

Comments on Jennifer Burns's *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right*

by Edwin A. Locke

Let me begin by acknowledging that Burns's book contains many correct statements about events in Ayn Rand's life (based on my knowledge), including her great popularity as a speaker and guest on TV shows. On pages 198–199 Burns describes what Ayn Rand's philosophy means to people and they are two of the best pages in the book. There are some accurate passages about her political philosophy (though not its roots) and her impact on people on pages 200–213. Nevertheless, as I will show, the book is fundamentally flawed and the general tenor is negative.

The most critical errors Burns is guilty of are superficiality and misrepresentation, specifically the failure to understand and present the essentials of Ayn Rand's total philosophy as an integrated whole. More fundamentally, Burns does not really take ideas seriously. A recurring theme of the book amounts to: "Why couldn't Rand be less rigid, less focused on consistency and just get along with people?" (examples are given below). Most people's philosophies are a random collection of bromides, half-digested ideas and unanalyzed emotions. However, this is not true of Ayn Rand. You cannot understand her at all without understanding her philosophy. She is her philosophy—she meant it and lived it.

Burns's stated theme is Ayn Rand's political philosophy and its influence. This is a legitimate though dubious theme in that Ayn Rand made it quite clear that politics is not a primary and that you cannot formulate a rational political philosophy without a rational metaphysics, epistemology and ethics. Burns makes no attempt to systematically lay this groundwork. For example, on page 212 she points out that Ayn Rand's philosophy prohibited the initiation of physical force but does not say why. Further, Burns shows repeatedly that she does not really understand Ayn Rand's novels—novels which reflect her philosophy.

Now for concrete examples. (I will not point out every problem with the book—only highlights.) I will proceed chronologically, citing the relevant page numbers.

1. As Robert Mayhew points out in his book review (*The Objective Standard*, Winter 2009–2010), Burns is a determinist and claims Ayn Rand's philosophy “sprang from her early life experiences in Communist Russia . . .” (p. 2). Even if one agreed with the fallacy of determinism, this claim makes no sense. Tens of millions of people suffered under Communism and none of them came up with a new philosophy. Why did the environment determine only one person? And how did the environment create this particular philosophy? In the same paragraph, Burns writes: “What Rand confronted in her work was a basic human dilemma: the failure of good intentions” (p. 3). If we can assume Burns is referring here to Russian Communism, implying that totalitarian mass murderers had good intentions, this says nothing about Ayn

Rand, but it is a devastating indictment of Burns herself. On the same page Burns writes, “Rand advanced a deeply negative portrait of government action.” But Burns does not bother to explain here which types of government actions Ayn Rand objects to, which types she would approve of, or why.

2. p. 5: Burns writes, “The most obvious contradiction [in Ayn Rand and her work] lies on the surface: Rand was a rationalist philosopher who wrote romantic fiction. For all her fealty to reason, Rand was a woman subject to powerful, even overwhelming emotions.” If Burns had bothered to study Ayn Rand’s ideas even a little, she would have readily discovered that Ayn Rand’s identification of the relationship between reason and emotion (that emotions stems from subconscious ideas) was one of the most important philosophical and psychological discoveries of the last 2000 years. Ayn Rand showed how to *integrate* reason and emotion. (I will come back to this issue later in response to Burns’s later comments on emotion.) On the same page Burns makes arbitrary assertions about why Ayn Rand formulated a philosophy and why she wrote fiction. Had Burns done her homework she could have easily discovered Ayn Rand’s intent: “The motive and purpose of my writing is *the projection of an ideal man*” (*The Romantic Manifesto*, p.162). To do that Ayn Rand needed to first formulate a philosophy; she had to know what an ideal man was.

