

## Appendix A

# The Ayn Rand Problem

This appendix is intended to understand Ayn Rand's personal shortcomings in order to better appreciate Objectivism, the importance of humility and open communication (versus arrogance), and the importance of respecting general rules (setting boundaries) in personal relationships. It is not meant to disparage Objectivism by criticizing the personal choices of its founder.

OBJECTIVIST PHILOSOPHY HOLDS that individuals can understand the world and live best through the pursuit of reason-based, peaceful activities. Objectivism is also an intellectual tool for historians (such as the present writer) to elucidate causality and understand success and failure in the social world. The demise of seemingly invulnerable business titans can be comprehended in terms of second-hand strategies and philosophic fraud (reality falsification), not only politics-over-market strategies. The same framework can be used to interpret individual and organizational failure within the Objectivist movement itself, in which successes led to arrogance, and arrogance led to failure, deceit, and disaster.

Objectivism as a thriving, popular intellectual and practical framework has been held back by its founder in various ways. As mentioned in chapter 3, Ayn Rand sometimes couched her views in counterproductive rhetoric that her critics could exploit in sound-bite denunciations. Her unusual definitions and usage of the words *selfishness* and *altruism* were problematic, allowing critics to portray Objectivism as cold and heartless rather than as a philosophy for rational, productive living. Rand also defined and used the terms *faith* and *mysticism*, *egoism* and *sacrifice*, *pride* and *humility*, and *mercy* and *pity* unconventionally. But this was more of a strategic problem for Rand than an intellectual one, for her critics are under an obligation to understand and explain terms as they are defined and meant by their author.

Far more important, Rand made personal choices that caused a crisis in her life, the lives of some of her closest associates, and the entire Objectivist

movement. This outcome could have been avoided by rational thinking, something that Rand's philosophy championed in so many other ways. Walking the talk in this case would have avoided much personal anguish, for as Scott Peck has written, "Mental health is an ongoing process of dedication to reality at all costs."

Rand's writings and philosophy point toward a strong inward-out self: the self-sufficient person. Yet she herself suffered from personal insecurities and a high need for approbation, however much she might have tried to deny or hide it. She attracted an inner circle of admirers and students who were psychologically whipped into a cult of obedience to her. But this was part of something else that came to engulf Rand: a relationship addiction, called *codependency* in the mental health literature, with her protégé-turned-lover Nathaniel Branden. Rand placed her happiness, her self-esteem, in the hands of another person. Like a narcotic, Rand's arrangement worked for a while. But the situation became less and less sustainable over time, leading Rand and Branden to dodge realities in their own ways to avoid a great crash. Predictably, such evasion would make the final result worse, not better.

Such a disaster is hardly unique. Mental falsification from emotional dependency is also the story of Ken Lay, who clung to a preferred reality that stemmed from his own personal insecurities. His Enron was different from the real Enron, just as Rand's dreamt relationship with Branden became different from the real one. In these cases (and many others, from other walks of life), the dichotomy brings turmoil—or worse. For as Rand said in *Atlas Shrugged* (speaking through her hero, John Galt): "Reality is not to be wiped out, it will merely wipe out the wiper." It did wipe out Ken Lay—reputationally, emotionally, and physically. And it brought the "goddess of reason," Ayn Rand, to her knees.

Like the missteps that brought down Enron, the codependency (or love addiction) that engulfed Rand started small and spun out of control. It was a slippery slope that began by violating what Adam Smith called "a sacred regard to general rules." It was heart over head, forgetting Samuel Smiles's admonition that a person "must drill his desires, and keep them under subjection" to avoid becoming "the sport of passion and impulse."

Also, as in the case of Enron, Branden and Rand made no midcourse corrections but engaged in vivid imagining, role playing, and mutual deceit in an attempt to get to a fanciful *other side*. The two embarked on an unsustainable path, enjoyed an Enronish boom, prolonged an artificial situation, and suffered a painful crash. The real tragedy was not that their peculiar Objectivist (or anti-Objectivist) experiment ended badly but that it started wonderfully. In other words, the affair should not have begun, and once begun, it should have ended quickly, with contrition.

