

IN ANSWER TO AYN RAND: PART 1 OF 2

It is with great reluctance and sadness that I take up the task of responding to the charges and accusations against Barbara Branden and myself made by Ayn Rand in her article “To Whom It May Concern” (*The Objectivist*, May 1968).

The charges and accusations stated by Miss Rand are, in the overwhelming majority of cases, either false or so misleading as to be false by implication. It is very unfortunate that Miss Rand chose to make a tragic, highly personal conflict between us the occasion of a public scandal, through the publication of her article; she has left me no choice but to make my response equally public. It is the most distasteful duty I have ever had to perform. But my name, reputation and career are at stake—and I am obliged to defend myself.

Since many of the accusations are directed against Barbara Branden, she has made her own statement, which follows mine.

ON THE CHARGE THAT, FOR THE PAST THREE YEARS, I HAVE BEEN LOSING INTEREST IN OBJECTIVISM AND IN SERIOUS INTELLECTUAL CONCERNS.

During the past three years, I have been engaged in writing (and publishing in *The Objectivist*) some of my most important theoretical papers in the field of psychology—papers that Miss Rand has praised as being brilliantly original and of revolutionary importance. During this period, I was working on my first major treatise in psychology, *The Psychology of Self-Esteem*, and had begun making notes for two books to follow it. I created and delivered (at Nathaniel Branden Institute) two new lecture courses: *The Psychology of Mental Illness* and *The Psychology of Romantic Love*. I organized and conducted my first workshops in Objectivist psychotherapy. My company signed a fifteen-year lease (and committed itself to a financial obligation of nearly half-a-million dollars) with the Empire State Building, to house an Institute to teach Objectivism. I accepted a publisher’s proposal to edit a book which was to deal with various aspects of Objectivism and the Objectivist movement, and had begun lining up authors for this project. (The project has now been abandoned.)

Approximately eighteen months ago, I decided to produce Barbara Branden’s stage adaptation of Miss Rand’s novel *The Fountainhead*—a decision which Miss Rand describes as “the clearest indication” of my “departure from the principles of Objectivism” and from serious intellectual concerns. Inasmuch as *The Fountainhead* is one of the two most famous Objectivist works, it is bewildering to read that the desire to produce a play based on this novel can be construed as a “departure from the principles of Objectivism.”

The *Fountainhead* project arose in the following way.

Since early adolescence, I have had two passionate interests: psychology and fiction (later, my interest in fiction centered on the desire to write for the stage). Miss Rand and I had often remarked, across the years, on this interesting parallel between us, in that she, too, has a dual professional interest: philosophy and fiction. Neither of us regarded one interest as incompatible with the other. Two years ago, I decided that, when I finished my book on self-esteem, I would write a play. Being totally out of sympathy

with current trends in the theater, and not wanting to be dependent on established institutions, I decided to found an organization—NBI Theater—devoted to producing plays of the Romantic school of drama. The choice for the first production was among *Ideal, Think Twice* (two plays by Miss Rand that had never been produced), and a stage adaptation of *The Fountainhead*, to be written by Barbara Branden. I discussed the matter with Miss Rand, and we agreed that *The Fountainhead* was the logical choice, since it was an already famous property and, if successful, would pave the way for the production of *Ideal, Think Twice* and future plays of my own.

Miss Rand implies (since she names it first) that my chief reason for wishing to begin with a production of *The Fountainhead* was to give Barbara Branden (from whom, incidentally, I had been separated since 1965) a “professional start.” This is untrue. Miss Rand and I both knew that Mrs. Branden had no desire for a career as a playwright, that she intended to become a novelist (and already had a publisher interested in her as yet unwritten novel), and that although the *Fountainhead* project was attractive to her, it was far from crucially important to her long-range professional goals. (I stress this because of Miss Rand’s repeated attempts, throughout her article, to convey the notion that she was being exploited professionally.)

Contrary to Miss Rand’s assertion, it is not true that the *Fountainhead* project, at any point, took up “a major part” of my time; it never took up more than a small portion of my time. (Miss Rand’s statement that she consented to the *Fountainhead* project only when “he assured me that it would not interfere with his primary intellectual responsibilities,” suggests that I was obliged to justify to her the disposition of my time and energies, which, of course, I was not.)

