

The Legacy of Nathaniel Branden

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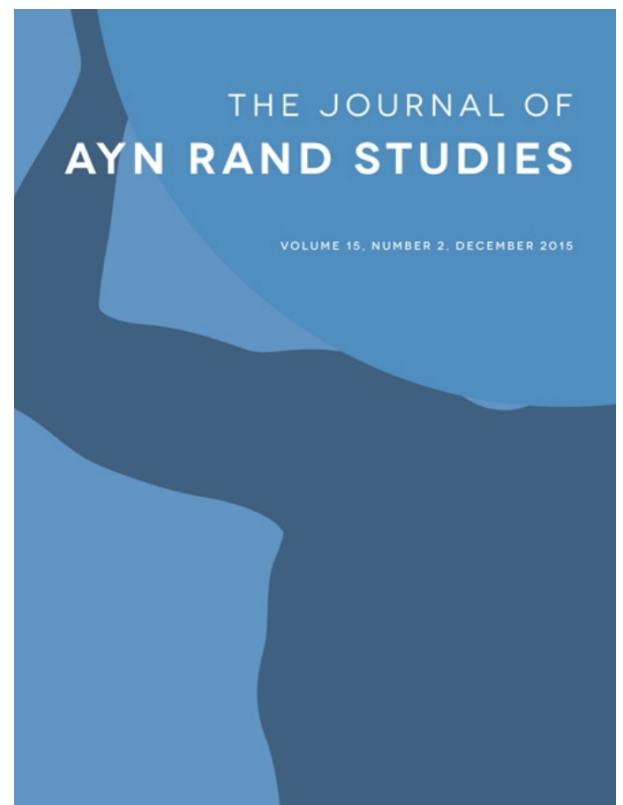
Topics: *Objectivism, Ayn Rand's Life*

The idea for a symposium on the life and thought of Nathaniel Branden came in 2012, two years before Branden's death. Branden himself knew about and approved of the symposium but never saw it completed before he passed away.

The editorial board of The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies conceived of this symposium as a wide-ranging, probing treatment of Branden's vast and complex career, not just of his years with Ayn Rand. The response from potential contributors exceeded their expectations; they were inundated with submissions. What was supposed to be one volume became two. The once-slender manuscript grew to over 300 pages bearing the title "Nathaniel Branden: His Work and Legacy." This is the first such work of its kind to assess Branden as a central figure in both philosophy and applied psychology in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Although the contributors to this collection come from various disciplines and represent different, sometimes incompatible positions, the editors received no contributions from the more "fundamentalist" Objectivists, and none from scholars associated with the Ayn Rand Institute (ARI). The editors emphasize this fact in their prologue not to display resentment or animus, it seems, but as a sort of disclaimer—and explanation for the largely positive tone that characterizes much of the content here.

I have striven for impartiality regarding the Branden-Rand split and have, I think, made a good-faith effort to maintain the critical detachment necessary to write searchingly and decisively about this collection without sacrificing scholarly rigor or causing needless



offense to students of Branden or Rand.

SECTION I

Section I of the collection is devoted to the so-called “Rand Years” of Branden’s career. It contains essays by Duncan Scott and Susan Love Brown and the reproduction of a lecture and question-answer session by Branden himself.

Scott, a filmmaker, tells the “truly epic story” of the improbable rise of the Objectivist movement that is attributable in part to Branden’s efforts. Scott met Branden but did not know him well. Filming Branden in 2003 for the Objectivist History Project, however, led him to realize Branden’s seminal role in the proliferation of Objectivism.



Scott credits Branden with popularizing Rand’s work and institutionalizing her lecture series. “The creation of a philosophy and the creation of a philosophical movement,” he says, “are not one and the same.” Undoubtedly Rand achieved the former on her own, but Branden is largely responsible for the latter, having responded to Rand’s fan mail, planned her events, established a newsletter in her honor, and spread her message across the globe to eager students and curious minds. These labors not only increased Rand’s following, but also lifted her spirits. Discouraged by negative reviews of her work, she began, with Branden’s help, to realize the extent of the impact her novels were having.

Branden popularized Rand as a writer of nonfiction and encouraged her to write about “racism as biological collectivism, totally incompatible with individualist philosophy”—a position that drew needed attention during the height of the Civil Rights Era. Scott succeeds in showing that

Branden’s singular devotion to Rand during this period made him something of a publicist for, not just a disciple of, her work. He created vehicles for driving her ideas to vast audiences and made possible the formation of groups devoted to her philosophy. Without him, Rand may not have become the towering figure she is today.

In my next installment, I will cover Susan Love Brown's piece on Branden's sexuality. Until then, I look forward to a lively discussion of the essays and my analysis online.

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