3. p. 6: “As a younger Rand might have predicted, a system [Objectivism] so oppressive to individual variety [variety is not defined] had not long to prosper.” Burns does not integrate this assertion with her own later admission that the sales of *Atlas Shrugged* were at record levels and that her influence was steadily increasing.
4. p. 11: Burns says Ayn Rand “escaped into French children’s magazines.” Ayn Rand’s love of (certain) fiction was not escapism but part of her search, even as a young girl, for interesting plots and the ideal man. This is explained clearly in Shoshana Milgram’s chapter (“Who Was John Galt? The Creation of Ayn Rand’s Ultimate Ideal Man”) in Robert Mayhew’s edited book *Essays on Ayn Rand’s “Atlas Shrugged”* (which book Burns must have read because she mentions it in her Notes).
5. p. 16: Burns cites a quote from a cousin of Ayn Rand’s who said: Nietzsche “beat you to all your ideas.” But Burns does not mention here that the claim was not true. Even later in the book Burns indicates she does not get it (p. 303–4, Note 4). Ayn Rand’s view of Nietzsche was made clear in her introduction to the 25th anniversary edition of *The Fountainhead*. For a time when she was younger she admired Nietzsche, but as she developed her own philosophy, she came to totally reject Nietzsche’s philosophy, because was it mystical and irrational—the complete antithesis of her own philosophy. She admired certain quotes from Nietzsche such as “the noble soul has reverence

for itself.” Ironically, such a quote could not even be rationally defended without Ayn Rand’s philosophy at its base. Nietzsche’s alleged individualism had nothing in common with Ayn Rand’s which was based on reason. Nietzsche may have called for a new morality, but he did not provide one. Ayn Rand did.

6. p. 22: Burns discusses Ayn Rand’s rejection by a Russian boy named Levy and concludes: “To desire was to need, and Rand wanted to need nobody.” Bad writing aside, this is an equivocation about the meaning of need. Ayn Rand argued that to have a successful romantic relationship, you need self-esteem—you need to have a self (see *The Fountainhead* and Galt’s speech). Others cannot not fill the void of zero self-esteem for you. But, given that base, Ayn Rand certainly believed strongly in romantic love (and friendship)—as her life and her novels clearly demonstrated. For example, Howard Roark says to Dominique in *The Fountainhead* (p. 376), “I’ve given you, not my sacrifice or my pity, but my ego and my naked need.” Ayn Rand’s long and loving relationship with her husband has been well documented (e.g., see Mary Ann and Charles Sures’ *Facets of Ayn Rand*).
7. p. 42: In a very brief reference to Ayn Rand’s ethics, Burns writes that Ayn Rand exalted “a psychological mindset utterly divorced from anything outside the self.” This totally misstates Ayn Rand’s position. Taken literally, Burns’s view would detach the mind from reality which would be a state of psychosis.

What Ayn Rand held was that in every issue of one's life one should think for oneself and not sacrifice one's mind, one's judgment and one's life to others.

Thinking requires that one focus on reality, including the value of other people whom one deals with.

8. p. 52: Burns reports Ayn Rand going to a dinner where Frank Lloyd Wright was speaking and basically being spurned by Wright. Burns concludes that "Rand was simply another unknown hoping to cash in on his fame." It does not take very much knowledge of Ayn Rand to know that she would never try to cash in on someone else's fame. Only a second-hander would do this. What she felt for Wright, at the time, was admiration for his work and probably hoped to be acknowledged as an admirer and someone with common values. Incidentally, the footnote to this paragraph refers to the taped interviews with Ayn Rand which described the events of the dinner. But the footnote notation is put *after* Burns's concluding sentence, making it appear as though in the taped interviews Ayn Rand must have confessed to being a second-hander. This is deliberately misleading and is obviously designed to give a bad impression of Ayn Rand. Only much later in the book does Burns acknowledge that Wright did give Ayn Rand recognition for *The Fountainhead*. (See also Mike Berliner's *Letters of Ayn Rand*.)
9. p. 63: Burns says that Ayn Rand viewed capitalism as "the solution to all ills." Clearly, Burns is taking conventional literary license here, but again, it is a

careless formulation. What Burns should have said here is that Ayn Rand held that capitalism is the solution to poverty or, more broadly, the only means of large-scale wealth creation. (Of course, more fundamentally, Ayn Rand regarded it as the only moral economic system.) The closest thing to a solution to all ills would be her entire philosophy.

10. p. 84: Strangely, although Burns discusses *The Fountainhead* at some length, she never fully identifies its theme, which is: individualism and collectivism not in politics but in man's soul. She did note that the book was about individualism but the need to be more explicit is important in that Burns's own theme is political and *The Fountainhead* was not a political novel. To tie the book to her theme, Burns would have needed to explain the book's political implications.