My delay on some of my articles for *The Objectivist*, which Miss Rand cites as an example of my intellectual “default,” had no connection with the *Fountainhead* project; the delays were caused by the theoretical complexity of the issues about which I was writing—and, in addition, by the growing strain and friction in my relationship with Miss Rand.

It is also relevant to mention that, when our publication was founded, I never committed myself to writing an article per issue, nor would I have agreed to make such a commitment. I was obliged to write for almost every issue because mutual friends who had promised to write for our magazine, proved unable to do so.

As to Miss Rand’s other “example” of my intellectual “default,” namely, her charge that I failed to revise, reorganize and update my lectures on “Basic Principles of Objectivism”—I have been carrying on this process of revision for several years. It is true, however, that at the time I closed NBI (August 1968), I had not yet begun a total rewrite of the course, which I had planned to do in 1969.

Such is the nature of my alleged loss of interest in Objectivism and in serious intellectual concerns.

ON THE CHARGE THAT MISS RAND WAS PROFESSIONALLY AND FINANCIALLY EXPLOITED BY ME.

In support of this charge, Miss Rand mentions that she had no financial interest in NBI or its affiliates. She stresses the fact that she received no

money from the various NBI organizations, beyond a “small royalty” on her recordings and a modest fee for her NBI lectures and for her Introduction to *Calumet ‘K’* (published by NBI Press). Miss Rand does not mention that when, several times across the years, I raised the question of NBI remunerating her, she consistently took the position that this would be inadvisable, since it was important to her from a public relations point of view to have no financial connection with NBI. (As to the “small royalty,” it is the standard percentage in the trade, and the figure was proposed to me by one of Miss Rand’s attorneys.)

In view of the contribution that NBI and its affiliates have made to Miss Rand’s career and to the spread of her ideas, in view of the fact that she repeatedly told me that the creation of an Objectivist movement was my achievement, and in view of the fact that she said, on more than one occasion, that no one had ever done for any thinker in history what I have done for her—her complaint that she was not paid by me comes with astonishing lack of grace.

For a person who has always taken a (justifiable) pride in her self-assertiveness and in her advocacy of an ethics of self-interest, Miss Rand seems strangely eager, in her article, to convey a picture of herself as a disinterested (and somewhat helpless) altruist. She states that one of her motives in lending her support to NBI was “to help Nathaniel Branden make a name for himself.” The fact is that, in the early years of NBI, Miss Rand was enormously skeptical about the success of the entire undertaking, and was continually and incredulously congratulating me on my “courage” in attempting a project that brought me into conflict with the whole culture (including my own profession). If my goal in founding NBI was “to make a name” for myself—or, for that matter, to earn a livelihood—there were and are easier ways to do it. My motive was selfish, but it was not the motive Miss Rand wishes to imply: my motive was the desire to fight for the spread of ideas I knew to be true and important. Mrs. Branden’s motive was the same.

Now let us consider *The Objectivist*.

The Objectivist (originally, *The Objectivist Newsletter*) began with two commercial assets, not one: the value of Miss Rand’s name—and the NBI mailing list (which provided the first source of subscribers and allowed the publication to operate in the black from its first issue).

In addition to writing my articles and doing editorial work, I was to be responsible for the financial, business, production and promotional aspects of our publication, as part of my contribution to our partnership. Miss Rand always evidenced a lack of interest in business procedures, and made it clear that she was content to leave the supervision of the business aspects of the magazine to me.

It is worth mentioning that, as recently as late June of this year, Miss Rand told me (as she had told me several times before) that she had always wanted a steady source of income apart from her books and that she was grateful to me for making it possible, through *The Objectivist*, which, she said, she could not have created without me.

Miss Rand’s chief complaint concerning *The Objectivist* involves a loan made by the magazine to NBI in July, 1967. The facts relevant to this loan are as follows.

When NBI, NBI Book Service and *The Objectivist* had offices at 120 E. 34th Street, each corporation had a lease in its own name. When the three companies moved to the Empire State Building last year, NBI undertook to assume full responsibility for the lease—partly because Miss Rand expressed

apprehension over the fact that the lease was for fifteen years. Thus, at the Empire State Building, *The Objectivist* was given the financial protection of being a sub-tenant of NBI, without the commitment of a lease.

