The Postmodern Assault on Reason: TNI's interview with philosopher Stephen Hicks

by Roger Donway

Editor's note: Stephen Hicks received his Ph.D. in philosophy from Indiana University in 1992 and has, for the last fifteen years, taught philosophy at Rockford College, in Rockford, Illinois. He is the author of articles on postmodern philosophy, the philosophy of history, Ayn Rand's philosophy of Objectivism, free speech on campus, modern art, and business ethics, among other topics. His book *Readings for Logical Analysis* is a companion volume to David Kelley's *The Art of Reasoning.* In 2004, Hicks brought out *Explaining Postmodernism: Skepticism and Socialism from Rousseau to Foucault*, a work sponsored in part by a grant from The Objectivist Center. In 2006, he scripted and narrated a documentary called *Nietzsche and the Nazis.* This year Rockford College received a $925,000 grant from the BB&T Charitable Foundation, which will be used to establish a Center for Ethics and Entrepreneurship, with Hicks as its head.

***The New Individualist*:** Perhaps you can begin by telling us something about your professional life. What sort of school is Rockford? What courses do you teach? And how do you like the teaching side of your job?

Stephen Hicks: I enjoy the teaching very much, particularly since Rockford is a small liberal arts college, which means that our class sizes tend to be small. Introductory classes generally run twenty to thirty students. Advanced courses can be anywhere from one or two students up to ten or so. That makes a big difference in my interaction with the students, being able to monitor what they understand and what interests them. And many students come by my office for informal follow-up conversation. I enjoy all of that. Right now, we have two full-time philosophy professors. But we will be adding a third this coming semester because the demand has been strong for philosophy.

***TNI*:** You also operate a website, with daily updates. It seems to be a pro-Enlightenment, pro-science, pro-beauty location.

Hicks: Yes, www.stephenhicks.org. A marvelous thing about the internet is there is so much thoughtful and fascinating stuff out there. So, one of my professional pleasures is browsing the web to see what is going on, then linking to things that are of interest to me and others. The website also has syllabi for my courses and links to my publications, at least the ones that are available online.

***TNI*:** Perhaps I should add that many of your publications can be bought from The Objectivism Store (www.objectivismstore.com/default.aspx).

Let's turn to your book *Explaining Postmodernism.* And let me begin by asking: What is postmodernism? What does it assert philosophically?

Hicks: Any major philosophy has a view of reality and of man's place in reality. That will include a view of our core capacities, particularly our cognitive capacities, and also a view of our core needs and values. Postmodernism, as a philosophy and as an intellectual movement, is characterized by strong skepticism and subjectivism, and consequently by ethical relativism. In social philosophy, it combines collectivism with a zero-sum view of human relations.

Those last two work together. For example, postmodernism holds that our identities are constructed by our race or gender or class identities—that is the collectivized part of it: You exist only as part of a collective group. The zero-sum part is that those groups are in a life-and-death conflict with each other. So, society is made up of blacks versus whites, men versus women, rich versus poor. Generally, the political philosophy of postmodernism is left collectivism. The aesthetic view is very fragmented and rather nihilistic.

***TNI*:** Clearly, the very term "postmodernism" distinguishes this philosophy from something called "modernism." What is the nature of that background philosophy? What were the views that modernism held, and when did it flourish?

Hicks: In philosophy, modernism was the great break with the traditional, medieval past, and it came in the seventeenth century, in my judgment. What that break brought was a shift to a naturalistic worldview. Modernism emphasized experience and reason as our fundamental cognitive capacities, as opposed to the medieval emphasis on faith and authority. You also began to see a much more optimistic view of human nature, of human potential, and of our core capacities for self-realization. In the value branches of philosophy, you found a much more individualistic approach. In ethics, you found increasing emphasis on the pursuit of happiness as man's natural birth right, as opposed to the traditional notion that we are here to do our duty. That played out in political revolutions that emphasized individual liberty and the development of freer markets. Modernism's this-worldly outlook spilled over into the nineteenth century as the flowering of Romanticism, which was a naturalistic and optimistic aesthetic.

***TNI*:** Despite their names, postmodernism does not immediately follow modernism in your narrative of philosophical history. There is a transitional period that you called the counter-Enlightenment. Could you explain that movement and its relation to modernism?