11. p. 86: Burns does not understand the "rape" scene in *The Fountainhead*. (See also p. 264.) She noted Ayn Rand's comment that the rape was by "engraved invitation" and thus not real rape. (Burns wrongly views these two statements as conflicting.) What needs explaining, however, is why Dominique resisted Roark while at the same time wanting him. To understand this, one has to understand the character of Dominique. Though she admires greatness, Dominique suffers from the malevolent universe premise (the premise that the good has no chance in the world—this issue is discussed in *The Romantic*

Manifesto in relation to sense of life but not mentioned by Burns). Dominique wants to prevent herself from wanting anything. Yet, subconsciously she is drawn to Roark, and he knows it. But she fights him, because though she desperately wants him, she does not want to value him or anything else in the world. *Thus she is, at root, fighting against herself, i.e., her own desire.* She wants to lose this fight—and does. Disgracefully, Burns describes Roark as a “principled criminal.”

12. p. 87: Burns views *The Fountainhead* as projecting “vengeful scorn.” This is way off the mark. What the novel projects is conflict between a moral ideal and its antithesis, the first-hander and the second-hander (and, in Dominique’s case, a person with a malevolent universe premise). The second-handers are foils for Roark. Ayn Rand is scornful of them, but the tone of the book is positive. The stress is on Roark as an heroic figure—a figure who is determined to achieve his own values and who does not waste his time scorning others. Recall Roark’s reply to Toohey when Toohey asks Roark what Roark thinks of him. Roark’s reply is: “But I don’t think of you.”

13. p. 87: Burns writes, “For all her bluster, Rand’s ethics were rather anodyne.” (“anodyne” means pain-relieving or insipid.) Given that Ayn Rand revolutionized the field of ethics, rejected the entire Judeo-Christian moral code (altruism), replaced it with a totally unique approach to ethics—an ethical system of her own (rational egoism, based on life as the standard)--

and was fiercely hated for it by the intellectual establishment, this has to stand as perhaps the most bizarre and perversely ignorant statement in the whole book. Again, this shows that Burns does not understand Ayn Rand's philosophy at all. On page 88 Burns writes, "Rand was not the first thinker to criticize altruism." If she wasn't, Burns does not say who was. (Perhaps Nietzsche, but he was an irrationalist.) A quote from William Graham Sumner does not support her case. Furthermore, a useful critique would have to identify why altruism was wrong and include a rational alternative to altruism. What philosopher in history ever provided such? Aristotle tried to defend egoism, but only Ayn Rand fully validated it.

14. p. 89: Burns claims that Toohey's goal is "to benefit just one man" (obviously himself). It is true that Toohey sought power in order to establish collectivism, but if he succeeded, he did not intend to be a dictator but only one of the masses. He intended to serve the collective just like everyone else. (Ayn Rand also made it clear in the novel that power lust is simply another form of dependence.) Burns does not understand any of this.

15. p. 90: Burns describes *The Fountainhead* as "a strange book . . . moody, and feverish." No reasons are given for these assertions. In contrast, Burns presents quotes showing why people loved the book. Somehow readers failed to see the book in the snide way Burns did. No explanation for these conflicting views is given.

16. p. 94: Further revealing her lack of understanding of *The Fountainhead*, Burns writes, “Even as it promoted a new morality, politically the novel reaffirmed the wisdom of the old ways.” By the old ways—which Burns never defines—she seems to mean a time when there were fewer government controls over the economy. But as noted, *The Fountainhead* was not a political novel. Nor was Ayn Rand re-affirming the past since the United States has never had pure capitalism and no one has ever offered a moral defense of it. What *The Fountainhead* projected was an ideal man—by implication, the man of the future.

17. p. 97: The heading of Part II of Burns’s book is “From Novelist to Philosopher.” Again this is seriously off the mark. If Burns had studied Ayn Rand more carefully, she would have known that Ayn Rand’s literary goal was to present the ideal man (or woman). She recognized, unlike most, if not all, other writers, that to present an ideal you had to have a philosophy. Ayn Rand was philosophical from an early age. So her development was not one of going from novelist to philosopher, but rather of formulating her philosophy more clearly and in more detail as she wrote her novels. Her philosophy is at the base of all of her books. It was the full development of her philosophy that enabled her to characterize the heroes (and villains) in *Atlas Shrugged* and to formulate the book’s theme.

