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## A Critical Examination of the Ethical Philosophy of Ayn Rand

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Virginia Jean Osborn entitled "A Critical Examination of the Ethical Philosophy of Ayn Rand." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Philosophy.

Glenn C. Graber, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Phil Hamlin, Pam B. Edwards

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

November 12, 1973

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Virginia Jean Osborn entitled "A Critical Examination of the Ethical Philosophy of Ayn Rand." I recommend that it be accepted for nine quarter hours of credit in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Philosophy.

Glenn C. Galbreath  
Major Professor

We have read this thesis  
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A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF THE ETHICAL  
PHILOSOPHY OF AYN RAND

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Graduate Council of  
The University of Tennessee

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

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by  
Virginia Jean Osborn  
December 1973

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## ABSTRACT

The central purpose of this paper is to critically examine and to render consistent three major areas of Ayn Rand's ethical philosophy "Objectivism." The three areas under consideration will be the intrinsic good and the basic extrinsic goods of Objectivism, the Objectivist theory of obligation, and the Objectivist position concerning happiness.

The task of analyzing these three areas of Objectivism will involve, first, a description of the position under consideration, second, an analysis of the meaning of the position, and third, an analysis of the internal consistency and/or truth of the position under consideration. This analysis shall be used in each of the areas listed above.

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## INTRODUCTION

I have undertaken the task of analyzing and, where needed, of rendering consistent the ethical philosophy of Ayn Rand for two principal reasons: First, since her philosophy is known primarily through her fictional writing, rather than organized treatises or papers, her ethical philosophy is very often misunderstood. Even in her essays it is difficult to separate her psychology, politics, and metaphysics, from her ethical position. I believe that this situation creates a scholarly need for an analysis of her work. Second, I have been greatly influenced by the stylistic power Rand employs. Since it is the clarity and consistency of her thought that I am interested in, rather than the power of her style, I hope that work on this paper will enable me to increase my critical distance in order to achieve a true perspective of her ethical position.



## CHAPTER I

### LIFE AND CONSCIOUSNESS

Ayn Rand's ethical position is perhaps aptly described as a rule-egoism. The rule(s), however, will not be discussed until Chapter III. In Rand's system one's life is the intrinsic good. All that functions to maintain one's life is extrinsically good. Death is the intrinsic evil. All that functions to either cause one's death or reduce the ability of one to live is extrinsically evil. The examination of her arguments concerning the establishment of (1) life's being the intrinsic good and (2) consciousness being extrinsically good, concern a major portion of this chapter.

This study of Objectivism's basic claims and consequent sub-principles begins with a statement of biologic and psychologic import: the structure of reality necessitates that man guide his actions according to a code or principles derived from his nature. The structure of reality that necessitates this is that man is a living entity possessing properties which enable him to live under certain conditions, but not under others. It is "ethics as a science [that] deals with discovering and defining . . . a code"<sup>1</sup> that will enable man to live according to his nature. Man is an entity capable of valuing. It is only because he is alive that this is so.

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<sup>1</sup>Ayn Rand, The Virtue of Selfishness (New York: New American Library, 1964), p. 73.

There is only one fundamental alternative in the universe: existence or non-existence--and it pertains to a single class of entities: to living organisms. . . . It is only a living organism that faces a constant alternative: the issue of life or death. . . . It is only the concept "Life" that makes the concept "Value" possible. It is only a living entity that things can be good or evil.<sup>2</sup>

The notion of "fundamental alternative" needs to be explicated. What makes the issue of life and death the one basic alternative? It is that the choice between these two alternatives leads to very different consequences. If one chooses to live, this choice makes possible all other consequent alternatives of one's life. On the other hand, if one chooses to die, or just dies, no further alternatives are ever presented to the agent. The dead do not make choices concerning what to wear, eat, or do. Only a living entity can make these, or any other, choices. Therefore, when Rand speaks of the fundamental alternative being that of life or death, she is speaking quite literally. She means the one alternative, life, is a necessary condition, the pre-requisite, of all other alternatives. She does not mean, however, that it is the sufficient condition of one's choices. The other alternative, death, has no subsequent alternatives at all. It is in this way that the issue of life and death is the basic or fundamental alternative for all living entities.

Since it is only to a living entity that things can be good or evil, Rand formulates her ethics on the principle that this fundamental alternative exists for all living things alike. It seems to me that the

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<sup>2</sup>Ayn Rand, Atlas Shrugged (New York: Random House, 1958), pp. 1012, 1013.

statement that it is only to living entities that things can be good or evil is obviously true. Rocks, roads, clouds, air, etc., do not have the capacity to judge what things are for them or against them. It is certain that rocks, roads, clouds, and air do exist although they are not living entities. Thus, while Rand first states that fundamental alternative in terms of existence or non-existence, what she means is the alternative between life and death.

On the difference between living and non-living creatures, Rand states:

Only a living entity can have goals or can originate them. And it is only a living organism that has the capacity for self-generated, goal-directed action. On the physical level, the functions of all living organisms . . . are actions generated by the organism itself and directed to a single goal: the maintenance of the organism's life. An organism's life depends on two factors: the material or fuel which it needs from the outside, from its physical background, and the action of its own body, the action of using that fuel properly. What standard determines what is proper in this context? The standard is the organism's life, or: that which is required for the organism's survival. No choice is open to an organism in this issue: that which is required for its survival is determined by its nature, by the kind of entity it is. . . . Life can be kept in existence only by a constant process of self-sustaining action. The goal of that action, the ultimate value which, to be kept, must be gained through its every moment is the organism's life.<sup>3</sup>

This passage is intended to provide a basis for the philosophic position that an organism's life is the ultimate value or intrinsic good. It can be viewed as containing two separate, yet related, assertions. The relation existing between the two assertions is a form of the classical argument from psychology to ethics. By showing that the

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<sup>3</sup>Rand, The Virtue of Selfishness, pp. 16-17.

functions of all living organisms are directed to the same goal Rand hopes to prove that the goal to which they are all directed is the end-in-itself or intrinsic value. The first assertion deals with living entities from a biologic, physical, and environmental point of view. The second asserts the philosophical position held by the Objectivists concerning the intrinsic good. A question arises regarding the statement that all physical occurrences within the organism are directed to the maintenance of the organism's life, namely, is this true? It certainly is true that biologists and physiologists commonly explain the different cell types, tissue types, organs, and systems of organs in question with a view to the relation each of these has in maintaining the life of the organism. Thinking critically, however, about this descriptive frame of reference of roles and functions, one must try to ascertain whether it is true that all the complex workings between cells, tissues, organs, and systems of the entity aim toward the maintenance of that entity's life. It is one thing to say that the red blood cells, do, in fact, carry oxygen to all parts of the body, and that without this process man would die, and quite another to maintain that this process itself has the goal of maintaining the life of a man. In a like manner the different systems of an organism, e.g., the digestive, the respiratory, and the nervous system do indeed function and with that functioning do maintain the life of an organism, generally speaking. However, to presuppose that these processes--from the cellular to the system level--aim at, rather than result in, the survival of the organism is an assumption that scientists do not generally make. Rand asserts

this as though science had discovered its truth. Therefore, let me say that the teleological implications involved in saying that the processes aim toward the maintenance of life are philosophically colorful (and philosophically arguable, perhaps), but they are not scientifically known. The same may be said of those occurrences or processes which result in the equilibrium of the environment, namely, senescence and procreation. Philosophically speaking, these two processes may be thought to presuppose the death of individual organisms. However, to cite the process as having that as an aim or goal is simply scientifically unknown. It is precisely this step which delineates the line between philosophy and science in this particular case. However, Rand implies -- the teleological account is scientifically grounded, rather than one of her philosophic assumptions.

This is not to say that science has no use for teleology or purposes. In genetic and evolutionary theory these concepts play a very important role. But even here the descriptions of certain processes are not confused with an ascription of purposes to these processes.

Explication of Rand's model of the organism and the "fuel" is necessary at this point. Rand's assertion is that an organism's life depends on two factors, one being the material or fuel from its environment, and the second being the utilization of that fuel by its own body. It is a fact that without physical sustenance, e.g., air, water, and food, and without the capacity to breathe the air, to drink the water, or digest the food, animals would perish. In claiming this it is obvious that Rand is on solid ground scientifically. I do not believe that Rand is arguing that these are the only two conditions required, the

sufficient conditions, or an organism's life. Nor do I think that she is arguing that the entire physical background of an organism is "fuel." Needless to say, there are a great many biospheric processes which, if halted, could end animal life. The rain and water cycles, sunlight and photosynthetic processes, decomposition of organic particles into inorganic particles (to name a few) have a great bearing on the ability of an organism to survive. These processes cannot be said to serve as "fuel" even in Rand's sense of the word. Therefore a qualification of her statement is needed. A change from calling these "the" two factors to simply "two factors" would be sufficient to avoid her being misconstrued.