Because Rand created and largely controlled the spread of Objectivism, her persona became almost as important as the philosophy itself—a dangerous development for any movement in which ideas must trump personalities. (Ken Lay's image as the buoyant Mr. Enron would have a similar, insidious

effect.) Her death in 1982 left Objectivism to stand on its own, although a wing of her supporters has continued to equate not only Rand's ideas but also her *actions* with Objectivism. Such idolatry aside, fully evaluating Rand's philosophy requires understanding and abstracting from Ayn Rand's personal shortcomings—then applying that understanding and those abstractions to the core subject of our trilogy.

## The Affair/Addiction

Objectivism as an organized intellectual movement was ruptured in 1968 by the acrimonious split between Ayn Rand and her heir apparent, Nathaniel Branden. At the time, he headed the 10-year-old Nathaniel Branden Institute (NBI), which with Rand's consent and participation offered courses in Objectivism in 80 cities around the United States. Her sudden, shocking repudiation of Branden ended the enterprise, to the bewilderment of thousands of serious students of Objectivism. (The NBI mailing list at the time had grown to 80,000 names—"all people who had attended lectures, subscribed to the magazines, etc.")

The complete, acrimonious break resulted from a conflict between reason and emotion in a real-world, intimate relationship, one that turned out quite differently from Rand's fictionalized ideal. Rand, married to Frank O'Connor, and Nathaniel, married to Barbara Branden (né Weidman), began having an affair in 1954, which was during the writing of *Atlas Shrugged*. At this time, Nathaniel was an impetuous 24 and Rand a mature (but needy) 49.

The affair began with emotional intimacy between the two in front of their spouses. Then, with a full explanation to their (reluctant) spouses, Ayn and Nathaniel began a platonic affair, scheduling time together when husband Frank would leave Rand's apartment so that she and the visiting Nathaniel could be alone. Five months later, in January 1955—again, with an announcement to the spouses—a physical affair started. So began, in Barbara Branden's words, "the nightmare that was to last for fourteen years, and was finally to smash many hundreds of lives."

Ayn and Nathaniel rationalized their intimacy as reason- and reality-based, corresponding to the highest moral values of love between a man and a woman. Both emphasized to Frank and Barbara that they loved their marriage partners just as before. Rand also stated that because of their 25-year age difference, the physical part would last only a year or so. But the affair engendered, in whole or in part, anxiety attacks for Barbara, a marginalization of and possible alcohol abuse by Frank, codependency and self-described "torture" for Rand, and a lifestyle of deceit and agony for Nathaniel.

All four, sworn to secrecy about the affair, engaged in a widening web of lies to keep the situation from others. Recalled Nathaniel:

Earlier, there had been the lie to Barbara and Frank that 'nothing will change,' and now we were lying to everyone in our circle. But, of course, *lie* was a word we never used. We didn't have to. We had a philosophical explanation for everything.

Rand reputedly said, “Well, I don’t like it either, but reality is reality,” as though her desires were supreme and deceit simply an unfortunate byproduct. After all, wasn’t such secrecy keeping up appearances in violation of a tenet of Objectivism?

The affair’s honeymoon period lasted through the completion of *Atlas Shrugged* in 1957. The affair proved distracting to the book’s completion, however, as Rand habitually spent hour after intoxicating hour with her young lover in deep emotional conversations and physical intimacy. (The 60-page speech of John Galt climaxing the book took two years to complete.) Rand was attempting to live a love scene from one of her novels, Barbara would later realize.

The affair cooled when Rand grew despondent at the negative critical reaction that greeted the publication of *Atlas Shrugged*. Collectivists of all stripes panned the book, as might be expected. But Rand’s secular case for reason, individualism, and capitalism made enemies among conservatives as well. The worst conservative attack came in William F. Buckley’s fortnightly magazine, *National Review*, when reviewer Whittaker Chambers slammed Rand’s “mountain of words” as “remarkably silly” and “preposterous.” Behind the book’s free-enterprise message was a totalitarian psychology, Chambers claimed. Randian man was likened to Marxian Man, a Big Brother through the back door. “From almost any page of *Atlas Shrugged*, a voice can be heard, from painful necessity, commanding: ‘To a gas chamber—go!’”