18. p. 124: Burns says that Ayn Rand, in her HUAC testimony, did not understand that the movie “*Song of Russia*” was not Communist propaganda, but American propaganda about a wartime ally.” This is a transparent equivocation. The movie was propaganda by Americans who were sympathetic to Communism.
19. p. 127: Describing an argument with Isabel Paterson, Burns says: “Though rigorously abstract, Rand’s discourse was in many ways aggressively anti-intellectual. She was uninterested in placing herself within the broader community of thinkers . . .” Again this shows that Burns did not understand Ayn Rand. She did not place herself in the broader community of thinkers (especially after numerous attempts to convince other intellectuals of her views), because she thought they were wrong (Aristotle partly excluded). And she always made her reasons for her disagreements known—as Burns’s book occasionally acknowledges. A correct statement would have been that Ayn Rand was *aggressively (i.e., seriously) intellectual*. She took ideas seriously, stood up for her views, criticized those she thought were wrong and gave her reasons.
20. p. 128: Burns writes, “Rand’s theory of natural rights was based on fiat, on her stating it must be so.” This is totally false. Her theory was not a theory of “natural rights” in the Lockean sense at all. She does not derive it from man in

a state of nature. Her theory of rights was based on man's nature as a rational being, the morality of egoism, and the requirements of man's survival in society. She wrote two whole articles on rights (see *The Virtue of Selfishness* and see also Galt's speech, both of which Burns knew about). This is just poor scholarship.

21. pp. 129ff: Burns talks earlier about the relationship between Ayn Rand and Isabel Patterson and on these pages she discusses their final break. The immediate reasons for the break are made quite clear. Patterson was rude and insulting to Ayn Rand's guests and by implication to Ayn Rand herself ("I don't like Jewish intellectuals"), during a visit. But the deeper rift, as Burns makes clear, was due to Patterson's intransigent belief in God. But Burns, contradicting herself, blames the break on "Rand's weakness Unable to meet Patterson's demands for connection." What is Burns implying here? That Ayn Rand should not have taken ideas seriously and should have sacrificed them (and her expectation of basic politeness) to Patterson's irrational emotions? Again, Burns does not understand Ayn Rand. (Ayn Rand also broke with Rose Wilder Lane over the issue of religion, but Burns focuses mainly on some snide comments by Lane [p.139].)
22. pp. 151ff: Burns gives a great deal of press to Murray Rothbard, who showed an early interest in Ayn Rand's ideas but who later came to advocate anarchism. Burns indicates that Ayn Rand disagreed, but Burns does not make

clear in this part of the book Ayn Rand's full view: that anarchism as a political system is totally irrational and can only lead to dictatorship. (Apparently Rothbard also believed in instincts and the primacy of emotions [p.153], which is further evidence of his irrationality.) Perhaps Rothbard's most egregious error is the claim that "the good stuff in Ayn Rand's system is not Ayn's original contribution at all." This is totally false but Burns never says so. There is a special issue of *The Objectivist Forum*, edited by Harry Binswanger (which magazine Burns evidently did not discover in her research) that shows Ayn Rand's original contributions in every sphere of philosophy (and even other fields like psychology). Burns also includes many snide comments by Rothbard, calling her students (who were known, in jest, as "The Collective") as "a group of lifeless acolytes" and a "passive, dependent group." Now I happen to personally know some of the people in this group, though not all of them. Their goal was quite simple: to learn from someone whose philosophical knowledge was light years above theirs. This required them to have active, questioning minds. Passive acceptance would not have enabled them to learn anything. Rothbard was an irrationalist and a subjectivist, but for Burns all ideas are treated as pretty much equal.

23. p. 156: Burns says Ayn Rand wanted to keep her affair with Branden secret due to having "a streak of cultural conventionality." Anyone who seriously studied Ayn Rand would have to know that she had no such streak. The obvious reason for keeping the affair secret was to protect her privacy.

24. A general point: Burns makes heavy use of the material written by the Brandens (e.g., pp. 156ff) even though they were bitter enemies of Ayn Rand's when they wrote their books. Nathaniel was exposed as a pathological liar in James Valliant's book *The Passion of Ayn Rand's Critics* and Barbara broke with Ayn Rand, according to Rand, when Barbara realized that she could no longer make money through her direct association with Ayn Rand. Burns acknowledges that Barbara Branden's book contains many misstatements of fact. Burns admits the Brandens' biases in her "Essay on Sources" but makes heavy use of the Brandens' books anyway. She does not say if or how she separated facts from fabrications.