NBI was required to pay one year’s rent in advance—which meant that its sub-tenants, *The Objectivist* and NBI Book Service, should and would share proportionately in that advance payment; this fact was discussed more than once in Miss Rand’s presence; she had full knowledge of it.

As is normal for a rapidly growing business, NBI required loans from time to time, and, on several past occasions, NBI had made interest-bearing loans from *The Objectivist*. These loans are a matter of record and were, of course, reported in *The Objectivist’s* financial statements. In no case did Miss Rand challenge my judgment in making these loans. It was the custom of *The Objectivist* to augment its subscription income by purchasing interest-bearing certificates or bonds with its surplus funds. The reason for sometimes taking loans from *The Objectivist* rather than from a bank, was to give *The Objectivist* the benefit of the interest payments. NBI never encountered any difficulty in obtaining whatever bank loans it required.

NBI’s busiest period was during the fall and winter months; as a consequence, it tended to have a low cash flow during the summer months. For this reason, in June of 1967, Mr. Wilfred Schwartz, NBI’s Administrative Director and *The Objectivist’s* Business Manager, recommended to me that NBI borrow \$16,500 from *The Objectivist*, in addition to obtaining a portion of the year’s rent in advance (more precisely, the sum of \$6,000)—a total of \$22,500. (I have no idea where Miss Rand obtained the figure of \$25,000; that figure does not appear anywhere in *The Objectivist’s* or NBI’s financial statements.)

Only part of that \$16,500 was borrowed by NBI for the purpose of paying its own rent. The rest was used for fixed improvements of the premises, and to purchase equipment to be used jointly by NBI, NBI Book Service and *The Objectivist*. Part of the cost of these improvements and equipment was later charged back to NBI Book Service and *The Objectivist*.

Contrary to Miss Rand’s claim, I never told her that I wished to borrow money from *The Objectivist* for the rent “because NBI did not have quite enough.” At the time of the conversation to which Miss Rand refers, I had no reason to doubt that she already had knowledge of the loan, since there was regular communication between Mr. Schwartz and Miss Rand concerning the move to the Empire State Building, since *The Objectivist’s* own Circulation Manager had prepared the check, and since the loan was entered on the books of *The Objectivist*. My passing reference to the loan was entirely perfunctory; it was intended, in effect, as a reminder, since I knew of Miss Rand’s disinterest in business matters. When I mentioned the loan, Miss Rand said nothing to indicate that she was hearing of it for the first time; she uttered some casual expression of assent, said “So long as you pay it back” (or words to that effect), and waved her hand in a characteristic gesture, dismissing the subject. [1]

Miss Rand states that “the original amount of the loan had represented the entire cash reserve of this magazine.” The magazine’s own financial statements do not support her assertion. The loan was made on July 6, 1967. The audited statement of the magazine, immediately preceding the loan, that of March 31, 1967, shows total assets in excess of \$44,000 and cash in the bank in the amount of \$33,881; the audited statement of March 31, 1968, shows total assets in excess of \$58,000 and cash in the bank in the amount of \$17,438, in addition to the \$16,500 loan receivable from NBI (for which NBI was paying a higher rate of interest than *The Objectivist*

obtained from its investments elsewhere).

In her article, Miss Rand alleges that we had an “incorporation agreement” which stated that all decisions concerning the publication were to be unanimous. Aside from the facts cited above, it is worth mentioning that my copy of our incorporation agreement contains no such stipulation.

Contrary to Miss Rand, the loan was repaid at my instigation, not hers. She did put in a request for repayment, not knowing that I had already given instructions to that effect. She writes that there was “some delay” in repaying the loan, evidently intending to imply either financial irresponsibility or instability or both on the part of NBI. The “delay” consisted of less than ten days—which, to anyone familiar with business procedures, is scarcely a “delay.”

So much for my alleged financial exploitation of Miss Rand.

ON MY WITHDRAWAL FROM THE OBJECTIVIST.

Since Miss Rand has raised the question of exploitation, I think it is appropriate to relate the circumstances under which I signed over to her my 50% interest in *The Objectivist*.