Hicks: The term "modernism" is broader than "Enlightenment," which refers to the eighteenth century, when all those modernistic trends—naturalism, optimism about human progress, the institutionalization of science, free markets, and so forth—came to dominate intellectual and cultural life. The counter-Enlightenment began toward the end of the eighteenth century and is essentially a reaction to

those trends. Its major proponents are the Swiss-French thinker Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the German thinker Immanuel Kant. What they are concerned with, in different ways, is that the modernist, Enlightenment movement undermines traditional institutions and values.

For instance, the rise of reason and science meant that religion was being marginalized and was in danger of being shut out of public life. Then, too, in the view of counter-Enlightenment thinkers, the modern emphasis on individualism and on the pursuit of happiness was and is a threat to the traditional ethical values of duty and communal ties.

***TNI*:** All right: the historical sequence is modernism, counter-Enlightenment, postmodernism. Now, the first half of your book's thesis statement is: "The failure of epistemology made postmodernism possible." Epistemology, of course, is the branch of philosophy that deals with the theory of knowledge. In what sense did epistemology fail? When did it fail, in terms of the narrative you have been presenting? And how did the consequences of that failure play out?

Hicks: What I mean by "the failure of epistemology" is that modernism did not carry through on its promise of providing an epistemological justification for science and reason.

The modern world at the end of the seventeenth century had tremendous optimism about the power of reason and the potential for scientific knowledge. To a great extent, we still share that optimism. But beginning in the middle of the eighteenth century, the modernist strain of epistemology came under siege from counter-Enlightenment thinkers, who tended to skepticism and relativism. The major early figures here were David Hume, Rousseau, and Kant. The battle was waged throughout the nineteenth century, and the skeptical and relativistic side got the upper hand. By the turn of the twentieth century, it had essentially swept the field of epistemology. So, the failure of epistemology here is the failure of philosophers to defend reason and the scientific enterprise from the skeptical counter-attack.

***TNI*:** You say we are still living in the after-glow of modernist confidence and reason, but your third chapter is called, "The twentieth-century collapse of reason." That sounds pretty bad. What does it refer to?

Hicks: That refers to the first two-thirds of the twentieth century, particularly in academic philosophy. The world of academic philosophy in the twentieth century, at least during its first two-thirds, was characterized by a split between the Continental approach and the Anglo-American approach. If you look at the major figures on the Continental side, particularly by the middle part of the twentieth century, the philosophers everybody is reading are Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, and the existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre. All of them are strongly anti-reason. If you come over to the Anglo-American side of the divide, by the time

you get to the middle of the twentieth century, the major intellectuals at that time are also people who are strongly non-rationalistic. Think of the later Wittgenstein and people like Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend, as well as, to a significantly lesser degree, Karl Popper. Skeptical forms of pragmatism are also prominent in the 1960s. So, by the middle part of the twentieth century, nobody is defending objectivity.

***TNI*:** One obvious question is: How is a "collapse of reason" in the twentieth century compatible with the tremendous scientific advances we have seen?

Hicks: That is an interesting puzzle. I think a very important element is compartmentalization by field. It is one thing to say that leading voices in the philosophy of science are reaching relativistic conclusions. It is another to say that relativism is the operating principle for practicing scientists. The intellectual world throughout most of the twentieth century was split, with many leading voices and many powerful voices reaching very skeptical conclusions. But there were still huge numbers of practicing scientists who disagreed with those conclusions and who were operating on a pro-reason epistemology.

Another kind of compartmentalization is not between what philosophers said and what the scientists did, but within individuals themselves. Some scientists, in their more philosophical moments, might voice very skeptical or relativistic kinds of claims, but in their actual practice as scientists, they might function in a pro-reason and objective way. We know it is possible for individuals to compartmentalize themselves psychologically in fairly dramatic ways. And we know, for example, that a practicing scientist may, outside of the lab, profess mystical, irrational, religious beliefs. But once he goes into the lab, all of that is left outside. In the lab, he functions objectively and in a reality-oriented fashion.

So, I think that is the way to put those two things together—the great scientific achievements on one hand, and the prevalence of skeptical, subjectivist philosophy on the other.