When Rand speaks of the "standard" that determines what is "proper" concerning the life processes, such as breathing, or ingestion of food, she is referring to biologic or physiologic facts of nature, viz., that the kind of organism I am determines the conditions, generally speaking, that must be available for me to live. For example, a plant must have air, water, sunlight, and accommodating temperatures to live. The standard that determines this is the physical structure of the organism with all that is entailed by being a certain kind of, or genera of, plant. Rand's statement concerning the standard of propriety is a disinterested one noting that an organism's biologic structure is a determining factor of the organism's ability to live, and the conditions required by it to live.

In summary, then, I agree that "Only a living entity can have goals or originate them. And it is only a living entity that has the

capacity for self generated, goal directed action" (Cf. p. 4). I further agree that two factors necessary to the maintenance of an organism's life are material from its environment and the ability to use that material as sustenance. I do not agree, however, with the assertion that physical processes aim toward, or have the goal of maintaining an organism's life. This is a philosophically debatable position that Rand treats as scientifically known.

At this point it is important to ask whether the considerations of the last few paragraphs concerning the biologic facts of life significantly undercut the philosophic position that the intrinsic good is an entity's life? I do not think that they do. The assertion that life is intrinsically valuable has two other arguments in its favor. One of these is Rand's argument regarding the fundamental alternative between life and death. It consists of the following steps: An organism faces the constant alternative of life and death. The death of an organism negates any meaningful ascription of any values for that organism, just as the death of all living entities would negate the ascription of ultimate or extrinsic values for anything. All values presuppose and depend on the organism's being alive. Therefore, it is the life of the entity that is of intrinsic value.

An initially plausible refutation to this argument is to assert that life is a precondition of the achievement of good(s) such as pleasure or knowledge, which makes it instrumentally good, rather than intrinsically good, and to go on to say that these ends, i.e., pleasure and/or knowledge are the intrinsic good(s).

This argument, however, does not show that life is not intrinsically good. It does show that life is sometimes considered a necessary condition to the achievement of other goods. For one and the same thing may be both intrinsically and extrinsically valuable. Many things such as love, knowledge, health, and happiness are either contributive and/or instrumental in the securing, sustaining, or bettering of one's life. Hence a similar argument can be offered maintaining that life is an intrinsic good, while these other things are extrinsic goods. This shows that it is possible that life is an intrinsic good in its own right even though (1) it is not recognized as such, or (2) there are other intrinsic goods, and that life serves as a means to achieving them. Thus, the assertion that life is a precondition of happiness or knowledge in no way affects the contention that it is intrinsically valuable, nor proves that these other goods are intrinsically valuable.

Rand speaks of one's life as the intrinsic good, or the ultimate value. There is a huge difference in maintaining this position and maintaining that life is an intrinsic good. The former position implies that life is the only intrinsic good while the latter allows that there may be other intrinsic goods.

In order to show that life is an intrinsic value, a person must show that it has a non-derivative value, i.e., that it is good for the kind of thing that it is. On the other hand, in order to show that it is the intrinsic good, one must show not only that it is valuable for the kind of thing that it is, but also that other supposed intrinsic goods do not have non-derivative value.



Trying to consider one's life without a view to its alternatives and possibilities is not an easy task. Life has this peculiar feature. It does have alternatives and possibilities, even for the lowest animals. This is part of what our concept of life is. Even a planarium or a tree has possibilities, though from a person's point of view very limited ones. By "possibilities" I mean not only the processes of a biochemical nature which scientists refer to as "life processes" but the possibilities and alternatives which spring up with the organization of these processes. The processes of life are biochemical and electro-physical. The organization of these processes in cells, tissues, organs, organ systems, and organisms give rise to the different activities of ingestion, growth, reproduction, regeneration, energy utilization, irritability responses (to name a few) that all living entities exhibit so far as the complexity of organization and their development of organization permits. In higher animals, as opposed to lower animals and plants, the specific possibilities include those of thought and emotion. It is these different possibilities and alternatives that make up our concept of life, and distinguish it from our concept of inanimate matter.

This does not amount to evaluating life in terms of its consequences, for all particular consequences can be disregarded. The fact that life is the kind of thing that it is, that involves processes, possibilities, and alternatives not found in non-living existents, such as sound waves or air, makes it intrinsically valuable.

When I calmly and coolly reflect on the proposition that life is intrinsically valuable, I can, in contemplation, leave out certain

properties of my life, say, its particular joys or pains. I can reflect that it is valuable regardless of these because of the kind of thing that it is. In other words, it is valuable in and of itself.

I can only suggest further that each person, when trying to discover if his life is intrinsically valuable, try to disregard the particular situations that he has encountered or will encounter, and reflect solely on the difference between animacy and inanimacy. This may not be an easy task. Ask a man being tortured if he views his life as intrinsically valuable, and the pain he feels may determine his answer. Similarly, ask a man who is sated, well-off, and happy if he views his life as intrinsically valuable, and his self-satisfaction may influence his answer. However, if one can, and I believe one can, extricate the particular moments of joy or pain, and consider the mere ability to live and the life one has, then I believe that its intrinsic value will be obvious.

The discussion above shows, I think, that one's life is intrinsically good. I shall now consider Rand's position that life is the intrinsic good.

In my estimation Rand does not adequately treat the question of whether there are other intrinsically valuable things, such as, happiness. By "adequately" I mean that she does not prove, nor does she even attempt to prove, that these do not have non-derivative value. Her consideration of other proposed intrinsic values, such as happiness, attempt to discredit them on the grounds that they can not serve effectively as a standard for action, whereas one's life can. While this may

be true, unless Rand can show that happiness is good only for its consequences, she will have to admit the possibility of pluralism.

We shall find in Chapter III of this thesis that Rand's positions concerning the value of one's happiness and the value of one's life are not clearly distinguished. This may be one reason that she does not attempt to show that happiness is not intrinsically, i.e., in and of itself, good.

Rand tries to show that happiness cannot serve as an effective standard of action by pointing out that actions such as stealing and working honestly, keeping and breaking promises, and telling the truth and lying will derive their rightness or wrongness depending on the accrument of happiness: That is, each of these actions may be judged right, even though some are considered wrong, because each may bring happiness.

It is not that Rand does not think that happiness is not valuable, for, as I pointed out earlier, she seems to view its attainment and the value of its attainment on a level with life itself. Her criticism of using happiness as the standard of right and wrong also includes the implication that to existentially determine an action's rightness or wrongness, one must look for the presence of a subjective emotion. Rand believes that ethics must be based on more than either emotions or subjective desire gratification for it to guide people's actions. She believes that what is actually conducive to one's life, that is, to the actual securement and betterment of one's life, is an objectively answerable question, and though one may give his opinion on this issue,

the opinion will in no way determine the actual truth of the situation. Rand thinks that if happiness is the standard, one will have no objective criterion by which to determine the rightness or wrongness of an action.

These criticisms are designed to show that there are problems that arise if one uses an emotion as the criterion of right and wrong. I am inclined to agree that these can not be forwarded against a standard such as one's life. What makes me happy, may not make John happy, but it does seem that if a certain situation is conducive to my life that, other things being equal, it will be to the advantage of John's life also. This seems to be true in virtue of the fact that John and I are both living human being. Therefore, if one can decide what things and actions further one's life, then one knows that they are instrumentally good. It is the concept of intrinsic good that makes possible the concept of extrinsic good. When Rand says that it is the "task of ethics to teach [man] how to live like man,"<sup>4</sup> she is referring to the discovery of and definition of those extrinsic goods which will promote and, hopefully secure the ultimate value, one's life.

Rand's philosophy declares that an organism's life is "an ultimate value . . . to which all lesser goals are the means--and it sets the standard by which all lesser are evaluated. An organism's life is its standard of value: that which furthers its life is the good, that which threatens it is the evil."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

A discussion of whose life is intrinsically valuable is important at this point. The question arises whether (1) life in general, apart from the life of the individual organism is the intrinsic value, or (2) each organism's life is of intrinsic value to that organism, or (3) all living entities are intrinsically valuable to each other. Although Rand's writings point to the second of these, she has not offered an explicit and defended statement of her position. I shall attempt to supply this. Regarding the proposition (1) that life in general is the intrinsic good, I must say that this makes little sense to me. What is life apart from the individual living organisms? Life is neither an entity nor a property of a generality; it is a property of single individual entities. At any given time, life is possessed by certain entities and not by others. It is true that we have the concept of "life in general." This is shown by the many meaningful utterances in daily discourse, such as, "Life in general is pleasant for Americans," or, "Life is a real hassle." The meaning of these utterances has to do with the quality of life the majority of certain people are experiencing at a certain time. In other words, it is the notion of people's lives that is at the heart of the concept of "life in general." By this I mean that when a person makes reference to "life in general," he means to refer to the lives of people or of other animals, and to make some statement as to the quality of those lives.