In the fall of 1961, when the incorporation papers for the magazine were being prepared, Miss Rand proposed that a clause be included to the effect that, in the event of an irreconcilable disagreement or break between us, publication of the magazine would be discontinued. She said, in explanation, that she did not think it would be morally right for one of us to keep the magazine and thus go on profiting from the work of the other, should there be a break between us. This seemed reasonable, and I agreed to the inclusion of the clause she proposed. Therefore, when my relationship with her ended this summer, I would have been entirely within my legal rights to demand that *The Objectivist* cease publication (before her denunciation of me).

However, because of the importance I attached to *The Objectivist*, I informed Miss Rand that I was willing to have her continue with the magazine on her own.

Until the evening of August 25, 1968, Miss Rand and I used the same attorney. Some weeks earlier, I had apprised him of the growing breach between Miss Rand and myself, and cautioned him that the situation might reach a point where he could no longer represent both of us; I asked him to let me know if and when this point was reached, so that I could make other arrangements for legal counsel, and he assured me that he would do so.

On the evening of August 25, he came to my apartment and handed me two documents. One was his letter of resignation as my attorney. The other was an assignment of my interest in *The Objectivist* to Miss Rand, which he demanded I sign immediately—and with no financial recompense.

I told him that I was willing to sign the transfer of ownership, but that before I did so I wanted Miss Rand to have *The Objectivist* sign over to me the copyrights to my psychological articles which had been published in *The Objectivist*, [2] and which I needed for my book, *The Psychology of Self-Esteem*. I reminded him that it had always been clearly understood between Miss Rand and me that each of us would retain full rights to our own articles published in *The Objectivist*. He telephoned Miss Rand to communicate my request. Miss Rand did not then deny, nor, to the best of my knowledge, has she ever denied, the nature of our understanding in regard to the copyrights. But, the attorney informed me after his telephone call, Miss Rand was very eager to gain complete possession of *The Objectivist* immediately; she insisted, he said, that I sign the transfer of ownership that

evening, and she gave assurances that I would be treated fairly with regard to the copyrights.

I told him that I was reluctant to sign that evening because I was exhausted and wanted a day to think the matter over, and I might want to obtain legal counsel before coming to a final decision. He replied that if I did not sign at once, Miss Rand would seek to create a scandal that would make it impossible for me to obtain certification as a psychologist, for which I was currently applying. [3] And further, he said, Miss Rand would demand a full investigation of *The Objectivist* loan to NBI and would initiate a legal suit against me. When I expressed shock at this, and pointed out to him that Miss Rand and everyone else involved knew that there was nothing unethical, much less illegal, about the loan, he neither affirmed nor denied the truth of my statement; he merely replied that the suit would be very unpleasant, nevertheless.

Feeling a mixture of moral revulsion, emotional exhaustion and a last vestige of sympathy for Miss Rand’s anxiety over *The Objectivist*, I signed the transfer of ownership.

Thus ended my business relationship with Ayn Rand.

ON MISS RAND’S ATTITUDE TO BARBARA BRANDEN.

I will not comment on Miss Rand’s extraordinary attack against Mrs. Branden, since Mrs. Branden has written her own statement concerning that attack. But there is one disgraceful touch in Miss Rand’s article about which the victim should not have to speak. So I shall speak for her.

After characterizing my life as “a terrible waste of a priceless human endowment: ability,” and calling it “a tragedy,” Miss Rand adds, in parenthesis: “I cannot say as much for Barbara Branden.”

I think it is appropriate to quote what Miss Rand has said for Barbara Branden, so that the reader can evaluate the meaning—and motive—of Miss Rand’s remark.

On Mrs. Branden’s parents’ copy of *Atlas Shrugged*, Miss Rand wrote the following inscription: “To Reb and Johnny—the parents of a girl who has the spirit, the ambition and the talent of the best characters in this book—Affectionately, Ayn.”