***TNI*:** In *Explaining Postmodernism,* you write: "I can now summarize and offer my first hypothesis about the origins of postmodernism: Postmodernism is the first ruthlessly consistent statement of the consequences of rejecting reason, those consequences being necessary given the history of epistemologists since Kant." Most philosophers would say that, given a flat rejection of reason, anything and everything follows. Why do you think that specific philosophical consequences follow, and if they do, would it not take a philosopher committed to reason to reach "a ruthlessly consistent set of conclusions?"

Hicks: My point here is that, if you are going to have a full account of reason, there are a number of major component ideas that must be defended. One is objectivity. Another is logic. A third idea is that it is individuals who do the reasoning, and therefore have the responsibility for operating objectively. A fourth

idea is the universality of reason. Human beings have the same cognitive capacities, so that truth-seekers can collaborate and check each other. All those notions—objectivity, rationality, individuality, universality, and others—are elements in a full defense of reasoning.

Now, Kant did not abandon reason wholesale. He gave up on the idea of objectivity. But he still maintained the universality of reason. And he maintained that reason was a function of the individual mind. In the subsequent history of philosophy, however, we see that once objectivity was gone, there was no way to maintain the defense of the universality of reason and there was no way to defend the individuality of reason. So, over the course of the next century and a half, up to postmodernism, the implication of Kant's abandoning objectivity was played out until we got to the postmodernists, who said: "Forget objectivity. Forget individual reason. Forget the universality of reason." What we got is their subjectivist, relativist, collectivist account of human cognition.

Now, in what sense is that a logical development? Well, there were people in the post-Kantian world who wanted to defend some but not all aspects of reason and the scientific enterprise. But over the course of the next century and a half, those people gradually lost their arguments, until you got to postmodernism. But no one said: "If there's no objectivity, then we must accept postmodernism." It was a step-by-step realization spread over decades.

***TNI*:** One distinguished libertarian protested against your condemnation of postmodernism, saying that you did not adequately appreciate the ways in which it permits people the choice of identities from a world of multiple possibilities. How would you respond? What do you think of a libertarian-postmodernist alliance?

Hicks: I'm familiar with objections like that, from my discussions with various libertarians. I think two things are going on. One is a very superficial reading of postmodernism as a philosophy. Every philosophy has buzzwords. "Choice," "freedom," "equality," "liberation," and so forth. Most people are in favor of these, in some sense or other. Everybody is in favor of fairness. But you have to ask the follow-up question: What does the philosophy mean by "choice," "freedom," "equality," and so on?

Obviously, people who are attracted to libertarianism like the word "choice." They like the idea of options and self-realization, the idea that there can be different lifestyles that are compatible with human self-realization, and so forth. But that is not in any deep way what postmodernism is about. You can find all kinds of postmodernists who will use words like "liberation," and when you ask them what they are talking about being liberated from, they will mention a monolithic, authoritarian, religious worldview. And it is fine to want to be liberated from that. But that is not a distinctively postmodern thesis. That is the *modernist* thesis, in fact. That was the modernist revolution against the older, feudal authoritarian

revolution. What the major postmodernists are talking about is being free from reason, being free from reality, being free from the constraints of human nature, denying that facts about reality and human nature should ground values and determine the choices we make.

So, typically, that kind of objection to my thesis comes from someone who represents the more subjectivistic wing of libertarianism. They think that if there are objective values, well, that will just empower the state to step in and make you live up to those objective values. From their perspective, the only way to support libertarianism is through the idea that there are no moral principles; there is no objectivity; everything is a matter of personal choice, and so forth. And here I think that they are confusing the subjective with that which is legitimately personal. If you start saying that liberty is just a matter of personal whim or following subjective choice, of doing what happens to press your button but may not press somebody else's button—then the defense of liberty is pointless. Someone can say, "Well, liberty does not push my personal button. Some other kind of political system is my subjective desire." And on subjectivist grounds, no counter-argument is possible there.