The Objectivist position is the same as mine that "life," apart from the individual entities that possess it, is not a candidate for the intrinsic good. The concept of "life in general" seems to be analyzable

in terms of a number of individual living entities with regard to quality of life this number may have.

Now what of the proposition (2) that it is the individual's life that is the intrinsic good relative to that particular organism? On this view my life is intrinsically valuable to me, a given horse's life is intrinsically valuable to it, a given planaria's life is intrinsically valuable to it, etc. Rand's writing indicates this interpretation is expressive of her position. This is because there is only one life that an individual can live: its own. What determines what is right to do in connection with the maintenance of an organism's life? Rand answers that the nature of the organism determines it: "A plant," she says, "must feed in order to live; the sunlight, the water, the chemicals it needs are the values its nature has set it to pursue; its life is the standard of value directions its actions. . . . it acts automatically to further its life, it cannot act for its own destruction."<sup>6</sup>

This passage clarifies the notion of intrinsic value, but it also creates a problem of facticity. Is it, or is it not, true that plants cannot act for their own destruction? It must be remembered that Rand's references to self-generated activity on the part of living organisms are not meant to be references to conscious goal-directed activity. If this were the case, then her statement would be trivially true since plants can not act consciously. She is saying of the physical processes

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<sup>6</sup>Rand, Atlas Shrugged, p. 1013.

of organisms ranging from amoeba through man in the Animal Kingdom and from algae to flowers in the Plant Kingdom that they do extend the organism's life, or enable it to live; and she is correct.

The actions of plants, as in the example above, do, on the whole, function automatically to sustain the plant's life. This is not to deny that, in addition, certain environmental conditions must be met according to the kind of plant one is speaking of. The aeration of the soil, water and mineral content of the soil, amount of sunlight required, and freedom from certain parasites and fungi are required, for example.

The question, here, is whether it is proper to say that the organism acts for its own destruction, given some external environmental condition, such as chemical poisoning of the soil the intake of which results in its death. In a sense it certainly can be said that the action of the plant, that is, the osmotic process of taking the water from the soil also resulted in the taking of poison which killed it. However, it is questionable that the osmotic process itself results in the organism's death. This process is necessary to the survival of the plant. The fact that the poison killed the plant in no way alters the truth of the statement that the process functions, in other more favorable conditions, to maintain the life of the organism. It is known by botanists that some plants are equipped with filter mechanisms which selectively obstruct the passage into the plant of certain parasites or chemicals which could kill it. Other plants do not have these filter devices. Is it to be thought that the latter plants act for their own destruction because they do not have the filter mechanisms that other

plants do? Is the inability to select which minerals are taken into its system the same thing as a plant's acting for its own destruction? The osmotic process is one of the processes by which most, if not all, plants survive. If a plant were to act for its own destruction, it would upset the process in some way. This is what I think Rand's point would be here.

A further consideration of the problem is this: If it is not the process of osmosis that is responsible for the death of the plant, but the unfavorable environment, can it not be said that the favorable conditions of an environment are responsible for the life of the plant? The answer is an emphatic, "No." The environment could be totally favorable for maintaining plant life. However, unless the processes of ingestion, and metabolic reduction of food to energy, etc., were present, the environment would be powerless to sustain a plant's life.

This question of whether a plant ever acts for its own destruction seems more and more to depend on how one chooses to describe the actual situation. Rand's point, here, seems to be an accurate one in the sense that even if poison is imbibed by the plant, the process of osmosis was functioning according to certain laws which if the process is executed in favorable conditions result in the plant's continuing survival. The claim she makes can be separated from the ambiguity of language if one sees that Rand's position seems again to import teleology to these processes when she speaks of "acting" for the plant's destruction.

Just as nature determines and equips plants with values to pursue, so she equips man with values. Unlike a plant, however, man is not



provided with an automatic course of activities which will gain his values. Nature provides him with a "volitional consciousness." "Consciousness--for those living organisms that possess it--is the basic means of survival."<sup>7</sup>

Rand's statement above is arguable. For to claim that consciousness is the basic means of survival, one must be able to show that it is more basic than, say, the citric acid cycle, or digestive processes. I really do not think that this is a defensible thesis. Man depends so greatly on unconscious processes to live that to claim one to be more basic than another is a mistake. Both unconscious processes and consciousness are basic to man's survival.

An acceptable and defensible thesis is that consciousness, for those organisms that possess it, is a basic condition of survival. Before arguing for this position I should like to say what I take the term "consciousness" to mean.

Consciousness is a level of awareness found in some animals, and not in others. It is more than the ability to respond to external stimuli; it involves the awareness of external stimuli. For example, this awareness of external stimuli provides man with an opportunity to respond before the actual physical stimulation. He can respond to symbolic cries such as, "Fire!" before he is burned. Another example is that in a forest fire, the conscious animals can retreat, or, in man's case react in such a way so as to put out the fire, before the actual

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<sup>7</sup>Rand, The Virtue of Selfishness, p. 18.

flames reach them. An amoeba or a planarium in a pond can only respond to actual rising temperature of the water in such an instance. Plants, in a like manner, and as examples of unconscious beings, can only respond to the traumas of the environment as they affect them directly. Whereas some animals can, because of conscious awareness, respond before the actual physical confrontation.

Different classes of animals display different levels of awareness. This indicates that consciousness can be differentiated into higher and lower levels. However, the major importance of consciousness for the animals that possess it rests on its importance as a means to assess the environment. Further, consciousness involves a level of awareness of one's own inner states such as feeling hungry, cold, or sick.

I agree with Rand that consciousness is a basic or necessary condition of life for higher or more complex animals. A dog, or a cat, a monkey, or a man could not survive on its own without this state of awareness.

For example, there are records of cases of comatose patients in possibly every hospital. Their lives were, and are, maintained by the intravenous feedings performed by others who possess this faculty of consciousness in its operative state. It does not alter this fact to say that once the plasma, glucose, or blood, are administered that the patient takes over. The point is that the unconscious patient will die without the provisions made possible by other conscious people. The fact that the patient's body makes use of the materials while he is

unconscious in no way diminishes the fact that his life depends on the food coming in. Further, the food is not coming in as a result of a self-generated activity on the part of the patient. Unlike the plant whose osmotic processes provide it with water automatically, and are self-generated processes, a comatose patient can use the water provided him, but can do nothing in the way of procuring it. In order for a person to drink water, or eat food, he must be conscious. In order for him to utilize these he need not be. But if he is not conscious, then he must depend on other conscious people to administer the essential materials to him. Otherwise, he will die. This does not lead to the following conclusion: That because a comatose patient is not self-sufficient, no organism is self-sufficient because in both cases the food is provided by something external to itself. It leads to this conclusion: That an organism is dependent on its external environment and its consciousness of that environment to live. If the organism loses consciousness, then the organism is dependent on its environment and other conscious entities in order to live. In both cases it is to be understood that the entity in question depends also in its own unconscious processes. Therefore, consciousness remains a necessary condition for its continued survival.

In a biologic sense, I do not think that there is any living entity that is self-sufficient in that it does not require environmental elements, which it did not create, to live. However, the point is not one of self-sufficiency. It is a point that relates to an entity's basic means of survival. When a person is unconscious, then his life

comes to depend on the consciousness of others. If those others cease to administer the necessary food or drugs, the unconscious person will die; unless, of course, he regains consciousness, and can administer these things to himself. The fact that it is contingent that the glucose is administered by a nurse, rather than a computer programmed by a nurse, does not lessen the force of the fact that it is empirically true that consciousness is a basic means of survival for those entities that have it. Since it is necessary for the survival of many organisms, I am in agreement with Rand that it is a basic extrinsic good for those organisms.