When Mrs. Branden was interviewing Miss Rand, in preparation for the writing of *Who Is Ayn Rand?* (the interviews were tape-recorded), Miss Rand made the following statement:

“As far as you’re concerned, career-wise, the turning point was when I saw the first few pages of that short story which you started and didn’t finish. It was those pages that convinced me that you’re going to be a great writer, and, as you see, I was right. . . . Up to then, I thought that you were very intelligent, and since you talked about writing intelligently, that you probably would be a good writer, but one has to see the real work. And it’s those pages that made me think that this is something of enormous size.”

ON THE CHARGE THAT I EXPLOITED MISS RAND INTELLECTUALLY AND FAILED HER PERSONALLY.

Miss Rand writes: “During the past three years, my personal relationship with Mr. Branden was deteriorating in a puzzling manner: it was turning into a series of his constant demands on my time, constant pleas for advice, for help with his writing, for long discussions of his personal, philosophical and psychological problems.”

Aside from seeing her at parties and other social occasions, I normally visited Miss Rand, or was visited by her, one evening a week—and it was she who often complained about the fact that I did not have time to see her

more often. It was she who tended to prolong telephone calls, initiated by me, into discussions lasting for hours; on countless occasions, I anxiously tried to communicate to her that those discussions constituted a devastating interruption of my writing. It was she who constantly volunteered personal advice, and tended to reproach me to the extent that I did not heed it.

It is true that Miss Rand has been of personal help to me on numerous occasions across the years of our relationship; she was always very generous with her time. It is no less true that I have been of personal help to her on many occasions. For example, in the two-year period following the publication of *Atlas Shrugged*, I visited her on an average of two or three evenings a week for the express purpose of trying to help her with a problem that was so distressing to her that she was unable to write or to project her future goals: the problem of her disgust with and revulsion at the intellectual state of our culture. Many other examples, of a more personal nature, could readily be cited. (Indeed, one of my most sincerely regretted injustices against Mrs. Branden, in the twelve years of our marriage, was the extent to which I permitted our lives to be subordinated to Miss Rand's personal interests and needs.)

As to her claim that I constantly demanded assistance with my writing—I did nothing of the kind. When we completed our respective articles for *The Objectivist*, it was our policy to show them to each other, for editorial suggestions. Miss Rand is a more experienced and accomplished writer than I, and she usually had a greater number of suggestions to offer; but they were almost always of a minor nature, such as straightening out an awkward sentence or correcting some small lapse of grammar.

Miss Rand makes a great many specious allegations about my personal problems—such as the claim that I was confused or uncertain about my “long-range goals,” which is entirely without foundation. I have never viewed such problems as I may have in the way portrayed by her in the article, neither with regard to their nature nor their severity nor their magnitude.

During the past several years, Miss Rand has often sought to persuade me of the validity of her own view of my problems; and one of her complaints against me was that she failed to do so.

I did have certain problems, but I submit that Miss Rand was not the person to diagnose or help correct them. I believe that her own judgment in the matter was clouded by the fact of too great a personal involvement. One of the pieces of evidence crucially important to her conviction that I had personal problems, was the fact that while I obviously admired her enormously and cared for her very deeply, my personal emotional response to her was less than she believed it should be. I shall return to this subject.

It is not my purpose here to provide an exhaustive analysis of all the issues and conflicts between Miss Rand and me. I am confining myself to answering the points raised in her article, or, more precisely, those that I consider worthy of comment.

I should now like to turn to one accusation in her article that is founded on fact and that involves a grave error I did make.

Several years ago, I found myself in an agonizing personal dilemma, which I saw no way to resolve. The solution I ultimately chose was wrong, because it involved resorting to a falsehood. It entailed, among other things, withholding from Miss Rand certain information about my personal life—specifically, my relationship with a young woman, with whom I was and am deeply in love.

Miss Rand suggests that her discovery of this falsehood was the final step in convincing her that it was necessary to repudiate me publicly. But

the fact is that her decision was made when, approximately a month earlier, she learned only of my present feeling for the young woman, and before she learned of the past relationship or of any falsehood on my part. She decided, at that time, that a denunciation of me in *The Objectivist* was imperative. I submit, therefore, that her motive in denouncing me could not have been indignation at the falsehood. What, then, was her motive? Let the reader study this entire document and judge for himself.