Rand viewed life grimly in this period. “The bitterness that had always been part of her makeup was becoming more pronounced,” Nathaniel noticed. “She was impatient, irritable, angry, and quick to condemn—Frank, me, Barbara, Leonard [Peikoff], anyone in the Collective who said or did anything even slightly ambiguous or questionable.” The physical part of the affair became less intense and stopped altogether, whereas the emotional side became erratic. Nathaniel, age 29, found himself in a situation in which he had ceased to be either “a lover to Ayn or a husband to Barbara.” Rand, Ms. Objectivism, meanwhile, had emotionally slipped to the point that her self-esteem was based on another person.

## The Break

Nathaniel was willing and able to continue the emotional side of his affair with the person who remained “the rock of my life.” He also admitted to having, at least in his relaxed moments, “a kind of love for Ayn, at times very intense, and I showed this plainly.” And given the big business that NBI had become, Branden was also in an employee relationship with Rand, because her endorsement propelled the enterprise.

A major disconnect emerged in 1963 when Rand, feeling more like her old self, asked Nathaniel to resume the sexual side of their relationship—and really to resume the emotional/physical oneness of before. But the 58-year-old was going in just the opposite direction from her 33-year-old intimate. Aging and isolated, Rand looked to Nathaniel as her primary joy and bedrock for the

future, her Galt-like Atlas. She feared anything less than a full return to the affair's former glory—despite the fact that much had changed in the relationship in the past six years. And both still had their own spouses, who, by definition, were supposed to preclude such otherness.

Nathaniel, in fact, was no longer attracted to his mentor as a lover. Part of this was because of their ever-more-pronounced physical divergence and the years of enduring Rand's moodiness. But the other part was the inevitable that now happened: 34-year-old Nathaniel found a true love. The object of his affection, and soon his lover, was one of his Objectivist students, a fashion model 10 years his junior.

Patrecia Gullison, who herself had recently gotten married, was more than simply beautiful. According to Barbara Branden, she possessed "an unusual emotional spontaneity and openness and, at times, a startling acute sensitivity." Patrecia loved Nathaniel immensely—and did not place endless demands on him as did Rand. Before long, the love-starved, conflicted Nathaniel was in a new passionate affair. For her part, Barbara began having an affair with Nathaniel's understanding but not his formal consent.

Thus, any desire by Nathaniel for a physical relationship with Rand was out of the question. Furthermore, Patrecia meant that the emotional oneness with Rand was over too.

But rather than own up to his feelings and set boundaries on the relationship, even at this late date, Nathaniel made excuses to try to placate Rand. This was not deceit for its own sake. It was ends-justifies-the-means pragmatism to try to give Rand enough of what she needed and preserve what he did like about and need from their relationship. The truth, he feared, would devastate their personal and business relationship (as in fact it did).

Rand by this time was classically codependent. To her, it was all or nothing—and had to be all. Her husband, Frank, hardly existed in her Nathaniel-centric world, and her relationship with him predictably suffered. Insecurities abounding, Rand increasingly came to view her world through Nathaniel rather than, as a mentally healthy person would, through herself.

With Nathaniel inventing a reality in an increasingly desperate attempt to allow Rand to have hers, the two were engaging in endless "psycho-epistemological" sessions by late 1967.<sup>1</sup> Rand—not getting logical explanations

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1. Rand's role as psychotherapist to Branden multiply violated the rules by which clinical psychologists now practice. The therapist should not have any intimate relationship with the client, yet Nathaniel was her lover and employee. A therapist must be in a position to be able to recommend ending the affair—something that Rand was determined not to do. Professional guidelines set by the American Psychological Code of Ethics (available at [www.apa.org/ethics/code2002.pdf](http://www.apa.org/ethics/code2002.pdf)) caution against "harm" (Section 3.04), "multiple relationships" (3.05), "conflict of interest" (3.06), "exploitative relationships" (3.08), and "sexual intimacies with current therapy clients/patients" (10.05).

and fearing what she was not hearing—reached out to Barbara to cope—or to control Nathaniel. Frank O'Connor, passive by nature, and now in a dysfunctional husband/wife relationship, was powerless and a target of Rand's unhappiness.