25. P. 166: Burns does not understand *Atlas Shrugged*. She writes, "Taken at the level of a story, *Atlas Shrugged* is a moral fable about the evils of government interference in the free market." This is a totally inadequate characterization. The novel shows what happens when the producers, the men of the mind, go on strike after discovering the disastrous consequences of rational, able men sanctioning an anti-life moral code: altruism. Scores of conservatives had written about the evils of government interference in the economy. But none of them had identified the deeper (philosophical) issues involved (e.g., altruism vs. egoism, sanction of the victim). *Atlas Shrugged* was not just a brilliantly plotted story; it was based on a revolutionary new philosophy. This was Ayn Rand's genius, which, sadly, seems beyond Burns's grasp.

26. p. 167: Burns writes that Ayn Rand believed that “It is immoral to ask for anything from others.” At best this represents careless thinking, at worst outright misrepresentation. Ayn Rand thought it was immoral to ask for alms, the unearned—but she did not think it was wrong to ask if you had something to trade in return. Consider that in *Atlas Shrugged* Dagny asks for “favors” from Hank Rearden, e.g., the extension of credit (not handouts). Rearden grants them, because he wants to see his metal used and expects long-term profits.
27. p. 170: Burns accuses Francisco, in the “money” speech, of misquoting the *Bible* when he says, “money is the root of all evil.” However, in the same speech only two pages later, Francisco says, “Or did you say it’s the *love* of money [the Bible’s actual wording] that’s the root of all evil?” (*Atlas Shrugged*, pb., p. 384). Either Burns did not read the whole speech or can’t hold in mind statements made two pages apart.
28. pp. 173FF: Burns quotes Ayn Rand’s discussion of the intellectual pyramid (how the man at the top contributes more to those below than he gets back in return). This, Burns says, means that Ayn Rand has dropped the views of “populism and egalitarianism that characterized her earlier work.” Again Burns does not understand Ayn Rand. She was never a populist nor an egalitarian. Burns’s confusion is between the political and the economic. Ayn

Rand believed, in agreement with the Founding Fathers, that everyone was equal under the law and had the same rights (e.g., to *seek* wealth, happiness, etc.). But she totally opposed egalitarianism which would mean that everyone was guaranteed equal outcomes. She recognized that some people had more ability than others and would, justly, achieve more than others. On the same pages Burns criticizes Ayn Rand for letting people with evil ideas die in the Winston Tunnel disaster “with relish.” Again Burns fails to understand the relationship of this disaster to the plot and theme of the novel. The disaster occurred because there were too few capable men left to run the railroad. The men of the mind were on strike. The passengers in the train, by spreading or sanctioning evil ideas, were themselves destroyers of the mind, i.e., death worshippers, and suffered the consequences of their own ideas. They were indirectly their own destroyers. The whole episode was tied to the novel’s theme: the role of man’s mind in existence. Burns claims in the same paragraph that Ayn Rand’s renouncing “charity as a moral obligation” helped cause *Atlas Shrugged* to get (to Burns, apparently justifiable) negative reviews. Ignoring the fact that charity (which Ayn Rand was not necessarily against and said so in writing) is not the same as altruism, Burns does not seem to understand that renouncing altruism (as irrational) and sanctioning rational egoism was a key theme of *Atlas Shrugged*. So what could have eliminated negative reviews? Presumably, not creating her philosophy and thus not writing the book.

29. Burns correctly states that the chasm between Ayn Rand and the conservatives was caused by the issue of religion, but then on p. 179 says, “the most significant obstacle to Rand’s joining the ranks of the intelligentsia was her antagonistic attitude.” But this so-called antagonistic attitude consisted of upholding her philosophy, including atheism, reason and egoism. So being non-antagonistic would have meant renouncing Objectivism. One of the consistent themes of Burns’s review, as noted earlier, is: Why upset people by espousing unpopular views? Lighten up and conform to the crowd. Maybe this is Burns’s own philosophy, but it is bizarre to want Ayn Rand to wipe herself out of existence.
30. p. 184: Burns writes, “Rand found intellectual interchange hard to manage,” citing her disagreements with other intellectuals such as Sidney Hook and John Hospers. She attributes this to Ayn Rand’s “single-minded focus on consistency” (p. 185), which means logic and that includes the law of contradiction. Burns does not seem to understand the significance of this law: a thing cannot be A and non-A at the same time in the same respect. The reason this is a law of logic is because it’s a law of reality. Thus, a philosophy that is not consistent cannot be true. Ayn Rand took logic seriously; overwhelmingly, other intellectuals did not. This is why, as Burns says on p. 188, at a certain point it became “impossible for her to communicate with contemporaries” (e.g., modern intellectuals). Burns did not realize that modern philosophy was approaching a state of collapse in the 1960s (which

has ended in today's postmodern skepticism) so that other intellectuals had nothing to offer Ayn Rand—or anyone else. Today, of course, academics are beginning to admit that she has a lot to offer them, and philosophy departments are openly looking for Objectivists.

