

IN ANSWER TO AYN RAND: PART 2 OF 2

BY BARBARA BRANDEN

When I read *The Fountainhead* at the age of fifteen, I would not have believed that the day could come when I would be forced to choose between Howard Roark and Ayn Rand—to choose between loyalty to the values of justice, of self-esteem, of speaking and acting according to one’s honest judgment, which the character of Howard Roark represented to me, and the woman who taught me the importance of those concepts and whom, for most of my life, I have loved, admired and honored more than any other human being.

But I did have to face that choice, and I have chosen. My loyalty to the values I learned from Ayn Rand led me to the actions I haven taken during the past few months, and to the most painful act of my life: the writing of this paper.

I wish it were possible not to defend myself, not to say that “To Whom It May Concern” is false, unjust, and tragically unworthy of Ayn Rand. But it is not possible. I cannot leave unchallenged and unanswered an attack on Nathaniel Branden and on myself which would so greatly damage our names and our professional futures if left unanswered. And I cannot leave our students in the state of miserable, helpless confusion in which so many of them find themselves.

Now to the charges—and the facts.

Miss Rand writes that “strangely enough,” it was I who “exposed the secret of his [Mr. Branden’s] private life.” This is true—except for the “strangely enough.” Although Miss Rand implies, again and again, that I was motivated by the hope of financial gain, she knows that it was precisely my horror of accepting the financial gain about to be showered upon me, that caused me to tell her about my cooperation in Mr. Branden’s falsehood (which he has discussed).

In the spring of this year, during the growing estrangement between Miss Rand and Mr. Branden, I was uncertain how to judge the basic personal conflict between them and the validity of Miss Rand’s view of Mr. Branden’s problems. But I knew that he did have certain problems, and I knew that he was withholding information from her. Because Miss Rand was in considerable distress, I wanted to be of help to her, as she had helped me so many times in the past. Miss Rand is correct in stating that, during this period, I acted as her “ally.”

Mr. Branden presented his written statement to Miss Rand on July 3. At Miss Rand’s request, I saw and discussed that statement with her the same evening, in Mr. Branden’s presence; I was acutely embarrassed at the necessity of being present during such a dispute, and knew neither how to handle the situation nor what to say.

During the next several weeks, as their relationship continued to deteriorate, Miss Rand said that she was unwilling to give NBI her intellectual support if it remained under Mr. Branden’s control. The Institute could have continued nevertheless, but in view of its close ties with Miss Rand, and in view of the conflict between Mr. Branden and Miss Rand, he felt it better to withdraw. He suggested that I should take over as head of the organization—and offered to turn over to me the legal ownership of NBI;

he volunteered to go on lecturing as long as the Institute needed him.

Miss Rand urged me to accept Mr. Branden’s proposal, saying that she would continue to give NBI her support only if I were in charge. She told me, further, that she wanted Mr. Branden to remove himself from *The Objectivist* and to sign over to me, without reimbursement, his 50% share. She wanted to put my name on the magazine, as co-editor with her. She offered me a \$15,000 a year position with *The Objectivist*. She told me that she planned to change her will and to name me as a major beneficiary.

Thus I was to receive—as a gift—NBI, half of *The Objectivist*, a remunerative job, and a major share of Miss Rand’s estate.

It was then that I decided to tell Miss Rand that I had been withholding information from her and that I could not, under the circumstances, accept her generosity.

On the morning of August 23, I informed Mr. Branden that I planned to tell Miss Rand the whole story; I received his full assent. I called in Allan Blumenthal and asked him to join me at Miss Rand’s. (I knew that she would be upset, and I wanted her to have the emotional support which I believed she would not wish to accept from me.) I told him that I considered it quite likely that Miss Rand would end her personal and business relationship with me when I told her the truth—and that that was why I had to tell her the truth.