So instead of a libertarian-postmodern alliance, I favor a libertarian-modernist alliance or a libertarian-Enlightenment alliance. The values that most libertarians rightly prize have their natural home in the Enlightenment or modernist framework. Scientific progress, technological progress, the free market, the broadly democratic and republican approaches to government, the optimistic sense of human potential, the notion that the pursuit of happiness is possible to us—all of those are rooted in the modernist intellectual framework, and all of those are things that the postmodernists attack. If you look at the postmodern intellectuals—Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard, Rorty—all of them are incredibly hostile to the free market, and that is not an accident.

***TNI*:** This brings us to your link between epistemology and politics. Having traced the developments in epistemology from the modernists to the postmodernists, you go back in Chapter Four of your book and trace the politics of the counter-Enlightenment, including what you call "right and left collectivism." What is the spectrum that you are using here to define right and left? And who are the main philosophers in each?

Hicks: Anytime you use "right" and "left," the terms are metaphorical. So, it is always important to unpack that metaphor and define your spectrum in literal terms. In this case, the context is nineteenth-century German philosophy and politics, and the dominant voices here are Hegel and Fichte. Following Hegel, of course, we have Marx.

The dimension or axis that I am using is collectivism, and along that dimension it is possible to speak of right and left versions. Right versions are more nationalistic. Left versions, like Marx's, are more internationalistic. Another point

of variation is religion. Right versions of German collectivism want more of a state-and-religion marriage. Hegel is an example of this. He opposed, on principle, the separation of church and state, so that will put him on the right side. On the left side, Marx is the clearest example, being vigorously atheistic and secular in his orientation.

***TNI*:** As I understand your book, you maintained that right collectivism was discredited by the Holocaust and World War II, and effectively banished from Western political discourse. First of all, is that reading correct? Secondly, would you say that that is an instance of a contingent historical event changing philosophical history?

Hicks: There's a lot packed into those questions. Yes, World War II and the horror of that war, and then the widespread knowledge of the Holocaust, did, in fact, discredit the rightist versions of collectivism for several generations.

But then you asked a question about philosophical history: Was this a case of a contingent historical event determining later philosophical history? No. The way the war played out did not change the underlying philosophical arguments. They are still there. And I think that is why we are seeing a resurgence of old-fashioned national socialism on the contemporary stage: people's obsession with racial identity and ethnic identity, organizing people into collective groups, seeing them as engaged in zero-sum conflict with each other.

***TNI*:** Let's turn to left collectivism—socialism. Do you see it as a child of the Enlightenment or the counter-Enlightenment? Marxism claims to be the product of reason and social engineering, which point to the Enlightenment. But historically, socialism rose to prominence during the Romantic counter-Enlightenment, at the same time as nationalism.

Hicks: Great historical question. Go back to the basic narrative. The modern world overturns the older medieval world. And one of the great questions is: What will replace feudalism? The individualists have their Enlightenment, pro-reason answer to that: It will be replaced by individualism, liberal-democratic politics, and free-market economics. At the same time, however, there were thinkers, especially on the Continent, who wanted to replace feudalism with a new kind of communalism—socialism.

So, liberal individualism and collectivist socialism were the two modernist answers to the question of replacing feudalism. But the socialist side of that divide split into two approaches. I'll give them historical names here. One follows a Rousseauian strategy, and the other follows a Marxist strategy.

The Rousseauian strategy was the earlier one. It placed its emphasis on passion rather than on reason, and on small tribal groups rather than on large-scale industrial or cosmopolitan enterprises. It also placed more emphasis on staying

close to nature than on high-tech industrial development. That movement fed directly into the Romanticism of the nineteenth century and was associated with the right collectivism that I mentioned earlier.

Marxism had the same communal aims and altruistic themes as the Rousseauians, but it drew more on Enlightenment themes. It had a materialistic metaphysics; it claimed to favor a scientific epistemology of sorts; and it was much friendlier to technological development. And for the next century or so, it was the Marxist version of socialism that dominated socialist discourse. As I see it, Marxism is a compound. It draws on some Enlightenment themes of reason and science and naturalistic metaphysics and so forth. But at the same time it holds onto that traditional altruistic and communalistic ethic. That's why it turned out to be unstable.