Sensing Nathaniel's withdrawal, Rand became more and more desperate and controlling toward her intellectual heir, so-called. As she became more manipulative, Nathaniel became more evasive, knowing what would happen if Rand found out that she had been replaced by an intellectual inferior and physical superior. Nathaniel was trapped, for he knew that the truth would "result in the total collapse of the life I had built . . . the end of everything." This included any chance for NBI, which was taking the next step of getting a new address: the Empire State Building, Rand's beloved skyscraper and a grand statement of how far he and Objectivism had come.

The Brandens' marriage was irrevocably broken by Nathaniel's new love. When Nathaniel told Rand that he and Barbara were separated, she responded with the words he did not want to hear: "Now, darling, perhaps there will be a chance for us to be in love again." Nathaniel at this point wanted to be "the best and closest of friends."

In emotional turmoil, Rand wrote pained, furious entries in her personal diary. "I am *dead* in his mind already," she agonized. "I can't help this feeling. He makes me *feel dead*." She complained elsewhere about the relationship's "total chaos," and her personal "horror" at where things were going. "Why don't I break with him now?" she pleaded with herself. (She could not—addicts cannot, short of recovery.) For his part, Nathaniel admitted: "I knew that I was putting her through hell." But he did not mean to do it—he *hated* doing it. He was simply trying to engineer—somehow, somehow—a soft landing rather than a crash.

Rand feared reality! She knew that anything short of total love meant that Nathaniel would find, sooner or later, a true love, and that she, Rand, would be trapped in her own triangle. Indeed, for a time, a hypothetical "Miss X" became a major focus of their psychoepistemological sessions.

In summer 1968, three bomb blasts would demolish the relationship. The first was when a fearing, exhausted Nathaniel handed Rand a letter he wrote explaining why age was a barrier to a romantic relationship. Rand's diaries had been filled with suspicions that the physical was driving the emotional, and here was the dreaded confirmation. But the letter did not mention another reason: "her rage, her grandiosity . . . had long ago extinguished any romantic feelings I had for her." Also, his relationship with Patrecia was left unmentioned, though she was the very person who Rand finally now suspected of being Miss X.

Rand reacted harshly, realizing that the 14-year affair had to come to an end in abject failure. Emotionally sick from trying to control Nathaniel and to construct her desired reality, Rand screamed at Nathaniel, summoned Barbara, and went through a litany of what-to-do-nows. Nathaniel, his worst fears confirmed,

was now “passionately sorry” that he had not confessed to Rand years earlier. “But it was also the first step toward a return to reality and the rebuilding of my self-esteem.”

To cope, Rand returned to her diary. This time she wrote out a careful outline before proceeding with a 12,000-word entry—no doubt for posterity. (Indeed, she would not destroy her diary or stipulate that it not become public—which it finally did, in part, with James Valliant’s book, discussed later.)

Rand tried to contain her rage at “the worst traitor and the most immoral person I have ever met.” But she did rage at “the total hell (for me) and the terrible torture of the last five months of ‘psycho-epistemological therapy.’” Remarkably, there was no mention of Frank O’Connor as she reviewed and parsed the history of the affair and the rabbit-trail truth sessions. Rand described her “stunned awe at the magnitude of the horror involved in such a phenomenon—at such an ignominious end for what had been, potentially, such rare and authentic greatness,” as if the affair could and should have been a lifelong joy to all parties. She ended her entry with a soft touch—a last hope, really—that Branden could see the light, recover, to make at least part of her reality become real. “Well,” Rand wrote, “I wish him the best premises—in the name of the best within him.”

Rand decided to let Nathaniel continue at NBI. The two visited strictly on business matters and actually shared their feelings about the pain that both were going through from the relationship pullback. But Rand was still codependent. As she told her new best friend, Barbara Branden, in this period: “There is nothing for me to look forward to, nothing to hope for in reality. My life is over. He has forced me into a permanent ivory tower. He took away this earth.”

The second blast came when Nathaniel confessed that he was in love with Patrecia to an intermediary Rand had chosen to help them cope with the new reality. When Rand received this news, she broke into rage and announced that she would never speak to Nathaniel again. Rand sent him a set of demands for being able to continue at NBI. When he agreed to those, new demands followed.