Mr. Branden, Dr. Blumenthal and I decided that Mr. Branden should not accompany us to Miss Rand’s; she had previously stated that she did not wish to see him. Mr. Branden suggested that he would wait in his apartment so that he would be available if Miss Rand wanted to talk with him. (He did join us later in the evening.) Thus, as he has pointed out, there was no question of Miss Rand “confronting” him with anything.

When Dr. Blumenthal and I saw Miss Rand that evening, I told her the facts that Mr. Branden and I had withheld from her. Although she was very angry with me, she said that she knew there were important mitigating circumstances in my complicity, that our personal relationship need not end, and that our business and financial arrangements would stand. (Next day, she decided that *The Objectivist* should be turned over to her, not to me, a plan to which I acceded, telling her—as I had told her many times—that I did not want a gift of something I had not earned.)

After August 23, Miss Rand stated that she was no longer willing to give her support to any lecture organization in which Mr. Branden was involved, even in the capacity of a lecturer.

She writes that I “kept stressing gently” that NBI could be run without Mr. Branden. I did not “stress it gently.” I said it clearly, distinctly, and emphatically. I said that I believed lectures could still be given, and that I did not want needlessly to abandon the work of ten years. I asked for a few days to think about and project a means of salvaging the lecture operation. Miss Rand agreed to this, although somewhat hesitantly.

For several days, Wilfred Schwartz, Robert Berole, a few members of the NBI staff and I worked eighteen hours a day, projecting the financial possibilities of a more modest lecture organization. We arrived at a set of figures that proved this to be eminently feasible.

While we were working on the plan for the new lecture organization,

Miss Rand states, she “discovered that NBI had treated its associate lecturers so unfairly that they were not eager to continue.”

She could not have discovered this, because they were not treated unfairly. Nor could the lecturers have objected to continuing, because they were not asked to continue. The plan for the new organization, which was submitted to Miss Rand, stated that it was to be a “tape transcription operation, with the exception of a live Basic opening in New York City [which I was to give] and live delivery the first time any new course is given.” I intended only—as the plan states—to ask Allan Blumenthal to create a ten-lecture course by means of expanding the five lectures he had already prepared for one of Mr. Branden’s courses, and to accept either Leonard Peikoff’s or Henry Holzer’s previous offer to give a new course.

Several years ago, when contracts were first being drawn up with NBI Associate Lectures, Mary Ann Sures (then Rukavina) was employed as a member of the NBI staff as well as an Associate Lecturer; it was she who helped me to arrive at the final financial arrangements—and it was she who continually cautioned me that I was being over-generous. At the same time, I asked for and received the advice of Alan Greenspan, in his capacity as both economist and Associate Lecturer; I asked him whether my proposed financial arrangements seemed fair and equitable; he said that they did. (It is relevant to mention that I, too, was one of the Associate Lecturers and received the same remuneration as the others for my work.)

Miss Rand states that when the yearly grosses of NBI grew larger, the percentages paid to its Associate Lecturers were cut. This is quite true. But she neglects to mention that when the percentages were cut, the minimum rate guaranteed to a lecturer for a course was more than doubled. (And surely the author of *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal* knows that the operations of a business preclude transactions which are not considered, by both buyer and seller, to be to their mutual advantage.)

I might add that, a few years ago, while lecturing for NBI during the summer months, Leonard Peikoff asked me if he might tell the head of his philosophy department the sum of money he was earning for his summer’s work; he explained that the amount was so much more than a university professor makes, that his department head would be profoundly impressed with the “practicality” of Objectivism. I agreed.

Recently, Reva Fox, one of our Associate Lecturers whose name is not signed to the appendage to Miss Rand’s article, told me that she had heard that our lecturers were underpaid. She expressed surprise that their contract with us was not the same as hers, since she considered her own reimbursement to be eminently satisfactory. I informed her that her contract was identical with those of the other lecturers.

Miss Rand states that “on September 2, the plan [for a new lecture organization] was submitted to me at a business meeting attended by my attorney.” She does not mention that her attorney had visited the NBI offices earlier that day, had been told the exact nature of the plan, and had given it his endorsement.