***TNI*:** Well, let's look at that. Chapter Five describes the crisis of Marxist socialism. Most readers, I expect, have heard of the "God that failed" syndrome, the long line of people who gave up on socialism over the years. But your concept of "the crisis of socialism" is wider. How would you characterize it?

Hicks: I like that phrase, "the God that failed," because it captures the ways in which the disillusionment that socialist thinkers underwent in the twentieth century was analogous to the religious crises of faith that so many intellectuals went through in the nineteenth century. But "the crisis of socialism" was a much broader phenomenon than the disillusionments of individual communists that were recorded in Richard Crossman's 1949 book *The God That Failed.* In the 1950s and 1960s, the phenomenon became general. The failures of socialism became widely known, and they were both economic and moral. One of the issues between socialists and capitalists had always been which system was more economically fruitful. By the 1950s and 1960s, capitalism was clearly winning. And capitalists were also beginning to explain why. Hayek and others were arguing effectively that efficient economic planning was impossible under socialism.

Then there were the serious ethical issues that socialists had to confront. From the beginning, socialists had looked down on capitalism morally. After all, the profit motive was based on self-interest. Socialism was based on altruism, which millennia of philosophers had judged superior to self-interest. A socialist society put the needs of its citizens first and demanded from each according to his ability, so that each might receive according to his need. Well, the ethical superiority of socialism was really rocked in the 1950s. In 1956, the revelation by Khrushchev of Stalin's horrors caused huge problems for leftists. Also in 1956, the suppression of the revolution in Hungary was televised to a worldwide audience. People could see how the Soviet Union looked after its people. Seeing and hearing those kinds of horrors coming out of the socialist world made complaints about capitalist countries and the treatment of the working class seem petty by comparison.

Economically, then, socialists were losing the debate, on the practical and theoretical levels. And ethically, they were losing the debate on the practical level.

***TNI*:** Okay. Now to bring it all together. The second half of your book's thesis statement says, "The failure of socialism made postmodernism necessary." Please explain.

Hicks: With the crisis of socialism in mind, the question becomes: Why did socialists make a dramatic turn, in the 1960s and on into the 1970s, by linking up with postmodernism? It is a cliché to say that there was a shift from the Old Left to the New Left in the 1960s. What I am doing, in effect, is examining that shift and integrating it with the emergence of postmodernism.

The postmodernists who came to greatest fame in the 1970s, 1980s, and later—people such as Foucault and Derrida and Lyotard and Richard Rorty and so forth—had all been young men in the 1950s and 1960s, and so they lived through the crisis of socialism. All of them were, in their youth, advocates of a fairly far-left politics. Rorty was perhaps the least extreme; most of the others were members of the French Communist Party. Derrida did not quite join, although he hung out with them and contributed to their publications.

And along came the crisis of socialism. The question is: What are you going to do? Here you have a movement, the socialist ideology, that you have thought to be beautiful and true and noble; the Idea that is going to cure all of the world's problems. Now it is being buffeted by theoretical arguments that seem to be unanswerable and by practical events that provide tons of evidence undermining it and showing that the hated capitalist system is superior. How are you going to deal with that crisis, psychologically and intellectually?

My hypothesis is that postmodernism is the way a significant number of far-left socialists dealt with that crisis.

The analogy that I would make here is to a religious crisis. Suppose you believe in a religion that has come to be a part of your identity, that you believe to be true and noble, and that gives meaning to life. Suddenly, you find yourself in a position where all the evidence is going against this religion, all of the logical arguments are going against it. You have a choice. Either you go with the evidence and go with the logic, in which case you are going to abandon your religious beliefs. Or you can maintain your religious beliefs but abandon the notion that evidence matters and the notion that logic is the final court of appeal.

On this religious analogy, we know that there are a number of people who, confronted with the intellectual failure of religion, resort to irrationalist defenses of their view. They will attack reason, they will attack evidence, they will attack logic,

they will embrace various non-rational epistemologies. And that, I suggest, is exactly what started to happen in far-left circles in the 1950s and in the 1960s.