However, what is the meaning of the term "volitional" consciousness?<sup>8</sup> Rand uses this term to make a distinction between man's mode of consciousness and other animal's modes of consciousness. With a few exceptions in higher mammalia, an animal

. . . has no choice in the knowledge and the skills that it acquires; it can only repeat them generation after generation. And an animal has no choice in the standard of value directing its actions: its senses provide it with an automatic code of values, an automatic knowledge of what is good for it or evil, what benefits or endangers its life. . . . it cannot suspend its consciousness--it cannot choose not to perceive--it cannot evade its own perceptions. . . . [Man] has no automatic course of action, no automatic set of values. His senses do not tell him automatically what is good for him or evil, what will benefit his life or endanger it, what goals he should pursue and what means will achieve them. . . . His own consciousness has to discover the answers to all of these questions--but his consciousness will not function automatically. . . . Man's sense organs function automatically;

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

man's brain integrates his sense data into percepts automatically; but the process of [abstraction and of concept formation] is not automatic. . . . The faculty that directs this [actively sustained] process . . . is: reason. The process is thinking.<sup>9</sup>

In part, I think that Rand is mistaken here. Man does have senses which act automatically to deter a person from following certain courses of activity. The different physiological gag-reflexes, pain-avoidance reflexes, and the bitter taste of some minerals usually function to deter a person from certain actions. Therefore, the flat assertion that man has no automatic course of behavior seems to be false. Some forms of behavior are automatic. The contrary of Rand's position, i.e., all forms of knowledge are automatic, is false, too, so, with some qualifications, I would agree with Rand's account. It is true that man does acquire knowledge by thinking, and in particular he acquires knowledge of values by thinking. For example, I saw the mother of a newly-crawling baby girl save the child several times from crawling off the bed. Then the mother put pillows around the bed. A few minutes later the baby crawled right off. Now before she fell the child could see the edge of the bed, and once at the edge, she could see the floor. She could perhaps see that there was a considerable distance between the edge of the bed and the floor. However, the knowledge that was not provided by her senses was that she would fall if she crawled off the bed, and that a fall could injure her.

In Rand's description above of consciousness as a level of

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 19-20.

awareness regarding an organism's environment and its internal states, there was no attempt to differentiate man's consciousness from other animals' consciousness. Rand does differentiate between man and other animals, however. She maintains that man's consciousness has a property that most higher animals do not have: The capacity to conceptualize.

Man's consciousness shares with animals the first two levels of its development: sensations and perceptions; but it is the third stage, conceptions, that make him man. . . . But to integrate perceptions into conceptions by a process of abstraction, is a feat that man alone has the power to perform--and he has to perform it by choice. The process of abstraction and concept--formation is a process of reason, of thought: it is not . . . instinctive, nor involuntary, nor infallible. Man has to initiate it, to sustain it and to bear responsibility for its results.<sup>10</sup>

It is this third stage that Rand refers to as "volitional." Rand maintains that this process of comparing, contrasting, and reasoning does not occur instinctively, nor automatically in man.

I agree with Rand's analysis of consciousness for the most part. However, an examination of certain cases may bring out some difficulties in this position.

It seems evident to me that there certainly is the kind of consciousness Rand refers to. It is usually called "reflective consciousness" and it seems to be an actively sustained endeavor on the part of a person. Problem solving, drawing conclusions from data, and scientific endeavors seem to exemplify the volitional aspect of directing one's attention to X for certain purposes, Y.

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<sup>10</sup> Ayn Rand, For the New Intellectual (New York: New American Library, 196~~7~~), p. 14.

However, is reflective consciousness the only sort of intellectual functioning? Are there no automatic intellectual functions? Building houses, for example, does not seem to result from an automatic knowledge of how houses are built. The knowledge of how to build houses seems to be a result of the reflective consciousness indicated above. There do, however, seem to be automatic intellectual functions in one sense, as can be seen in many examples.

Consider a quite different example. Suppose that I am in a foxhole and a live grenade is thrown into it. I certainly would not sit and reflect to myself about the presence of the grenade. I would snatch it up as quickly as possible and throw it, hopefully, out of distance of harming me. However, this seems to be a response to a stimuli that I had knowledge of. The process by which I gained this knowledge, however, still seems to me to be of the reflective kind Rand refers to. Had I never learned that grenades killed people, I might have picked it up curiously, rather than throwing it out of the foxhole. It seems that many of our actions depend precisely on the kind of knowledge acquired through the kind of conceptual endeavor Rand describes.

Consider the process of learning to play the piano. First one must learn the names or sounds of the particular keys or notes. Then he must practice fingering exercises and simple scales. Then one must coordinate the notes into melodies. All of this takes a great deal of effort and is, unless a person is unusually gifted, a very slow process. However there comes a time when the playing of the piano seems to be automatic. I use the work "automatic" in the sense that the fingering

of keys does not have to be thought of directly. One just knows where his fingers go without having to contemplate it. If there is a sharp or a flat in the melody, it presents no problem to play. One does not have to reflect on the next measure of music; one just plays it. One has not learned to play the piano without having attended to the elements of piano playing, for the struggles of learning to play show that it was not automatic. However, over a period of time, the playing does become automatic in the sense specified.

It certainly does seem that there is a kind of thinking that is not involuntary, nor infallible, nor instinctive. Whether or not there are other kinds of thinking, kinds that are instinctive, involuntary or infallible is an open question which is outside the scope of this paper. It might be that there are such kinds of thinking, which may necessitate a qualification of Rand's statement. However, this does not seem to lessen the import of her statement concerning the kind of thinking heretofore discussed.

It is on the basis of this kind of reflective thinking that Rand differentiates between man and other animals. When Rand says that man's consciousness must discover the answers to the questions of what is good for his life and what is not, she is speaking of the sum total of awareness made possible through sensations, perceptions, and reasoning. "Consciousness" in man refers to all three of these levels. As we shall see the conceptual level of consciousness is a most important factor in Rand's ethical position.

A being who does not know automatically what is true or false, can not know automatically what is right or wrong, what is good



for him or evil. Yet he needs this knowledge in order to live. . . . That which his survival requires is set by his nature and is not open to his choice. What is open to his choice is only whether he will discover it or not. . . .<sup>11</sup>

Rand means to do three things in this statement. She first wants to impress the point that man's consciousness, consisting of the three previously described levels, can discover what things his survival requires. This is a basic assumption she makes. Secondly, she wants to show that this knowledge is crucial to his survival; and, finally, she claims that this discovery is open to a man's choice in so far as it is conceptual.

Rand's biological argument and her references to biological facts disclose that the life of a man, as well as of some other animals, depends on an operative awareness or consciousness of both what his environment affords him to live, and the means by which that sustenance is to be gained. In lower animals this process is largely a case of instinctual behavior. In man it depends on the functioning of all three levels of his awareness. Though it is true that the comatose patient lives without his own operative consciousness, he could not live without the operative consciousness of some other human being who refills his glucose vials, removes his waste, and is conscious.

As the ethical position of the Objectivist philosophy maintains the life of the organism is the intrinsic good, and those things which further life are the extrinsic goods, the ethical position concerning

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<sup>11</sup>Rand, The Virtue of Selfishness, p. 22.

consciousness is that it is a basic extrinsic good. This does not mean, however, that one always employs one's consciousness in the course of one's life to preserve one's life. Indeed, a man who commits suicide by hanging himself, may consciously assemble a rope and a stool for that purpose.

In light of the view that in man the operation of his conceptual faculty is under his volitional control, Rand forwards a prescriptive or normative claim as follows: To the extent that a person employs his capacity to reason in the furtherance of his life, he is doing as a human being should do. To the extent that he does not employ this capacity, or employs it in a way that is destructive of his own life, he is not doing what a person ought to do. The fact that reasoning and thinking are volitional endeavors and that Rand sees these as capable of functioning to maintain and preserve one's life, the intrinsic good, warrants her prescriptive claim.

According to Rand, if man is to survive, he must "initiate" and "sustain" a process of thought.<sup>12</sup>

He cannot provide for his simplest physical needs without a process of thought. . . . His percepts [as opposed to his concepts] might lead him to a cave, if one is available--but to build the simplest shelter, he needs a process of thought. No percepts, and no 'instincts' will tell him how to light a fire, how to weave cloth, . . . how to make a wheel, how to make an airplane, how to perform an appendectomy. . . . Yet his life depends on such knowledge--and only a volitional act of his consciousness, a process of thought, can provide it.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

The range of knowledge necessary to do the above tasks varies tremendously from one to another. I think that the difference in these achievements is largely a difference in degree rather than kind.<sup>14</sup> For example, the process of thought responsible for lighting a fire seems to turn on the ability to isolate or recognize certain materials, viz., chert or flint, and to realize their sparking effects on other materials, dry wood for example. On the other hand, it is obvious that the performance of an appendectomy has required several centuries or more to perfect. The contributions to the success of such an operation are probably innumerable. The complexity of knowledge, gained by many different men in different pursuits, does not lend itself to easy analysis in terms of the "process of thought" Rand ascribes to it. However, despite the complexity, it does seem evident that though the channels leading to the successful performance of an appendectomy are varied and obscure, and spread over years, the faculty that makes it possible is the cognitive, reasoning faculty both in the man who performs the operation and in his predecessors who developed the technique.

It is at once conceded by me, if not by Rand, that there are people who do survive with a minimum of technology. The Australian aborigine and the Phillipine Tasaday, for example. But could they survive without a constant process of thought? By this I mean would they live without assessment of their environments, without their stone implements for hunting or cooking, without shelter, or knowledge of medicinal herbs? Even the simplest means of living seems to depend partly on man's ability to reason.

