of your listeners by now have the *Tuttle Twins* books, but for that one guy out there, *TuttleTwins.com* is the place. And then right now, we're just selling the *Lemonade* book through Amazon. That's the easiest place to get it. And then if anyone wants to follow what we're doing, Googling "Connor Boyack" is pretty much the easiest way to do it. We kind of all over the place.

WOODS: All right, good, so I'll have a bunch of links to help people and particularly to the books at TomWoods.com/1054. Well, good luck. I'll even link to that — I should try to remember the link

BOYACK: The *Salon* article.

WOODS: — to the *Salon* article. Yeah. It's amazing. You have driven them insane with a children's book. Don't you know that children's books are supposed to be just like — I was going to say like dumbed down *Salon* articles, but how much dumber can they get?

BOYACK: [laughing] Thanks.

WOODS: Anyway, okay, Connor, thanks a lot for being here.

BOYACK: Thanks as always, Tom.