

Discussion

Reply to Jonathan Jacobs

Contesting a Review

David Kelley

Jonathan Jacobs's chief complaint about my book *The Contested Legacy of Ayn Rand: Truth and Toleration in Objectivism* (Poughkeepsie, New York: The Objectivist Center; New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2000) is that it did not offer a sufficiently thorough account of Objectivism. He spends most of his review ("A Contest of Wills," *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* 3, no. 2 (Spring 2002): 329–37) listing the elements of Objectivism that I asserted without offering detailed elaboration or proof, from the theory of concept-formation to the theory of virtue. Toward the end, however, Jacobs muses that

Perhaps this reader was looking for things the author did not intend to present in this book. . . . [P]erhaps it is asking for the wrong thing to ask for the supporting arguments. Still, the scale and number of claims invites an interest in the arguments and a need for them. The book that supplied them would not be a book about the contested legacy of Ayn Rand; it would be more purely a philosophy book, and it may be that it was not the author's intention to write that kind of book. (335)

Well, yes. The book Jacobs describes is one of many that I didn't write. As the title suggests, the book I wrote actually *is* about the contested legacy of Ayn Rand. I don't know how I could have made it clearer—in the Preface, Introduction, Postscript, and indeed throughout—that my goal was to address a debate within Objectivism rather than to write a treatise expounding Objectivism for other

philosophers.

To be sure, I thought the work might also be of interest to some “outsiders.” As I said in the Preface, “for the growing number of scholars who are interested in Ayn Rand and her impact on American culture, the work provides a useful introduction to the core ideas and central fissures of the Objectivist movement” (Kelley 2000, 11–12). To that end, I tried to present each of those core ideas in a way that was accessible to readers not already familiar with the viewpoint. But it would have been a constant distraction from my purpose (and required a much, much longer book) to interrupt the discussion with a technical elaboration of each thesis I mentioned.

Since Jacobs put such emphasis on the value of technical treatments of Objectivism, however, I want to let readers know that such work exists. Indeed, it exists in such abundance that I can’t offer anything like a real bibliography. But the following material speaks directly to the issues he mentioned in his review.

Readers who share Jacobs’s interest in epistemology may consult several works of mine:

- *The Evidence of the Senses* (Louisiana State University Press, 1986). In the course of presenting a realist theory of perception based on some of Rand’s ideas, I discuss the “realist/antirealist dialectic” that Jacobs wishes I could have included in *Contested Legacy*.
- “A Theory of Abstraction” (*Cognition and Brain Theory*, 1984; reprint available from The Objectivist Center). This essay is a detailed examination of Rand’s theory of concept-formation, comparing it with other historical and contemporary views.
- “Evidence and Justification” (*Reason Papers*, 1991; reprint available from The Objectivist Center). This essay shows how the epistemological theories presented in the preceding works offer a new approach to current puzzles about the foundations of knowledge.

Among the many works that deal with the Objectivist ethics, I would recommend the following:

- Tara Smith, *Viable Values: A Study of the Root and Reward of Morality* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000).

- Roderick T. Long, *Reason and Value: Aristotle versus Rand* (Poughkeepsie, New York: The Objectivist Center, 2000).
- Neera K. Badhwar, *Is Virtue Only a Means to Happiness?* (Poughkeepsie, New York: The Objectivist Center, 2001).