At the meeting were Miss Rand, her attorney and his wife, Mr. Schwartz, Mr. Berole and myself. (Mr. O’Connor was present, but took no part in the discussion.) Miss Rand writes that “the plan did not offer any relevant factual material, but a projection (by an unspecified method) of future profits to be earned by a lecture organization patterned after NBI.”

In fact, we presented a ten-page Report which outlined the nature of the plan and its rationale, our projection of revenue figures and expenses for the next year, and the advantages to all companies, including *The Objectivist*, of

continuing the lecture activities. Accompanying this Report were twenty-one accounting-analysis pages of figures justifying the revenue projections and twenty-six pages of figures justifying the expense projections. Included in the Report was the statement that our revenue and expense figures were arrived at by a methodology that we had been employing at NBI for the past five years and that, in those years, by the use of this methodology, our estimates had been correct within a 2-3% variation.

In the light of this mass of material and documentation, Miss Rand’s statement is truly incredible. I cannot imagine what she would consider to be relevant factual material and a specified method, if this was not.

The business meeting of September 2 began at 8 P.M. and ended at 4 A.M. It was a meeting I shall not soon forget.

After merely glancing over the Report we had so painstakingly prepared, Miss Rand declared that she would not sanction the proposed lecture organization. What she objected to—and what she is presumably referring to when she mentions a business arrangement of a “questionable” nature—was our plan to make the new lecture organization a sub-tenant of NBI (as were *The Objectivist* and NBI Book Service), leaving the liability for the lease where it had been, with NBI. I did not and do not understand what could be considered questionable in such a plan; nor did Mr. Schwartz; nor did Mr. Berole; nor, earlier that same day, did Miss Rand’s attorney (although he did not contradict Miss Rand that evening); nor does any one of the reputable and honorable businessmen to whom I have shown the Report since then.

However, it proved impossible to discuss this issue: Miss Rand was highly agitated and was unwilling to consider arguments against her position. I therefore agreed that the plan should be dropped, and said that I would proceed with the liquidation of NBI. I considered it her right to refuse to sanction the new organization; although I could have done so, I never contemplated proceeding without her assent. But I was disturbed by the peremptory manner in which she abandoned all possibility of continuing what I believed to be the source and the future of *The Objectivist* movement. Less than an hour’s time was spent discussing this issue.

The rest of the night was devoted to the following two issues, both of which were profoundly disturbing to me.

1. Because of NBI’s recent repayment of its loan from *The Objectivist*, and because of the sudden cancellation of all scheduled lecture courses, NBI’s cash reserves had dropped considerably. We discussed the fact that if NBI were unable to come to an amicable settlement with the Empire State Building concerning the lease, *The Objectivist* (as well as my own companies, NBI Book Service and its affiliates) might conceivably be saddled with a legal liability—which could result in a threat to the continuance of the magazine.

Mr. Schwartz suggested that if Mr. Branden’s equity in the past profits of the magazine were transferred to NBI, that company’s financial situation would be considerably improved, and all danger to *The Objectivist* would be averted. Miss Rand angrily refused, saying that she considered it immoral to “help” Mr. Branden. She proposed, instead, that I should transfer to NBI, from my assets, the necessary sum—that I take the action which she had denounced as immoral.

I explained that in order to obtain the required money immediately, I would have to remove all the cash from my own companies (thereby probably forcing them into liquidation) and that, in addition, I would have to go into my personal savings. Miss Rand raised no objection to my destroying myself

financially in order to remove *The Objectivist* from possible danger.

Miss Rand writes that she then offered me a loan “to start a book service of [my] own.” This is true. But I had a “book service of my own” as of August 26, when Mr. Branden, knowing that I could be in financial difficulties if NBI closed, had generously made me a gift of NBI Book Service. However, at the business meeting on September 2, it did appear that I would soon be without a book service: I was being asked to destroy it so that Miss Rand could maintain, without cost to herself, an Objectivist “of her own.”