Then the third and final blast came. Barbara, finding out that she was to replace Nathaniel as heir to Rand’s estate should Ayn outlive Frank O’Connor, could no longer continue to keep a deceit: the affair between Nathaniel and Patrecia. With Nathaniel’s permission, Barbara confessed this fact to Rand, whereupon—hell hath no fury. It suddenly became clear: Nathaniel had been lying systemically. It was all his fault, Rand now knew.

But Nathaniel had concocted an alternative reality to avoid devastating his mentor-turned-lover-turned-codependent—and to save the nonromantic side of their relationship, not to mention his business life. He certainly was not out to hurt Rand; he simply wanted the romantic switch turned off. Yet Rand was addicted—to him. She was *allowing* Nathaniel Branden to torture her rather than realistically concluding: *This is not romantic love, this can’t be romantic love, this should have never been romantic love, so let’s reground the relationship.* Branden’s deceit was about not bursting Rand’s bubble, for he wanted Rand as mentor

and dearest friend—and needed her endorsement for professional reasons and for the continued growth of the Objectivist movement itself.

Upon receiving the full story from Barbara, Rand immediately summoned Nathaniel, whereupon she verbally, emotionally, and physically attacked him in a final meeting that ended with her hiss:

If you have an ounce of morality left in you, an ounce of psychological health, you'll be impotent for the next twenty years! And if you achieve any potency sooner, you'll know it's a sign of still worse moral degradation!

Nathaniel may have been a pitiful liar and hypocrite, but Rand was a sick codependent who had put her happiness in another's hands and got crushed.

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NBI was dissolved, and Nathaniel moved from New York City to California to begin life anew with Patrecia, who became his second wife in 1969. Rand, with all her influence and through her remaining intimates, conducted a scorched-earth policy in an attempt to discredit and otherwise ruin Nathaniel. Rand even would expunge references to Branden's work when her original articles were reprinted—as if his intellectual contributions to Objectivism were now null and void.

Nathaniel had Patrecia and little else; Ayn had Frank and a lot. It was time for both to lick codependency, for such “recovery is when fun becomes fun, love becomes love, and life becomes worth living.”

Rand may never have recovered, however, for recovery requires coming to grips with the reasons for the addiction—owning up to one's insecurities and recognizing the inadequacies in one's other relationships—and accepting responsibility. But Rand, viewing herself as the exemplar of what people should be, could not admit that the affair had been wrong *in principle*. And so to her last breath, she saw herself as a victim of the other party in the codependency and thus was unable to understand, forgive, and forget—or really recover.

Rand explained the sudden, stunning break—as stunning as the Enron collapse was in a different context—by resorting to half-truths, a method she philosophically condemned elsewhere as a “very vicious form of lying.” Rand would never own up to the circumstances leading to the split, personally or publicly, placing all blame on others. She was *in denial*, in the vernacular of addiction science, as much as Nathaniel Branden himself can be blamed for his bad choices and tar-baby deceit.

The split between the Brandens and Rand was part of a pattern. Many in Rand's inner circle suffered from “paralyzing alienation.” Barbara recollected how during that time, “a philosophy that exalted individualism and joy was becoming, in practice, a set of dreary duties and a source of agonized emotional repression. A philosophy that was a mighty hymn to the possibilities of human life was becoming, in practice, a dirge.”

Some left Rand's inner circle, but others could not, owing to “a deadly mixture of idealism and a vulnerability to guilt.” One of the few survivors was



Leonard Peikoff, who became heir to Rand's estate and founded the Ayn Rand Institute (ARI) in 1985. ARI not only is dedicated to the veracity of Rand's writings in toto but also defends Rand's personal life as consonant with Objectivism. It is as if the moral perfection of Rand is necessary for Objectivism, something which it is clearly not.

## Relationship Addiction (Codependency)

Codependency, or relationship addiction, is defined by the National Mental Health Association (NMHA) as a "learned behavior . . . that affects an individual's ability to have a healthy, mutually satisfying relationship." The codependent cannot emotionally disentangle from a "one-sided, emotionally destructive and/or abusive" relationship. Misplaced caretaking for the partner leaves the codependent "feeling choiceless and helpless in the relationship," yet the codependent is "unable to break away from the cycle of behavior that causes it."