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

Rand argues, then, that man can choose whether to think or not. What, then, determines whether or not a man will think? Rand answers: a man's will. She compares a man's consciousness, specifically his reasoning faculty, to a "machine without a spark plug, a machine of which [one's] own will has to be the spark plug, the self-starter, and the driver; he has to discover how to use it, and he has to keep it in constant action."<sup>15</sup> "The will" is a very complex philosophical concept, giving rise to a host of problems. I do not think it is self-evident that it is a man's will which determines whether he will think or conceptualize. But I think examples not involving the concept of will can be cited as instances of what Rand means. Suppose, for example, that I eat mushrooms to live on. Suppose that every third day I get violently ill from certain mushrooms, but I don't know which ones. All I do know is that some days mushrooms make me sated, and that other days they make me very sick. If I don't care whether I feel well or not, perhaps I won't go any further in my knowledge than this. But what if being sick makes me care? If so, I must try to find out what causes this state of affairs. I may jump to all the wrong conclusions; for example, I may link the sick feeling to the way I handle the mushrooms or store them. When these efforts fail, perhaps I may discover a difference between the mushrooms' odor, coloring, or whatever that shows me that whenever I eat mushroom A type I feel fine, whereas mushroom B type makes me sick.

The reflective examination involved in this example revolves

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

around two things: One is the desire not to be sick from mushrooms any longer. This is part of the pleasure-pain mechanism found in most people. Sickness is unpleasant. But the desire to discover what and why I am getting sick seems to be more than a reflex to avoid pain or discomfort. Rand would say that my efforts to understand are manifestations of my will. Although the case under discussion is a clear example, and self-explanatory, I am still not convinced that it is proper to speak of a "faculty of will," nor am I sure just what this faculty is like. Further, I am not sure that an act of choice is the sufficient condition of such reflective thinking. To be sure, it seems as though learning of this kind, or the refusal to participate in learning of this kind, is controlled by a person's desire or "will" to learn or not to learn. But I am inclined to think that one's environment also has a good bit to do with the initial impetus to make this choice. For example, tribes of Eskimos are known to have over two dozen words for "snow," each designating a particular kind of snow according to color, texture, and implications for hunting and fishing. This classification is important for the Eskimos due to the fact that snow is a constant aspect of their lives. As it is not important environmentally that I have the different classifications of snow on hand, it has never occurred to me to attempt such a classification. Were I to put my mind to such a task however, I think that I would be successful. However, phrases such as "will," "personal decision," "putting my mind to it," or "desire" do not sufficiently explain the initiating and sustaining of my reasonable thinking which, in the example above, would consist of

comparing, contrasting, and devoting my attention to snowfalls. Unfortunately, Rand's metaphor of the spark plug is all that she has written on the subject of the will. I would only be second-guessing to say what her view of the will is, and tearing down a straw-man if it were not what I thought it should be. Perhaps the only acquaintance I have with such a capacity is through introspection. If this can be allowed as evidence for the seat of volition then I can say I know what Rand is speaking of, though I cannot say how to analyze it.

In this chapter I have tried to present and evaluate Rand's position concerning the intrinsic good, i.e., the life of such organism, and a basic means to life for some organisms, i.e., consciousness. At this point I should like to move to other derivative extrinsic goods in Rand's philosophy. Chapter II will deal with Objectivism's contention that productive action, reason, pride, and self-esteem are values/virtues. The examinations of the meanings of each of these terms and their consistency with her foundational premiss will be the main objective in the chapter.

## CHAPTER II

### THREE CARDINAL VALUES AND VIRTUES

Some questions that can be asked in connection with values are: What are values? Does man need values? If he does, why? Where does the concept of "value" originate?

To begin with the last question, Rand says that the concept of "value" originates in the irritability of an organism, i.e., the ability to respond to the sensations of pleasure and pain. She writes:

The capacity to experience pleasure or pain is innate in a man's body: it is part of his nature, part of the kind of entity he is. . . . The pleasure/pain mechanism in the body of man . . . serves as an automatic guardian of the organism's life. The physical sensation of pleasure is a signal indicating that the organism is pursuing the right course of action. The physical sensation of pain is a warning signal of danger, indicating that the organism is pursuing the wrong course of action. . . .<sup>16</sup>

Rand thinks that the concept of "value" originates in the ability to feel and respond to pleasure and pain. But what are these "automatic guardians" exactly? Rand has specified several times that, unlike other animals, man does not have instinct, which I would think would serve as an "automatic guardian" in some respects. Even instinct is not a guardian in the sense that it guarantees the survival of the animals that have it. For example, the migration instinct in birds does help them survive hard winters, but it does not insure a safe flight to the warmer climate.

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., pp. 17-18.

The pleasure/pain mechanism, like instinct, is automatic. It also serves as a guardian in the sense that it does help to provide some safety for the organism. Unlike instinct, however, the pleasure/pain mechanism works only when, in fact, specific kinds of physical conformation is experienced. For example, if I put my hand on the burner of a hot stove, I will withdraw my hand in pain. I do not have an instinct telling me not to put it there in the first place. Rand is correct in citing cases of children who were born without this capacity not surviving very long, for they are unable to assess their environments and the relation their environments have to their own bodies. Suppose that one did not have the capacity to experience pleasure or pain. If one broke his leg, one would feel no pain. One might let it go unattended, and perhaps contract blood poisoning and die. The pleasure/pain mechanism gives a person an instant assessment by way of sensation and reaction to his own environment, and to his own internal states. If the pleasure/pain mechanism is an indication that a man is following the right or wrong course of action respectively, then it might be asked if he needs anything more than these indicators, and in particular why he needs intellection?

It is a fact that this mechanism can be controlled by a man's rational faculty, and, in some cases, it is such control that saves a person's life. Suppose, for example, that a person is left in the snow and upon being rescued his feet show signs of gangrene. All of the nerves in his feet are dead; there is no pain. However, he knows that gangrene is fatal if left unattended; therefore, he submits to both the pain of having his feet removed, and the discomfort of recovering slowly,



in order to live. During the operation the pleasure/pain mechanism is going to be signaling that the man is "pursuing the wrong course of action." However, if it is his life that will be saved, then he is pursuing the right course of action in overriding that signal.

Therefore, I would say that if a person is conscious, not sedated, and possesses the pleasure/pain mechanism, then this mechanism serves automatically on many occasions, but not all, to assess the relation existing between the physical environment and one's body. It can and should be entirely ignored on some occasions. For in some cases reason must guide one's actions toward the preservation of one's life. In many cases pleasure and pain do indicate that the organism is following the right or wrong course of action. Therefore, on the occasions that it is reliable (and these occasions far outnumber those on which it is not), the pleasure/pain mechanism is an extrinsic good.

One problem with Rand's treatment of the pleasure/pain mechanism involves the word "signal." The operation of the mechanism involves, I think, two separable occurrences: the stimulus and the response. Although it is difficult to tell experientially where the stimulus begins and ends and the response begins and ends, it is physiologically explicable through diagrams of afferent and efferent neurophysiological nerve networks. It is evident to me that Rand regards the pleasure/pain mechanism in a way that includes both the ability to transmit sensory input, and the ability to respond to that input. The word "signal" is unfortunate because it can be taken to mean only the sensation, exclusive of the response. I think, however, that Rand intends to include both the stimulus and the response as the "automatic guardian."

If the concept of "value" originates in the ability to experience pleasure and pain, what are values, and why does man need them? We have seen that the pleasure/pain mechanism helps the organism to survive. This is why it is of value. Other values, in a like manner, are also that which help an organism to survive. Rand says that values are "that which one organism seeks to gain and or keep."<sup>17</sup> In biologic terms, values are those things nature sets an organism to pursue, or actions it sets an organism to perform which result normally in the maintenance of its life. It seems to be the case that man, unlike most animals, faces alternatives which his biologic nature does not help him to decide between. Rand describes this situation as one of having "no automatic course of action" (Cf. p. 21). We have seen, however, that there are some kinds of automatic behavior, such as pain-avoidance. There are also behavior patterns in infants which are common. What I think Rand is suggesting here is that whereas instinct prompts the migration of birds, if hard winters come upon man, instinct does not tell him where to go or what to do. The closest resemblance to an instinct apparatus in man seems to be the pleasure/pain mechanism. Through this mechanism certain actions are effected as in the withdrawal response from fire when being burned. However, instinctive behavior takes place before the winter sets in, whereas the pleasure/pain mechanism is aroused only in the presence of the actual stimuli. In view of this Rand says that man

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

"needs a code of values to guide his actions."<sup>18</sup> To guide his actions to what? Rand would answer--to the maintenance of the person's life. Just as some actions may endanger the organism, so others may encourage the securement of his life. A code of values is needed to provide man with a way to know which actions are good in so far as they help secure the ultimate value.