I discussed my feeling for and relationship with the young woman, with Mrs. Branden, about two years ago (a year after Mrs. Branden and I had separated); I fully apprised her of the facts of the past relationship only this summer. When Mrs. Branden came to me in late August and told me she believed it was necessary to tell Miss Rand the full truth, I agreed with her. She went to speak to Miss Rand with my knowledge and approval. (As to why she went, rather than me, she explains the reason in her own statement.)

Miss Rand writes: “I confronted Mr. Branden with her accusation and he admitted it.” There never was a question of “confronting” me with anything, as Mrs. Branden's statement makes clear.

When I decided to close NBI (which I did by personal choice, not by legal or financial necessity), I called a meeting of the staff in order to make a statement about my break with Miss Rand. I did not want to leave them with an incomprehensible mystery. I felt very regretful over the pain I had caused Miss Rand, and wanted to assure the staff that she was fully within her moral rights in severing our relationship. I did not specify what I had done wrong; I merely acknowledged that I had taken an action that I considered wrong. I did not suspect that this attempt at candor and honesty would be used against me; but thereafter, when accusations were hurled by partisans of Miss Rand, these accusations were often accompanied by the argument: “Nathaniel Branden confessed to doing something wrong, didn't he? What else do you need to know?” In other words, I was now to be judged guilty of any offense anyone chose to charge me with.

Another common argument of Miss Rand's supporters, of which I doubt that Miss Rand would approve, is the following: “Ayn Rand says Nathaniel Branden is wrong. What else do you need to know?” The authoritarian implications, the implicit assumption of Miss Rand's infallibility, are scarcely in keeping with the philosophy such supporters profess to uphold.

Perhaps I am wrong in thinking that Miss Rand would not approve of this sort of argument—since it reflects the position taken, in effect, by four of NBI's former Associate Lecturers, the four whose repudiation of Mrs. Branden and me follows Miss Rand's in *The Objectivist*. Not one of those four made any effort to discuss the conflict with Mrs. Branden or me. They know only what Miss Rand has told them (with the partial exception of Dr. Blumenthal, who had some additional information, but far from the full story). They did not think it necessary to hear from the accused, in order to form a judgment. In the case of Dr. Blumenthal, when Mrs. Branden and I made separate attempts to discuss the situation with him, he refused to talk to us.

I do not think it inappropriate to mention that all four of the people who denounced us have acknowledged that, in my capacity as psychologist, I have made an incalculable personal contribution to their lives and careers; and all four have been our friends for a minimum of sixteen years. Such is the manner in which they chose to end the relationship.

CONCLUSION

I believe it is apparent, to any thoughtful reader of Miss Rand's article, that, whatever the truth or falsehood of any of her specific charges, the real and basic reasons for her condemnation are not given in that article. There is too obvious a discrepancy between the significance of the alleged facts she cites and the intensity of the emotional violence the article reflects. It is not Miss Rand's normal policy to write in the same style and by the same method as most of the antagonistic reviewers of her books. A major part of the story is obviously missing.

She does provide one indirect clue—and I must confess I am astonished that she chose to include it.

She writes: "About two months ago (at the beginning of July), in an apparent attempt to terminate the discussions he himself had initiated, Mr. Branden presented me with a written statement which was so irrational and so offensive to me that I had to break my personal association with him."

In writing the above, Miss Rand has given me the right to name that which I infinitely would have preferred to leave unnamed, out of respect for her privacy. I am obliged to report what was in that written paper of mine, in the name of justice and of self-defense.

That written statement was an effort, not to terminate my relationship with Miss Rand, but to save it, in some mutually acceptable form.

It was a tortured, awkward, excruciatingly embarrassed attempt to make clear to her why I felt that an age distance between us of twenty-five years constituted an insuperable barrier, for me, to a romantic relationship.

(October 16, 1968.)

ENDNOTES

1. I have an affidavit in my possession, signed by Miss Rand's former part-time secretary, Miss G. Fletcher, testifying to the fact that she happened to be present during the above conversation and that her recollection of the event is identical with mine.

2. It is customary for copyrights of articles to be taken out by the magazine which publishes them.

3. It should be mentioned that Miss Rand has always considered psychological certification laws an immoral, political abomination, and had been very indignant about the fact that I had to apply for certification.