31. p. 190: Burns writes, “At first look Objectivism may appear a freakish outgrowth of the turbulent 1960s, but it had significant parallels in American history.” The gratuitous insult aside, what parallel is she referring to? An 1887 book about a socialist utopia! What point is Burns trying to make here? Presumably that ideal societies are written about only by freaks and that one such society is as bad as the other.
32. p. 193: Burns attacks Ayn Rand for using the terms *altruism* and *selfishness* to mean what they originally meant: self-sacrifice and acting in one's own interests, respectively. With respect to altruism, Burns comes up with this falsehood: “. . . as she had with selfishness, Ayn Rand was redefining words to match her philosophical concepts.” Burns's point here seems to be: Why don't you just use these concepts in the fuzzy or misleading way everyone else has come to use them. For example, altruism is now often used in a way that confounds self-sacrifice with simply helping people—which can be done for non-sacrificial reasons. The term *selfishness* today confounds legitimate self-valuing with hedonism and amoralism. In sum, Burns wants Ayn Rand to

reject objective definitions and conform to the muddled status quo so as not to upset people—which means she does not want Ayn Rand to be Ayn Rand.

33. p. 200: Ayn Rand's effect on people is compared to that of Marx's, the implication being: "Here are two people who can really dazzle people." Burns does not bother to note that Marx advocated dictatorship and Ayn Rand advocated freedom—the content of the ideas seems not to matter to Burns.
34. p. 216 and elsewhere: Burns mentions Mary Ann Sures three times in the book and Charles Sures once but only in passing. But Burns fails to discuss their book *Facets of Ayn Rand* except for noting its existence in her discussion of source material. This omission is significant in that Burns repeatedly tries to make the case (directly or by implication) that Ayn Rand was impossible to get along with, was dogmatic and wanted unquestioning agreement. The Sures' book, based on their twenty- (Charles) to twenty-eight (Mary Ann) year friendship smashes that view to pieces. Why did the friendship last so long? Leonard Peikoff provides the answer in his introduction to the book: "The Sures were among the few people in Ayn Rand's life who were intellectually honest all the way down . . ." Ayn Rand *was* intolerant: of the irrational. She understood its consequences only too well. No honest biography of Ayn Rand can afford not to utilize this book. Those who think that the Sureses must have been mindlessly obedient are wrong—I knew them

almost as long as they knew Ayn Rand. Neither of them ever accepted any view unless they were rationally convinced that it was true.

35. p. 219: “Rand’s invocation of the villainous Kant [whom she blamed for the state of the modern world] was one aspect of Objectivism’s kooky side.” This sentence is doubly bizarre, First, because Burns does not bother to give Ayn Rand’s reasons for her view (Kant’s attempt to destroy reason—which met with enormous success—and his advocacy of self-sacrifice which helped lay the groundwork for Nazism—see Leonard Peikoff’s *The Ominous Parallels.*), and second, because in the very next sentence Burns acknowledges Objectivism’s (evidently non-kooky) “earnest intellectualism and deep reverence for the power of ideas.” It is regrettable that Burns has no such reverence.

36. p. 221: Burns, apparently in an attempt to show Objectivism’s dogmatic character, relates the story of a student, Jarrett Wollstein, who was banned (by the Nathaniel Branden Institute) from teaching Objectivism at the free university of Maryland and from attending Objectivist conferences. Now I was at the University of Maryland when this happened, and I can testify firsthand that Wollstein, rather than being “a dedicated student of Objectivism” was a pretentious incompetent. He is not even worthy of a footnote.