2. During the discussion, I observed the intensification of an attitude in Miss Rand that had been troubling me progressively during the past weeks: the emotional violence of her attacks on Mr. Branden was growing more and more intense; she was grossly exaggerating the nature and moral meaning of the mistake he had made; she began hurling accusations against him that had no factual foundation whatever. It seemed as though, from the time she had decided to break with him, she felt a growing need to persuade herself, and to communicate to others, that he was a monster.

Although Miss Rand’s original intention had been to publish a one-paragraph repudiation of Mr. Branden in *The Objectivist*—(it was this paragraph which I had told the NBI staff, on August 28, was justified)—her comments now indicated that she was considering a much expanded statement, and that she would include in it many of the accusations she had begun making. (In fact, this is precisely what she did.)

During the meeting of September 2, she made statements about Mr. Branden’s work and character—while pounding the arm of her chair in anger—of such a nature that I could scarcely believe my ears.

By the time the meeting ended, at 4 A.M., Mr. Schwartz, Mr. Berole and I were in a state of numbed shock over the events of the evening. We were appalled by what Miss Rand was willing to demand in order to protect *The Objectivist*, and by the magnitude of her accusations against Mr. Branden.

Later that morning (September 3), we met with Elayne Kalberman, Circulation Manager of *The Objectivist* and her husband, Harry Kalberman, in order to discuss the situation. During the conversation, we mentioned that we had promised Miss Rand to have *The Objectivist* mailing list and equipment moved out of our quarters that morning. Mr. Kalberman objected strenuously; he cautioned us that this could be legally dangerous, so long as NBI had not settled the matter of its lease with the Empire State Building. At Mr. Kalberman’s insistence, we agreed to take no action until consulting Miss Rand’s attorney (who also represented me at that time).

This is the event which Miss Rand summarizes as follows: “Without any warning to me, they [Mr. Schwartz and I] tried to prevent *The Objectivist* from moving out of the quarters it sub-leased from NBI in the Empire State Building.”

Miss Rand further states that we asked Mr. and Mrs. Kalberman to persuade her “to accept the plan and ‘to help NBI.’” This is false. We had no intention of reconsidering the plan to salvage a lecture organization, and no such issue was discussed.

At Mr. Schwartz’s request, Miss Rand’s attorney joined us at the NBI offices. Mr. Kalberman told him why we were hesitant to move out *The Objectivist*. I explained my concern over Miss Rand’s refusal to use the profits she had obtained from Mr. Branden as the means of protecting the magazine. I told him my concern about Miss Rand’s accusations against Mr. Branden.

I stressed the fact that I believed Miss Rand’s accusations were the

result of great emotional stress, and that she would not stand by them when she was more calm. But I said—and this, presumably, is what Miss Rand is referring to when she writes that I uttered “veiled threats” against her—that, apart from the danger to Mr. Branden if such charges should become common gossip, I was worried that her attacks would compel him, in self-defense, to reveal information which would be painful and embarrassing to Miss Rand.

I did not say what this information consisted of. I specifically refused to do so. I hoped that it would never be necessary to do so—as did Mr. Branden. The information was the content of Mr. Branden’s written statement to Miss Rand, the preceding events that had convinced him of the necessity to prepare it, and the fact that that statement had caused her to break with him.

At my request, the attorney agreed to telephone Miss Rand to make an appointment for Mr. Schwartz, Mr. Berole, Mr. and Mrs. Kalberman and myself. Our purpose was to discuss, once more, the possibility of Miss Rand providing the funds necessary to protect *The Objectivist* and to discuss her charges against Mr. Branden.

Miss Rand’s response was to send me a message, through her attorney, that the purpose and nature of my proposed meeting was changed, by her unilateral decision. Without my knowledge or consent, she had invited several other people to the meeting, and had announced that Mr. Berole (who had witnessed the events to be discussed) was not to attend. I was ordered to appear, before a group of her choosing, to answer charges of having made false and immoral accusations against Miss Rand. (I was told, incredibly, that by objecting to her accusations against Mr. Branden, I had impugned her own moral integrity.) I was informed that I was to attend, and on Miss Rand’s terms. I was informed that I had no right to terms or conditions of my own.