This is not to say that all values presuppose a conscious recognition. In most instances, a code of values, consciously arrived at, presupposes the need of such a code. Obviously the values in different societies differ, some being more explicitly set out in law and custom than others, and some being more consciously and purposefully arrived at than others. Rand's assertion that a code of values is needed by man means that in the face of alternatives (which men face no matter what society they come from, nor how advanced the society is) men need and can be helped by a code of values. A person does not usually worry about which alternative course of action to choose unless the decision is upon him. If there were no alternatives, then a code of values would probably not even be thought of.

At this point Rand introduces two sub-principles which she supports by reference to man's nature: "Since everything man needs has to be discovered by his own mind and produced by his own effort, the two essentials of the method of survival proper to a rational being are: thinking and productive work."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Rand, Atlas Shrugged, p. 1012.

<sup>19</sup>Rand, The Virtue of Selfishness, p. 23.

In the first place it seems plainly false that everything man needs must be discovered by his own mind and produced by his own effort. Man needs his autonomic nervous system, but this need never have been discovered by his own mind, and it is certainly not produced by his own effort. What is discovered is that he needs it. The discovery that he needs air, or water, or food does not mean that one did not need them before the discovery. Further, what is produced by his own effort? It is obvious that he needs many things which he does not produce. Air and water are things he needs, but it does not seem that he produces them. This part of her statement would be better if it were revised to say that many things man needs to live must be discovered by his own mind and procured by his own effort. By "effort" Rand means action of a certain type. It seems, for example, that if I hunt for my food, I have discovered that I need food and that certain actions on my part will or will not be commensurate with my procuring it.

Both in her fictional writing and her essays Rand indicates that "a method of survival" and a "method of survival proper to man" are two different notions. But why should one method of survival be more proper than another? Does the difference boil down to one of attempt versus one of success? The answers lie in the intrinsic value, life, and the means or methods employed by men to secure it. It has already been shown that man's consciousness--consisting of three levels--is crucially important to his life. The difference in "the method of survival proper to man" and the mere "method of survival" is that the former includes the interrelated functioning of all three levels; whereas, the latter relies on a method consisting primarily of sensation--perception,

without initiating and sustaining the cognitive or reasoning capacity. Concept formation, comparing, contrasting, integrating the material provided by one's senses and perceptions are the sources from which practical knowledge comes. A man could never tell the difference between a poisonous mushroom and a non-poisonous one, nor the difference between good water and bad water, nor any of the many co-existing goods and ills he might stumble upon if he did not make use of the cognitive reasoning level. The result of this would be a huge jump in the mortality rate, which has declined so enormously due to the use of reason. "In ancient Rome the average life span was twenty-five years."<sup>20</sup> The fact that the increase in the life span is partly a result of a decrease in the infant mortality rate does not alter the fact that what is responsible for the decrease in the infant mortality rate is the expanding knowledge of man. Man did not gain this knowledge through mere perception and sensation, but through the exercise of his reasoning capacity.

Rand's reason for stressing the importance of thinking rests on the fact that if man does not think, his odds of survival decrease. It seems that if life is the intrinsic good and if there are methods both proper and improper, the grounds on which one is judged proper, and the others improper, lies with the fact that the proper method tends to increase the length of life, whereas the improper methods do not tend to achieve this and perhaps deter it. The meaning of "proper" would be "having the best results in so far as maintaining an entity's life."

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<sup>20</sup>"Life, Length of," World Book Encyclopedia, 1949, X, 4439.

What of the other essential: "productive work"? I think the phrase "productive action" connotes a wider range of activities than "work." Hence, I will use it in lieu of "work." Productive action is co-necessary with reason to enable a man to live. I could think to myself, "I am starving"; however, without an active locomotion of my body toward the procurement of food, I would go right on starving. Just as sensation will initiate the thought, "I am hungry," thinking will provide, or attempt to provide one with a solution, such as, "I will go kill that deer and eat it." Upon deciding what course of action to pursue, one's efforts directed to that course of action must be concomitant for survival. This does not differ in kind from many animals' behavior. However, this does not negate the fact that productive action is an essential part of the ability for man to live. Rand asserts that reason and productive action help to maintain and better man's life, and should be utilized to the fullest possible extent compatible with maintaining life.

For those who do not employ these means, however, Rand says quite frankly that their only means to maintain life is to rely on or try to control others whose efforts to live embrace these essential methods.

Rand is wrong, however, in some of her statements concerning those who refuse to think and act productively. She says, "such looters and parasites are incapable of survival, who exist by destroying those who are capable,"<sup>21</sup> i.e., those who think and act productively. Now clearly

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<sup>21</sup>Rand, The Virtue of Selfishness, p. 23.

such looters and parasites do survive. Further she is too simplistic when she says that they "are attempting to survive by the methods of animals,"<sup>22</sup> i.e., mere perception--sensation. Many such looters, the confidence-man for example, certainly plans and thinks and follows his plans. Also, to go on to say that they "cannot survive by attempting the method of animals, by rejecting reason and counting on productive men to serve as their prey"<sup>23</sup> is only true if the men who serve as their prey stop that service. She is on stronger ground, empirically speaking, when she says: "If some men attempt to survive by means of brute force or fraud, by looting, robbing; cheating or enslaving the men who produce, it still remains true that their survival is made possible only by their victims. . . ." <sup>24</sup> Rand claims:

Man's mind is his basic tool of survival. Life is given to him, survival is not. His body is given to him, its sustenance is not. His mind is given to him, its content is not. To remain alive, he must act, and before he can act he must know the nature and the purpose of his actions. . . . To remain alive he must think.<sup>25</sup>

Here, again, Rand is stressing the extrinsic value of thinking and productive action. However, there is one claim made in this statement that seems to be mistaken. It is that before a man can act he must know the nature and the purpose of his action. Perhaps it is true that actions taken by men who do not know the purposes of their actions are not as

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>25</sup> Rand, Atlas Shrugged, p. 1012.

effective, in terms of maintaining one's life, as actions whose purposes are known. But it does not seem that one "must" know the nature and the purpose of one's actions in order to act. The sentence concerning one's mind and its content means for Rand that the ability to learn, think, and perceive, are given to man, but the things that he actually will learn, think, or perceive are, for the most part, developed through his own life and by his own effort.

I think that Rand's arguments that reason and productive actions are extrinsically good follow from her premiss that one's life is the intrinsic good. Hence, I accept these claims.

The problem is not so much that Rand argues for productive action and reason as two cardinal values as it is that she argues against other methods of survival. This is seen in her analogy of the looters and the parasites. At this point I should like to consider these methods that Rand argues are improper to the survival of man. Rand employs a classification in which she describes three methods of awareness. It must be remembered that Rand claims that conceptual awareness is volitional. If this is true, then man can (and according to Rand does) function erratically, that is, on one level of awareness at one time, and on another level of awareness at another time. For Rand, the question of whether one is going to be able to live his life utilizing reason and productive action depends on the method of awareness one utilizes the most.

Rand suggests the following general classification on the basis of a person's dominant method of awareness. The first label that she employs is "the Mystic." A person whose dominant method of awareness is



"mystic" does not relate his abstractions, feelings, or emotions to reality. The second label she employs is the "Atilla." The person whose dominant method of awareness is "Atilla" is described as one "whose brain is a jumble of concretes, unintegrated by abstractions" and who sees all things within his immediate perceptual view as objects to either be feared or manipulated at his every whim. "Both are guided and motivated--ultimately--not by thoughts, but by feelings and whims."<sup>26</sup> Rand defines a "whim" as "a desire experienced by a person who does not know and does not care to discover its cause."<sup>27</sup> That one can discover the causes of one's desires is a philosophic assumption of Rand's system. The third method of awareness is labeled the "Producer." This method consists of comparing and examining the world around one, forming a consistent view in accordance with the reality one perceives, and acting in accordance with that view. Rand says that this is the method of awareness that enables man to improve the odds of his survival. The label "Producer" includes the process of conceptual thinking which was discussed earlier.

Let us examine in particular the methods "Mystic" and "Atilla" in order to see what is involved in them, and whether there are such kinds of awarenesses, and, if there are, whether or not they are improper given Rand's basic premiss.

I intend to use Zen Buddhism to clarify what Rand designates as the "Mystic" mode of awareness. Rand describes a person as a "mystic"

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<sup>26</sup> Rand, For the New Intellectual, p. 19.