37. p. 223: Burns reports that Branden's affair with Patrecia Wynand "lit the fuse that would blow Objectivism sky high." But this affair did not affect the philosophy of Objectivism one iota. It simply upset some people. Somehow Burns cannot separate Objectivist ideas from the irrational actions of specific individuals.
38. p. 225: "[Branden's] problems were compounded by his development of Objectivist psychology, which denied the autonomy and importance of emotions." Claiming that Objectivism denies the importance of emotions reveals woeful ignorance. (Did Burns even read *Atlas Shrugged*?) Objectivism holds that emotions are not tools of knowledge, but it does not claim they play no role in human life. Ayn Rand said she never had an emotion for which she could not account; but she never denied or disparaged *having* emotions. Note the strong emotions experienced by her fictional characters. Without emotions we would all be zombies. She wrote: "His [man's] emotions are not his enemies, but his means of enjoying life." (See Harry Binswanger's *Ayn Rand Lexicon* for many other valuable quotes regarding Ayn Rand's view of emotions and other subjects. This book was in Burns's list of references.) Objectivism does deny, however, the autonomy of emotions. They are not psychological primaries but stem from automatic appraisals based on subconsciously held ideas. Thus, emotions need to be understood—but not eliminated. Incidentally, identifying the true nature of emotions was Ayn Rand's discovery, not Branden's. Burns did not do her homework.

39. pp. 234–5: Burns seems to think that Ayn Rand should have presented her philosophical ideas as one opinion, then presented other opinions, then claimed uncertainty, and then let the students figure it out for themselves. But why would Ayn Rand even consider this if she knew she was right (and had proved it)? Clearly Burns resents the idea of certainty, in line with current intellectuals. But denying certainty would have made Objectivism into a useless joke. Imagine Ayn Rand starting a lecture with: “Here are the axioms of philosophy and here is how I validate them—but, hey, maybe I am wrong so you decide.” Burns thinks certainty promotes dogmatism (p. 237), but in reality dogmatism is the enemy of real (rational) certainty, because dogmatism necessarily relies on the arbitrary, e.g., belief on the basis of faith, which can only be sustained by evasion.
40. p. 237: Burns claims Ayn Rand’s conclusions were “syllogistically [deductively] derived.” Wrong again. Objectivism was derived by induction (cf. Leonard Peikoff’s course “Objectivism Through Induction”).
41. p. 240: “Objectivism taught that sex was never physical.” Burns must have meant “not just physical.” She takes Branden’s attraction to Patrecia as disproof of Ayn Rand’s thesis. Obviously there was a physical aspect but why pick Patrecia when Branden could have picked other beautiful women? Who

would a liar and hypocrite be attracted to? Perhaps someone who was not too bright and who wouldn't judge him.

42. p. 242: Burns claims Barbara Branden was rejected by Ayn Rand because Barbara tried to defend Nathan after the affair with Patrecia was uncovered. This may be Barbara's story, but in fact, she turned against Ayn Rand when it became clear to her that she could no longer use her association with Ayn Rand to make money. Why did Burns choose to believe Barbara's story and not Ayn Rand's when Burns admits (in her "Essay on Sources") that the Brandens had revenge motivation and had biases and false statements in their books? (Burns presents no evidence that Ayn Rand was anything but 100 percent honest.)
43. p. 244: About the split with the Brandens, Burns quotes one student as saying, "The rationally ordered universe NBI students sought and found in Rand was no more." Wasn't it? Where did it go? The rationally ordered universe was not based on people but on ideas. The ideas were there, on paper, for anyone who wanted them.
44. 251–3: Burns correctly notes, citing "The Nature of Government," that Ayn Rand opposed anarchism and even gave some of Ayn Rand's reasons (which, as noted, should have been done earlier). Burns then reports that libertarians claimed that given Ayn Rand's philosophy, it was a contradiction or an

obfuscation to advocate any government at all. Burns does not take sides in this controversy. The above article by Ayn Rand makes the irrationality of anarchism so blatantly obvious and so utterly clear, that for Burns to make no judgment here represents a kind of “agnosticism” that no self-respecting writer should allow herself. But then Burns, as I have shown, does not take philosophical ideas seriously.

45. pp. 253ff: To take this point a step further, Burns spends many pages describing the influence of Ayn Rand’s ideas on the libertarian movement. But she never makes clear that Ayn Rand exposed the entire libertarian movement as irrational from beginning to end. The libertarians have never taken philosophy seriously. They took random ideas from Ayn Rand (such as the non-initiation of force) totally divorced from her philosophical system, added in various subjectivist whims, and tried to make a political movement out of it. Finally, Peter Schwartz wrote a long article showing that libertarianism was at root nihilistic. (Burns may not have read this.) All of this is why libertarianism disintegrated into chaos and never became a coherent political movement. Burns does not seem to understand any of this.