I do not accept invitations of that kind. I did not go to the meeting.

Miss Rand writes that Mr. Schwartz and I refused to come to the meeting and “I have not seen them since.” She neglects to mention that I attempted to reach her by telephone, but was told by her attorney that she would not speak to me, that I could communicate with her only by mail.

Contrary to Miss Rand’s claim, neither Mr. Branden, Mr. Schwartz nor I ever “screamed insults” against her to her attorney or to our staff. On one occasion, while we were answering our staff’s questions about the conflict with Miss Rand, her attorney appeared in our offices, uninvited, in order to make allegations against Mr. Branden and me to our staff. We became very indignant at this. Mr. Branden said—very loudly, and in a tone of moral outrage—“How long is she [Miss Rand] going to count on me to remain silent?” I added—in the same manner and tone—that if Miss Rand continued her vendetta against Mr. Branden, she would end by disgracing herself. She has done so.

Miss Rand writes that the change in the attitude of Mr. Branden, Mr. Schwartz and myself occurred “when they realized . . . that the gold mine involved in their use of my name was shut down.”

My feeling at reading this statement was one of acute embarrassment for Miss Rand. I cannot bring myself to offer a defense against an accusation of this kind on my own behalf. But I should like to relate certain facts about Mr. Branden and Mr. Schwartz.

Throughout her article, Miss Rand makes many attempts to convey the idea that she was exploited by Mr. Branden—in effect, that he “used” her for commercial purposes, through NBI. I think this charge can best be

answered by Miss Rand's own words.

The following is a verbatim transcript of a portion of a tape-recorded interview I conducted with Miss Rand, in preparation for the writing of my biographical essay in *Who Is Ayn Rand?*

We were discussing Miss Rand's shock over the intellectual state of the culture, following the publication of *Atlas Shrugged*. Miss Rand said:

"As cultural signs, I think the thing that really changed my whole mind is NBL. [Nathaniel Branden Lectures was the original name of Mr. Branden's organization.] It's the whole phenomenon of Nathan's lectures. As you know, when he first started it I wasn't opposed to it, but I can't say that I expected too much. I was watching it, in effect, with enormous concern and sympathy for him, because I thought there was a very good chance of it failing... Since the culture in general seemed totally indifferent to our ideas and to ideas as a whole, I didn't see how one could make a lecture organization grow... But with the passage of time... I began to see how even the least promising of Nathan's students... were not the same as they were before they started on the course, that Nathan had a tremendous influence on them, that they were infinitely better people and more rational, even if they certainly were not Objectivists yet... What I saw is that ideas take, in a manner which I did not know... The whole enormous response to Nathan gave me a preview of what can be done with a culture. And seeing Nathan start on a shoestring, with the whole intellectual atmosphere against him, standing totally alone and establishing an institution, that was an enormously crucial, concrete example of what can be done."

Elsewhere in the same interview, she said: "And in this respect, and for the record, Barbara, I think that the man who saved my life in this period [the post-*Atlas Shrugged* period] was, of course, Nathan, because it was conversations with him and his sense of the culture, his understanding, that helped me to make up my mind and to clarify things; otherwise I must say I was almost paralyzed, above everything else by disgust and contempt... If I feel contempt for the whole culture, it doesn't make sense to even want to write... And it's only Nathan that kept a steady point in a Hegelian [i.e., chaotic, contradictory, unintelligible] universe, in the sense that he could judge the culture and the situation much better than I could at that time."