The left intellectuals were confronting the crisis of socialism. One choice was to say: “The logic and evidence show that socialism does not work, that it is discredited, and so we have to abandon socialism in order to stick with the logic and the evidence.” The other choice was to say: “We have to maintain our socialism and our advocacy of it, but we therefore have to attack logic, attack evidence, attack reason as the final court of appeal.” And the latter is exactly what all of those postmodern, skeptical, subjectivistic, relativistic epistemologies do. They, in effect, give you a set of tools. If there are arguments against the success of socialism and in favor of the success of capitalism, well, you can just dismiss those arguments on epistemological grounds. Postmodernism gives you, in effect, a get-out-of-jail-free card against any rational attack on your system. So, that is what I mean by saying, “The failure of socialism made postmodernism necessary.” Postmodernism, including its epistemological strategy, was the only way in the latter part of the twentieth century for someone to retain his faith in socialism as an ideology.

***TNI*:** Some people have said that in tracing postmodernist belief to political disappointment you are engaging in an argument *ad hominem.* What is your response?

Hicks: Well, let’s think about the *ad hominem* issue. It is correct that whether postmodernism is true or not is independent of the political views of its advocates. Those postmodern epistemological strategies—skepticism, subjectivism, relativism, the notion that human beings are in zero-sum conflict—all those arguments have to be addressed on their own terms. So if my argument was: “Postmodernists use certain epistemological strategies, but they are just a bunch of socialists, so their epistemological arguments are no good,” that would indeed be an *ad hominem* argument. All of the elements of the postmodernist package—their epistemology, their view of human nature, their ethics and political theory, and so forth—all of the elements do have to be addressed philosophically, and counterarguments have to be made against them, and adequate defenses of the alternative position have to be made as well.

But—and this is the second part of my answer here—when one is doing intellectual history, which is a related but different enterprise from doing philosophy per se, then one must try to understand why a movement of thinkers embraced the views that they did. And there is this striking question when you turn to the latter half of the twentieth century: Why is a huge movement of very powerful intellectuals, the vast majority of whom are far left in their politics, suddenly advocating and using skeptical or relativistic arguments in defense of their political ideology? It is all the more striking when the history of socialism, particularly in its Marxist version, had for over a century emphasized the importance of science, the importance of evidence, the importance of giving good

rational arguments for one's position. If you have a generation that quickly throws into reverse its epistemological defense of socialism and tries to defend socialism by the very opposite means, that is a question in intellectual history that begs for an answer.

So that is why I think it is absolutely essential to tie the epistemology of postmodernism to the politics of postmodernism. The vast majority of the major postmodernists are far left in their politics. We know a lot about the history of far-left politics in the twentieth century, and I do not think it is an accident that those thinkers confronted with the crisis of socialism resorted to desperate epistemological strategies in their defense.

***TNI*:** Since completing *Explaining Postmodernism,* you have produced *Nietzsche and the Nazis*, a 2-hour-and-45-minute documentary that picks up on certain material from the book. In it you ask, "Did Nietzsche's philosophy provide the foundation for the horrors perpetrated by the Nazis?" Well, did it?

Hicks: I talk about Nietzsche in my postmodernism book and the Nazis to a lesser extent. But this documentary is a full-bore investigation about that fascinating question of political history and intellectual history: To what extent were the Nazis justified in citing Nietzsche as one of their philosophical precursors? Hitler, for example, had a bust of Nietzsche in his study. He gave a set of Nietzsche's works—I believe the complete set that had been published up to that point—as a gift to Mussolini on one of Mussolini's state visits. Many of the speeches of Hitler and Goebbels and other members of the Nazi hierarchy have rhetoric that is clearly inspired by Nietzsche. And so on.

So it is an interesting intellectual historical question. In addition, since the Nazis were such a disaster and Nietzsche is such a popular philosopher of the twentieth century, many people have been afraid that there might be something to the Nazis' claim that Nietzsche was one of their own. After all, where would that leave today's admirers of Nietzsche?

My answer to the question is an unequivocal yes and no. In several significant respects, the Nazis were bang-on accurate in citing Nietzsche as one of their progenitors. And I think that, in a number of other respects, Nietzsche would have been properly horrified at the use that the Nazis made of his philosophy. To keep my answer here under two hours, I'll have to focus on generalities.