<sup>27</sup> Rand, The Virtue of Selfishness, p. 14.

when his dominant mode of awareness "obliterate[s] the distinction between consciousness and reality, between the perceiver and the perceived, hoping that an automatic certainty and an infallible knowledge of the universe will be granted to him. . . ."28 The desire for an infallible knowledge of the Universe is not to be condemned. Philosophers and other men have searched for this throughout recorded history. However, whereas the philosopher employs conceptual thinking to gain knowledge, the "mystic" attempts to gain it by the purging of the intellect. The "unshakable conviction that there is something indeed going beyond mere intellection"29 is an accompaniment of this endeavor to seek a higher reality or a truer truth than that which is afforded by reason, logic, and conceptual data. Inherent in Zen, and possibly in all other kinds of mysticism, is the distrust and consequent denial of the acceptability of rational explanation for acquiring this truth. "True knowledge (bodhi) transcends all modes of expression. . . . In Zen, there is nothing to explain by means of words . . . ."30 Logic, which encompasses all forms of conceptual exercise, comparing, contrasting, reasoning, etc. is to be purged from the mind as it is the "bane of humanity."31 The efforts to purge the mind sometimes take the form of koans, one of the most famous of which is: "You have heard the sound of two hands clapping:

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<sup>28</sup>Rand, For the New Intellectual, p. 17.

<sup>29</sup>D. T. Suzuki, An Introduction to Zen Buddhism (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1964), p. 109.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

What is the sound of one hand?" . Supposedly, this kind of statement is able to help a person achieve a receptive frame of mind for enlightenment or "satori" by negating the process of rationalization.

Words are regarded as fetters, reasoning power as chains, and conceptualization as a dungeon which tie man to an imperfect and uncertain knowledge. According to Zen, perfect knowledge consists in finding "a new viewpoint for looking into the essence of things."<sup>32</sup> This viewpoint reveals that "silence and eloquence become identical, that is, where negation and assertion are unified in a higher form of statement,"<sup>33</sup> where A is non-A and contradictions exist. The illogical and irrational is proclaimed to have a higher truth "which is in correspondence with the true state of things."<sup>34</sup>

From an intellectual and logical point of view this is not in correspondence with the true state of things at all. This is what Rand means when she says that when and if the "insights" of the "mystic," which are produced by the 'emptying of consciousness' "clashes with reality, it is reality that he ignores."<sup>35</sup> Reality, in this sense, is not to be confused with the "higher reality" the "mystic" strives for. From this explanation it is clear that Rand's metaphysical assumption is that reality is knowable through one's intellectual reasoning power,

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 88

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>35</sup> Rand, For the New Intellectual, p. 17.

that it is the use of this capacity that makes real knowledge possible. Further, Rand considers the kind of "insight" achieved through the purging of one's reason will, far from corresponding to the true state of things, be a distortion of the true state of things.

This metaphysical position is an old one, and has much to be said both for and against it. However, for the purposes of this thesis it is necessary only to recognize it as an assumption on Rand's part. What is important in Rand's view is whether or not an awareness such as is employed by Zen would or would not help one in his endeavor to survive.

The second mode of awareness in need of investigation is that of "Atilla." It is characterized by a concern only with the immediate moment and how to get through it. Rand says, "An Atilla . . . thinks . . . only of taking over."<sup>36</sup> He "regards a fist, a club, or a gun, as the only answer to any problem. . . ."<sup>37</sup> The modern paradigms of such a level of awareness are the bank robber, blackmailer, murderer, or kidnapper. The "Atilla" mode of awareness expresses itself in physical force and/or force by guile "Atilla feels no need to understand, to explain, nor even to wonder how men manage to produce things he covets-- "somehow" is a fully satisfactory answer. . . . All he needs, his "urges" tell him, is bigger muscles, bigger clubs, or a bigger gang than theirs in order to seize their bodies and their products, after which their bodies will obey his commands and will provide him, somehow, with the satisfaction of any whim."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 16

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

The "Mystic" mode of awareness results in a feeling of disgust for practical reality; and the "Atilla" method of awareness results in an inability to view his life long range. The former "professes scorn for material property, for wealth, for man's body, for this earth . . . [while the other] professes scorn for values, ideals, theories, abstractions. . . ." <sup>39</sup> The two archetypes come to depend on each other. "Atilla" seeks refuge from an incomprehensible universe, and the "mystic" seeks refuge from a "physical reality." <sup>40</sup> Examples of such a collaboration are numerous in history: the priests of ancient Egypt saying whether the "omens" are right for Pharoah to attack, or the warriors' listening for the advice of the Oracle at Delphi, or the members of the Manson family waiting for the justification of killing an entire household of "sinners" are just a few examples.

Perhaps another kind of example will help gain the point that men are erratic in their methods of awareness, as well as explain Rand's meaning in distinguishing these three categories. In a discussion of any sort where divergent opinions are being asserted, if you have ever wanted to force your view on your adversary, rather than persuade him of its truth, goodness, plausibility, etc., then you have experienced the "Atilla" urge of conquest. In a like manner, if you have ever refused to be questioned about, or refused to question, beliefs or tenets you hold on the grounds that facts are not relevant to their truth or falsity, or that words are of no use in discussing beliefs, then you have stood where the men that Rand calls "mystics" stand.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

In both cases these men ignore reason, logic, facts, discussion, and exchange of ideas. Is this to say that they do not think? It is not. Rand admits that

. . . they can and do--but thinking, to them, is not a means of perceiving reality, it is a means of justifying their escape from the necessity of rational perception. . . . Just as a bank robber will spend years of planning, ingenuity, and effort in order to prove to himself that he can exist without effort, so both Atila and the Witch Doctor will go to any length of cunning, calculation, and thought in order to demonstrate the impotence of thought and preserve the image of a pliable universe where miracles are possible and whims are efficacious.<sup>41</sup>

I think that two points need to be made here. Firstly, I do not think that a bank robber tries to "prove" to himself that he can exist without effort. This is more of a psychological question than an ethical one. It seems that he seeks to find ways to exist without the effort of honest work, and in finding a way he proves to himself that he can exist without efforts of honest work. Secondly, the question arises of whether or not a rational man will go to any lengths in order to prove that the universe is rational. On Rand's view of this, any man who goes to the length of distorting his own perceptions, or distorting his conceptual judgements in order to make them fit a desired end, rather than to arrive at them in view of the facts he has apprehended or discovered will be a "mystic," no matter whether he is trying to prove that the universe is rational according to his own image of rationality, or irrational. The key element in Rand's discussion

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

of the "Mystic" mode of awareness is the distortion that is employed, and the contradictions that result from it.

I hope that the differences and the similarities between the modes of awareness of the "Mystic" and the "Atilla" are clear. I believe that this classification can be usefully applied to normal people, that is, to those whose brains are not damaged, and who are not mentally retarded. There are other ways of understanding a person's behavior. Psychologists and psychiatrists have their own specialized language to deal with the behavior of people. Rand's classification is in line with the position that it is man's reason, not his whims or feelings that is a basic necessary condition of his life in that it is the means by which we can learn what actions do and do not promote our lives.

These methods of awareness are important in Rand's ethics, and, although they have been severely criticized, I do not think that analysis of Rand's ethics would be complete without a discussion of this classification. For it is implicit in her philosophy that all progress on Earth, that is, all gradual betterment of the quality and length of life that men have undergone, has been due to the use, however sporadic, of his conceptual and reasoning capacity. Of the three methods Rand describes only the "Producer" employs this ability to its fullest extent capable with maintain life, and in a way which helps to secure life (Cf. p. 27).

I think that at this point Rand can only try to show that the "Mystic" mode of awareness is an improper method of awareness. She cannot, as far as I can tell, argue that the "Atilla" mode is improper at

this point. In Chapter III we shall discuss why the outcome of an "Atilla" awareness is improper, for this method and its results are directly concerned with her theory of obligation.

I think that Rand can legitimately argue that a "Mystic" mode of awareness is improper on the following grounds: the consequences of a "Mystic" mode of awareness are such that if I had to rely on the "knowledge" acquired by it as a guide for my actions, my odds of survival would diminish considerably. For even if contradictions can exist in the "higher" reality, in the "lower" reality food is still grown by sowing seeds, not eating them; diseases still cause death, not health; and shelter is built by working, not wishing. Therefore, though the "Mystic" mode of awareness may give a person the knowledge that contradictions exist, this knowledge cannot provide one with any guidance as to how to live in this "lower reality" where to act on the knowledge that speaking and being quiet are not different would be like acting on the knowledge that life and death are not opposites. Any kind of knowledge that destroys this distinction cannot, on Rand's view, be an effective guide to actions preserving one's life. Therefore, the mode of awareness from which this knowledge comes is an improper mode of awareness in that consequential behavior issuing from it is not conducive to life in most cases, and in other cases, could be destructive of one's life. It is in terms of the consequences that such a mode must be evaluated.