As to Mr. Schwartz, Miss Rand is aware that he left a highly lucrative business of his own in Canada, at great financial loss to himself, when he came to New York over five years ago for the purpose of studying Objectivism and working in *The Objectivist* movement. Mr. Schwartz is a superbly able executive, and the contribution he made to the growth of NBI and *The Objectivist* is enormous. (Miss Rand will be the beneficiary of his work for many years to come—indeed, for as long as there is an Objectivist.) Yet his combined salary as Administrative Director of NBI and Business Manager of *The Objectivist*, was approximately one-quarter of what he had earned per year in Canada. For Miss Rand to attempt to implicate him in her charges against Mr. Branden and me—to suggest that he has been motivated by improper financial considerations—is worse than disgraceful.

Throughout this whole period, Mr. Schwartz has been motivated by the passionately-conscientious desire to do whatever was just and reasonable in relation to all the parties involved in the dispute. His integrity deserved a better reward from Miss Rand.

There are certain extraordinary and shocking psychological aspects of this conflict with Miss Rand, about which I want to comment briefly. I refer to the quality of what can only be called religious mania which characterizes

the behavior of many of Miss Rand's supporters.

NBI students who are unwilling to accept the validity of Miss Rand's position in this dispute (either because they challenge the validity of her arguments or because they do not believe enough evidence has been made available to justify a judgment on their part) find themselves under the most violent attack at the hands of their friends, who are persuaded that there can be only one side to the story, Ayn Rand's side, and that anyone who inquires further is thereby proven to be immoral. We are obliged to inform students who are either neutral or who express sympathy with our position, that they will be subjected to ostracism and to every kind of ugly pressure that can be brought to bear on them by Miss Rand's partisans.

The quality of religious mania to which I refer is perhaps best expressed in a letter we received recently, written by a student of Objectivism. The letter consisted of two sentences: "May the Lord have mercy on your soul. I will not!"

It is as though Miss Rand's supporters are whipping themselves up into some sort of moral frenzy. When the fit passes, I can only wonder how they will evaluate their behavior during this period.

As verification of the ugly and tragic irrationality now so much in evidence, I submit the following conversational exchange. Shortly after my own break with Miss Rand, I asked one of the people who had been at the meeting of September 3 which I had refused to attend: "Is there anyone who attended that meeting who actually believes that I am a monster?" The answer was: "No." I asked: "Is there anyone who attended that meeting who is not now saying that I am a monster?" After a moment's silence, the answer was: "No."

From a reading of her article, there can be no question that Miss Rand intends to do the maximum damage of which she is capable to Mr. Branden's reputation. During the last weeks of my relationship with her, this intention became more and more apparent—and, as I have indicated, was crucial in my own disillusionment with her.

Throughout her life and career, Ayn Rand has been the passionate champion of human ability. Even now, as I write these words, I find it almost impossible to accept the inescapable fact that there are considerations to which Miss Rand is willing to subordinate that loyalty. But I have read what she has written about Mr. Branden in her article.

Here is what she said about him in one of our tape-recorded interviews:

"As to Nathan, I thought he was a genius from the first evening. And I really mean genius. In that sense, I have never pronounced that judgment on someone I know, not that immediately, not that objectively... From intelligence alone, it's not yet enough for the title genius. You know what's necessary there? It's a creative intelligence, it has to be an initiating intelligence, not merely philosophical or abstract or quick to understand or being able to deal with abstractions... When you conclude that someone is really a genius, it's total independence, the first hand look of a creative mind, a mind that is constantly active on its own power."

Postscript: We have learned that Miss Rand has now chosen to dispute Mr. Branden's right to the use of his articles published in *The Objectivist*. She has set, as the price of her cooperation in this matter, a number of conditions, chief among which are the following. We must guarantee not to initiate an action for libel against her; and we must further guarantee not to defend ourselves against the charges made in her article, that is, to make no statement or comment of any kind, oral or written, about the article.

We have rejected Miss Rand's conditions.

(October 21, 1968)

The preparation and distribution of this statement (which is being sent to all subscribers to The Objectivist) has involved considerable personal expense. We cannot guarantee that we will be able to issue further statements, should Miss Rand choose to continue her attacks against us in The Objectivist. Our silence should not be construed as acquiescence.