The more abstract the level you look at, the more the Nazis have a claim on Nietzsche. They both are anti-rationalistic in their thinking; they both make zero-sum conflict central to their idea of human relationships; they both are strong advocates of violence and militarism. And so all of those ideas—none of which Nietzsche invented, but all of which he advocated—can be found in Nazi rhetoric. And Nietzsche was an extraordinarily powerful voice for those ideas. So, the

Nazis were right to see Nietzsche as advocating the same themes that they were.

At the level of specifics, though, there are any number of important points of detail about which the Nazis and Nietzsche had profound differences. Nietzsche was not an anti-Semite in the virulent way that the Nazis were. The Nazis thought of the German Aryan-type as the highest development of mankind, and Nietzsche had almost nothing but contempt for contemporary Germans, and so on. So I would say this: At the level of philosophy, there are a number of very strong agreements between Nietzsche and the Nazis. At the level of cultural specifics, there are more divergences than areas of agreement.

But for details, watch the documentary.

***TNI*:** Lastly, I want to discuss your most recent project: The Center for Ethics and Entrepreneurship. How did that come about and what will you be doing?

Hicks: Well, I wrote an article called "Ayn Rand and Contemporary Business Ethics," which was published in a journal in 2003. That article was read by John Allison, who is the CEO of BB&T Corporation, a financial holding company, and head of the BB&T Charitable Foundation. He is a strong advocate of Ayn Rand's philosophy, and he liked the article, so that led to a correspondence between the two of us. The BB&T Charitable Foundation has been funding some academic programs around the country, trying to foster a vigorous and well-informed debate over the morality of capitalism. So, out of our correspondence came a proposal that was then approved.

What we are going to be doing at Rockford—actually, we have already begun—is to start up a new institute called The Center for Ethics and Entrepreneurship. Most of the effort will be done in the philosophy department, of which I am the chair. But we are also going to be doing projects with our economics and business department as well. We will be developing new courses focusing on the morality of capitalism, and Rand's writings will figure in those courses. We are going to be focusing also on courses on entrepreneurship and integrating those with material on ethics.

For example, we will be looking at some of the great entrepreneurs in American business history and using them as case studies: How did they become so successful? What can we learn from their success? But then we will also be using their life experiences as a platform for talking about all of the ethical and political controversies that they generated. Were they robber barons? Were they predatory monopolists? Or were they productive individuals who enriched themselves, lived the good life, and improved the lot of other people as well?

As a result of the grant, we will also be able to hire another full-time philosophy professor at Rockford College. We are in the midst of the search for that person

right now. That will enable us to teach a broader range of philosophy courses, but especially to teach business ethics courses, which are a major interest of mine. I'm going to be working more systematically in business ethics as a result of this.

***TNI*:** Will you have publications or programs for the general public? Is there some way that we can follow along with the work of the Center? And can people contribute?

Hicks: Yes, absolutely. Although everything is in development right now, we will be doing two major types of outreach efforts. We will have a website, which will be for students at Rockford College, of course, but also will be generally accessible, and we will have lots of material of general interest there. We are also going to be publishing a newsletter that will come out three or four times a year. The first issue will come out this September, and its central feature will be interviews with people who are doing interesting work in the business world, especially if their work has a strong entrepreneurial angle.

These are exciting times for entrepreneurship, by all indications, and so we are going to be seeking out creative people, people who have achieved success through entrepreneurial activities. We are also going to be seeking out people to interview who are principled, thoughtful, and strategic about how they do what they do. We have a list of people who had a vision, worked hard, and made it real. The interviews with them will show how they did what they did, how they met the various challenges and difficulties, and what we can learn from them as a result of their entrepreneurial success.

And certainly, to pick up on your third question, contributions are welcome. I want to make this a long-term, ongoing Center. The Objectivist, libertarian, individualist world has several institutions and think tanks outside of the academy, but my focus and the focus of the Center will be to make a difference inside the academic world. So, anyone who is interested in supporting the Center's work can make contributions out to The Center for Ethics and Entrepreneurship and send them to my address in Rockford College. That would certainly be much appreciated. Also, anybody who is interested in being on the Center's mailing list for press releases and the newsletter can just send me their snail mail and e-mail addresses, and we will add them to the list.

***TNI*:** Thank you for your time, and good luck with your new Center.