46. p. 269: “Rand had become increasingly unpleasant, querulous, and rigid as the years progressed.” There is no documentation for this claim. I only met her late in her life. I was fortunate enough to take her non-fiction writing course and had two conferences with her regarding papers I had written. She was

unfailingly gracious and delighted to answer questions about her novels and philosophy. If she disagreed with something I wrote, she always politely explained her reasons. Ayn Rand, of course, could get angry (though she did not at me).. But Burns does not understand why. Ayn Rand took ideas seriously; most people do not. She also understood in the most fundamental terms the consequences of irrational ideas for man's life; for most people wrong ideas were just floating abstractions disconnected from reality. Furthermore, Ayn Rand withstood decades of smears and denunciations from the intellectual establishment. In 100 percent of the instances that I am aware of, they misrepresented her ideas, often in the most grotesque manner (e.g., claiming her views were the actual opposite of what they were). Nevertheless, she never became bitter, never refused to explain her ideas (as long as the questioner was polite) and never deviated from her philosophy. She was inflexible in holding to her rational convictions against the most outrageous attacks. This is an aspect of her greatness—an aspect that Burns does not see at all.

47. p. 274: In reference to the visit of Ayn Rand's sister Nora, this is how Burns describes Nora's tragic decision to voluntarily return to Russia from America: "Nora had chosen dictatorship. Nora was not like her—and so much like her." Burns never deigns to explain what she means by the last part of the sentence, since Nora rejected Ayn Rand's ideas and Ayn Rand's love of America. It appears that this is just a gratuitous insult by Burns.

48. p. 280: In her epilogue, Burns sinks into maliciousness (see also points 49 and 50). She argues that the Showtime television movie about Ayn Rand and Nathaniel Branden, written by an enemy, Barbara Branden, “destroyed the vaunted image of Ayn Rand as an intellectual paragon who lived by rationality alone.” I noted earlier that Ayn Rand was never anti-emotion. But more important, a less than C--grade, trashy movie written by an enemy who nonetheless wanted to exploit her connection to Ayn Rand, cannot be taken seriously by anyone—and it wasn’t. We have no way of knowing what events in the movie really occurred and which Barbara Branden made-up.

49. p. 280–281: Further, Burns often uses the term *orthodox*, pejoratively, to refer to Ayn Rand’s philosophy. Now the dictionary defines *orthodox* as meaning adhering to religion or tradition. Neither of these definitions apply to Ayn Rand’s philosophy. By implication Burns is saying there are other versions of Objectivism (i.e., non-orthodox versions). But there aren’t any other versions. Objectivism is the philosophy of Ayn Rand *as she wrote it*. Other “versions” are not Objectivism. Note the absurdity of using terms like orthodox Platonism or orthodox Aristotelianism. There are no such things. Aristotle’s philosophy is the philosophy written by Aristotle. There may be disagreements about interpretation with respect to any philosopher, but the only thing that can be interpreted is what the philosopher actually wrote. If someone wants to create new philosophy, it properly must be called by

another name. It should be noted that David Kelley, who Burns seems to revere, has openly stated that Objectivism is an open system that anyone can add to or modify. This is not an intellectually honest position but an invitation to parasitism. If Kelley has original ideas of his own, let him write them down and call the result Kelleyism.

50. p. 281: Burns claims that the Ayn Rand Institute has a “poor reputation.”

Again, she gives no documentation. Poor according to whom? The institute is skyrocketing in growth, popularity and influence (see its websites). No other allegedly Objectivist organization even comes close.

51. p. 285: What is Burns’s final statement about the essence of Ayn Rand’s

philosophy? ”Be true to yourself.” Ignore the shopworn cliché. The statement is not even true. “Yourself” may be a hodge-podge of arbitrary and irrational ideas. If one had to condense Objectivism that much, the correct statement would be: Be true to reason and reality. Burns’s statement is a final, involuntary confession of her failure to grasp Ayn Rand’s philosophy. How could Burns go so far wrong in so many ways? As I noted at the outset, she simply did not understand the philosophy and seems to have made little effort to do so. This destroys the value of the book.