

Philosophy

Discussion

Rejoinder to Greg Nyquist, “Rand and Empirical Responsibility” (Fall 2006)

Nyquist Contra Rand, Part II

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In reading Nyquist’s reply to my review of his book *Ayn Rand Contra Human Nature*, I actually found myself in agreement with him, especially the line where he writes that he does not disagree with my points. I don’t disagree with my points either. He does, alas, find them irrelevant and hence his reply. Why irrelevant? Because they miss the main point of his book, to wit, that Rand is not “right about human nature” (Nyquist 2006, 111). But I do address that issue on pages 363–65 of my review (Seddon 2003). I make two different arguments against Nyquist *vis-à-vis* Rand’s notion of human nature and he, apparently, thinks both are irrelevant to his main point about her notion of human nature! What can I do but ask the reader to take a look at both his book and my critique? Bottom line, I think he gets Rand radically wrong on both the “utopian to the core” and the “free will” issue. I am content to rest my case on those arguments.

He is also wrong about the Objectivists’ views of logic. He thinks Rand and the Objectivists limit logic to deductive logic and then triumphantly claims that some modern sciences have proven that “Most practical knowledge . . . is based on generalizations drawn from experience” (Nyquist 2006, 114), that is, on induction. Yet Leonard Peikoff has issued a 24-CD set entitled *Objectivism through Induction* in which he shows how *all* of the major theses of Objectivism are “based on generalizations drawn from experience.” David Kelley and William Thomas are working on a book about the “logical structure of Objectivism,” which deals extensively with its inductive foundations. Thomas, in fact, delivered six lectures from the book to The

Objectivist Center Summer Seminar at UCLA in 2002. Does everyone, except Nyquist, know about these works? How could he manage to get Objectivism so wrong? It is exactly what he claims the most modern, up-to-date sciences indicate it should be! Since I am a poor psychologist, I am at a loss to explain such an egregious error. It's akin to accusing the Pope of not being Catholic.

And it is Rand herself who set the stage for the role of induction in Objectivism in the following lines from *Atlas Shrugged*:

Man perceives a blob of color; by integrating the evidence of his sight and his touch, he learns to identify it as a solid object: he learns to identify the object as a table; he learns that the table is made of wood. . . (Rand [1957] 1999, 1016)

No pure deductivism here. No rationalist philosopher at work here. Just someone who recommends that one look at reality.

Finally, I want to withdraw my charge of positivism against Nyquist. He says he is not now nor has he ever been a member of that party, and I for one am willing to take his word for it. But please allow me to make a Popperian point against Nyquist's almost naive reliance on science for knowledge. Popper was famous for his claim that science does not give us knowledge, but only opinion. Science is nothing but a woven web of guesses. Not only that, all science is nothing but an application and acceptance of a particular philosophy. For example, Lakoff and Johnson (1999, 89) are explicit about being scientific realists.

Since I would claim that this is true of all the scientists mentioned in Nyquist's reply, then what we really have is a quarrel between different philosophies.

References

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- Nyquist, Greg. 2006. Rand and empirical responsibility. *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* 8, no. 1 (Fall): 111–19.
- Rand, Ayn. [1957] 1999. *Atlas Shrugged*. New York: Plume.
- Seddon, Fred. 2003. Nyquist contra Rand. *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* 4, no. 2 (Spring): 361–72.