Codependency is "a disease of lost selfhood," a "dysfunction . . . from focusing on the needs and behavior of others." It also has been called "the addiction to looking elsewhere." The values and practices characteristic of codependency run contrary to the self-reliance that is taught by Objectivism. Melody Beattie begins her book *Codependent No More: How to Stop Controlling Others and Start Caring for Yourself* with an Objectivist-like, commonsense quotation (from Agnes Repplier): "It is not easy to find happiness in ourselves, and it is not possible to find it elsewhere."

*Why couldn't Ayn Rand find happiness in herself or at least in her own husband, Frank O'Connor? Did Rand's depression and deep-rooted insecurities have a physiological basis? Was it due to her prior drug usage (Dexamyl, a combined amphetamine and barbiturate)? Could today's antidepressants have allowed her to be more satisfied with her accomplishments and more optimistic about her future—and thus have a sustainable relationship with Nathaniel Branden and her own husband? These questions can only be raised, not answered.*

Scarcely understood in Rand's time, codependency has become a well-studied emotional disorder. Rand (and Nathaniel) exhibited its classic behavioral characteristics, described in part by NMHA as:

- An exaggerated sense of responsibility for the actions of others . . .
- A compelling need to control others . . .
- Fear of being abandoned or alone . . .
- Rigidity/difficulty adjusting to change
- Problems with intimacy/boundaries
- Chronic anger
- Lying/dishonesty

- Poor communications
- Difficulty making decisions

Another descriptive can be added to these: *chronic depression*. And indeed, Rand was in such a state, and Nathaniel was not far behind.

There were many telltale signs of codependency in their relationship. Rand heaped increasing praise upon Nathaniel, even telling him that she could not survive without him. She dedicated *Atlas Shrugged* to him in addition to her husband—then used the inscription against Nathaniel as if it were a marriage bond. Interminable discussions between the two included statements from her that ranged from inordinate praise to devilish threats (Rand’s own form of deceit, or a deceit fighting Nathaniel’s deceit):

- “If anything goes permanently wrong between us, I’m finished. Everything is finished. You’re my lifeline to the world and to any chance at happiness I’m ever going to have.”
- “The man to whom I dedicated *Atlas Shrugged* would never want anything less than me! I don’t care if I’m ninety years old and in a wheelchair.”
- “You [want] a personal life away from me? . . . You have no right to casual friendships, no right to vacations, no right to sex with some inferior woman!”

Rand was unable to see the reality she did not like. “Ayn’s blindness on some issues is incredible,” Barbara remarked to Nathaniel in the period right before the breakup, continuing: “You’ve got to find a way to help her see the truth. A way that won’t devastate her. Not that Ayn would ever admit to being devastated. Poor Ayn. Poor Nathan.”

Codependency brings out the worst in the afflicted. Nathaniel remembers Rand’s “near paranoia, violent temper, and general blindness to any context but her own.” He was engulfed in his own hell, lacking any perceived way of escape without dramatic consequences. “The only thing worse than feeling trapped in a nightmare,” he summarized, “is forbidding oneself to know that one feels trapped in a nightmare.”

Despite her own teachings on the primacy of self-reliance and personal responsibility for one’s own happiness, Rand put herself into an untenable situation with the affair. She placed her emotional state and happiness in the hands of another person—and not her husband at that. Nathaniel himself remarked “how disastrous it was to allow my self-esteem to become involved with my relationship with Ayn.”

The psychological explanation of codependency is not mentioned once in James Valliant’s 400-page attempted exoneration of Rand, *The Passion of Ayn Rand’s Critics*, based in part on newly released entries from Ayn Rand’s personal diary. (A full release of Rand’s diaries has not been made, which will be necessary to further understand the dysfunctional relationship under review.) Valliant casts

blame almost entirely on Nathaniel—with some reserved for Barbara Branden. In Valliant's interpretation, Rand was "a romantic soul [who was] cruelly manipulated by a man to whom she had given her highest trust and affection." The author goes so far as to conclude at the end of the book that "[Nathaniel] Branden's psychology shows a striking similarity to the *psychology of a rapist*."

Valliant's black-and-white reinterpretation is problematic. Although it is possible that Nathaniel and even Barbara have misconstrued parts of the story with their recollections, Valliant throws the baby out with the bathwater to suggest that their memoirs each are "monuments of dishonesty on a scale so profound as to literally render them valueless as historical documents."

But given the facts (marital circumstances, age difference, etc.) and Rand's mental makeup, was an emotional and physical affair between Nathaniel and Ayn really sustainable? Valliant admits: "Certainly, the average contemporary husband would find such a situation [as between Ayn and Nathaniel] intolerable." He also shares Rand's answer to the question once posed to her in public about whether a person can be romantically in love with two people at the same time. Rand answered (before the blowup when, *presumably*, she was in love with Frank O'Connor): "It's a project that only giants can handle." Thus, she viewed herself as a *giant*, one who could live life by a set of rules different from everyone else's, different from the nongiants' rules. Still, Rand shuddered at the prospect that Nathaniel would find his own love, one that could require a triangle where she was not at the apex.

If Rand had not drifted into codependence but was emotionally strong enough to end the physical side of the relationship—and thus the emotional intimacy that went with it—Nathaniel's own behavior would have been far less evasive and dishonest than it turned out to be. A much healthier relationship, and certainly greater productivity and happiness, could have resulted from setting emotional and physical boundaries. Sadly, Frank O'Connor was not what Ayn could accept, at least after she entered into an emotional/physical oneness with her protégé.

## Lessons

Nathaniel Branden possessed personality flaws and has regretted his authoritarian, insensitive years at the feet of Ayn Rand. Nathaniel could have and should have ended the affair much sooner, as Rand should have. Without the affair, Rand surely would have been more productive and less controlling, although the latter was apparently a deep-seated trait that might have still manifested itself.

As it turned out, the affair brought out the very worst in Ayn Rand—as it did in Nathaniel Branden. "The luckiest beneficiaries of her work are the people who read her and never see her, never meet her, never have any reason to deal with her in person," Nathaniel concluded from the ordeal. "Then they get the best of what she really was."

Nathaniel interpreted Rand's blind spot as follows: "If you have created a new intellectual system—or new in important respects—which rightly or wrongly you perceive as a highly integrated structure, the desire to preserve it in its totally undiluted form is as understandable as it is unrealistic." But Rand had deep-seated insecurities that contributed to her absolutist, controlling nature.

Another of Rand's closest and best students also saw the situation more clearly after leaving Rand's inner circle. The linkage between the bad and the good in Rand's character led Barbara Branden to conclude:

One must wonder if the dogmatic absolutism of her certainty, the blinding conviction of her own rectitude and her special place in the world, the callousness of her intolerance for opinions that were not hers, the unwavering assurances that she was alone to know the truth and that others must seek it from her—the eyes that looked neither to the left nor to the right, but only at the path ahead—the savage innocence of her personality was not the fuel for the height of achievement she attained.

She goes on to ask:

Would a lesser conviction have made it possible? The unyielding intransigence distorts the life and corrupts the personality of the innovator. But is it a tragic flaw—or is it, in the end, when one pushes past the rubble and the pain, neither tragic nor a flaw?

But, again, it did not have to be this way. A mentor/business relationship would have brought out the best (instead of the worst) in the principals, their loved ones, and their friends. This would have been a godsend to the whole Objectivist movement compared to what actually transpired.

Adam Smith once contrasted the brilliant ideas of Voltaire with his erratic personal behavior. Voltaire was one of a genre of great thinkers who, said Smith, "distinguished themselves by the most improper and even insolent contempt of all the ordinary decorums of life and conversation." Smith added, "They have thereby set the most pernicious example for those who wish to resemble them, and who too often content themselves with imitating their follies, without even attempting to attain their perfections."

The Ayn Rand problem retarded the intellectual development of Objectivism in her lifetime. Today, the split reverberates between the orthodox Ayn Rand Institute, founded three years after Rand's death, and a breakaway organization, the Objectivist Center (now the Atlas Society), which was founded as a "more open, tolerant, and independent alternative to orthodoxy."

The existence of different Rand-influenced organizations—small tent and big tent, closed philosophy and open philosophy—indicates that Objectivism is outgrowing its founder's persona. The Ayn Rand problem will continue to recede as the personalities of Objectivism's past give way to the ideas of Objectivism itself, although the lessons of the whole affair and the crisis of 1968 should never be forgotten.