I do not think that if a person uses a "Mystic" mode of awareness for gaining knowledge of what he thinks is a "higher" reality, and his reason as a guide to his actions, that Rand can fault him. What I think



she faults is the fact that those of this awareness do often rely on this knowledge to the exclusion of reason and in this ignore the possible consequences this may have for their lives.

The abstract principle that man's life is the intrinsic good is applicable to every individual. Rand writes:

The task of applying this principle to a concrete ~~specific~~ purpose--the purpose of living a life proper to a rational being--belongs to every individual man, and the life he has to live is his own. . . . The three cardinal values [i.e., that which one acts to gain and/or keep--virtue being the act by which one gains and/or keeps it] . . . are the means to and a realization of one's ultimate value, one's own life--are: Reason, Purpose, Self-Esteem, with their three corresponding virtues; Rationality, Productiveness, Pride.<sup>42</sup>

The definition of "value" Rand offers is one that requires investigation. When she says that it is something that one "acts to gain and/or keep," she implies that one acts to gain or keep it for oneself. This is correct in many cases. However, this does not rule out acting to gain or keep something with which one might not have a direct tie. I might be immune to some disease, but work toward its prevention in order that, say, my sisters not contract it. It is because my sisters are important to me that I work toward this cure. The standard of all values is my own life. Therefore, all my values will have some importance in a direct or indirect manner such that their achievement affects my life. In the above example, the achievement of a serum will both be a value to my sister, in that she will not contract the disease, and it will also be of value to me since she is important to me.

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<sup>42</sup>Rand, The Virtue of Selfishness, p. 25.

As Rationality and Productivity have already been discussed, I should like to consider the virtue of Pride and the value of Self-esteem in turn. Both pride and self-esteem are states that are experienced psychologically, I think. The question is one of the exact nature of these states.

Pride is described as a virtue which would make it an action given Rand's definition of virtue. In contrast to Rand, however, I do not think that pride is an action at all. It is an attitude, or a motivational state, such as taking pride in one's work; or it can be a rewarding feeling, such as the pride of a job well done. Linguistically, I just do not think that there is a verb "pride" that reduces to what Rand thinks that it does. Even the use of "pride" in the sentence, "She prides herself in her grades," seems to reduce to "She takes pride in her grades," or, "She is proud of her grades." When Rand tries to make her meaning clear as to the way she uses the word "pride" many problems arise.

Rand says that the virtue of Pride is

(moral ambitiousness). . . . It means that one must earn the right to hold oneself as one's own highest value by achieving his own moral perfection--which one achieves by never accepting any code of irrational values impossible to practice and by never failing to practice the virtues one knows to be rational. . . .<sup>43</sup>

Her statement only serves to muddy the water surrounding the question of what pride is in addition to raising new problems. One of the new

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

problems concerns the meaning of the statement that "one must earn the right to hold oneself as one's highest value." We have already seen that one's life is one's highest value whether or not one recognizes it. Therefore earning the right to hold one's life as the intrinsic good cannot be the meaning of the statement. Does she mean only that in order to be proud of myself I must commit myself to a rational ethical code? If so, then what is the meaning of the reference to earning the "right" to this attitude or feeling about my actions? In the first place, if she means that I must commit myself to a rational ethical code and practice the rational virtues therein, in order to be proud, then I think that she is mistaken. Children cannot be said at the age of three or four to have committed themselves to a theoretically rational code of values, yet I believe it is quite possible that they experience pride at their achievements of learning to walk, talk, or tie a shoelace. I think that Rand should recognize that while pride is the result of efficacious action, or action deemed efficacious, it does not have to be coupled with a rational commitment to morality. She might say that in the case of children there is a pre-rational commitment on their part to dealing with one's life rationally, but this is to alter her statement considerably. Even if we admit this, there is the further problem that many people seem to be proud, or say that they are, and yet have done nothing to earn it. I believe that Rand is arguing that it is pride which must be earned, rather than the right to be proud. Therefore, I shall try to meet this objection.

Linguistically, it has already been noted that the word "pride"

suggests a feeling or an attitude taken by someone with reference to one's achievements such as, "taking pride in one's work." It is also not uncommon to speak of being proud of others' actions or achievements, e.g., "I was proud of you when. . . ." Both of these seem consistent with Rand's point of view. However, there is a sense of the term in which "pride" is interchangeable with the words "arrogant" or "conceited." Neither of these is compatible with the sense in which Rand uses the word. A term that designates this difference is "false pride." Psychologists recognize the defense mechanisms manifesting themselves in excessive boasting or bragging, or, on the other hand, aloof and disdainful attitudes as masks for feelings of inferiority, guilt, fear, or shame. These are certainly not what Rand means by "pride."

I think that it is very clear that "pride" is a word that is achievement-oriented. It is usually experienced when one has done something that one (1) set out to do and did, or (2) set out to do and did better than one expected, or (3) set out to do and did not do, but did the best one could.

The first example is easily demonstrated. Jones set out to earn a 4.0 in graduate school and does it. This does not guarantee the pride, for if he cheated, or fixed the grade report, then it is doubtful that he made the 4.0 in the sense of earning it at all. The second case is similarly demonstrated. Jones sets out to make a 3.0 in graduate school, but makes a 3.5. The third case is more difficult for it involves failure. Suppose that I am going to race the length of the pool with a friend whose time is 4 seconds faster than mine at the least.

My goal is to beat the girl, but suppose I lose the race. However, suppose that I only lose to her by a time of 2 seconds. She still beat me, but not as badly as the times indicated that she would. I can still experience pride that I did the best that I could even though it was not enough to win the race.

Rand's problem is really that of trying to show that pride is something that is earned as in the cases cited above, and only in cases like these. She is trying to show that what one experiences in cases where one has not achieved anything is not pride. I just do not know if she can successfully argue this position.

Rand would want to argue that the use of phrases such as, "black and proud," or, "white, or male, or female, or American (except in cases of immigrants who have to study, pass tests, etc.), or Russian, or Aryan and proud," are all incorrect uses of the word "proud." Linguistically, I think that the word "glad" probably conveys the same significance in each of these examples as the word "proud." However, this is arguable, and I do not know if there is a convincing argument to the effect that this is actually the case. One could ask a "proud American" in the sense specified above if he really doesn't mean only that he is "glad to be an American." If he concedes that this is really all he means, then you have accomplished finding that at least one person really meant "glad," and not "proud." If he sticks by his guns, however, and insists that it is "pride" that he experiences by being an American, and not just gladness, then what are you to do? Insist he introspect further? Clearly, a common use of the word "proud" suggests that it can

also be a non-achievement word. Therefore, I agree with Rand that the word "pride" and the word "proud" can be used as an achievement oriented word. But I disagree that it is an action and that it can only be used rightly as an achievement word. There is just no conclusive evidence for this last claim.

Further, Rand suggests that pride is the result of a commitment to a rational code of values. This suggests that an experience of pride could in some sense tell one whether the code one has accepted is rational or not. I disagree most vigorously with this implication. It is man's ability to reason that is the final arbiter of which values and virtues are right. There was a cult in India, for example, around the time of early colonization by Britain, that believed in a god of the road. This god demanded certain sacrifices to made each night.<sup>44</sup> The members took great pains to select only certain kinds of people for the sacrifice, and these were killed by strangulation. The members of the cult prided themselves on their ability to do their duty quickly, efficiently, and quietly. There was no personal profit involved. The pride that these men experienced was based on their belief that there was a road god and that they had been appointed by him to deliver a certain number of victims a night. Rand would certainly not say that these men were adhering to a rational morality. Nor could she prove that they did not experience pride. Therefore I disagree that pride is always the result of a mind's being fully committed to reason, and only to reason.

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<sup>44</sup>The cult is described in many historical texts on Indian culture.

Self-esteem, the last cardinal value that we shall discuss in this chapter, means that a person values himself, and in this he values his life. Rand says,

Self-esteem is the consequence, expression, and reward of a mind fully committed to reason. . . . In order to deal with reality successfully--to pursue and achieve the values which his life requires--man needs self-esteem: he needs to be confident of his efficacy and worth. . . . Self-esteem is a metaphysical estimate.<sup>45</sup>

This "metaphysical estimate" seems to be a basis for productive action. This self-confidence can be achieved from recognizing that one can grow intellectually and come to understand aspects of particular endeavors, and then committing oneself to that growth. Pride results from the particular mastery of such endeavors, whereas it is one's self-esteem that issues the affirmation that one could do it. Rationality is the process which provides the evidences in a given area as to whether one can master the particular feat, and whether it is to one's advantage to do so. If this relationship between self-esteem and productive action does exist, then it would, to the degree one possessed self-esteem, be a direct influence on the achievement of values. It is difficult to ascertain whether Rand is arguing that self-esteem is a necessary condition of "pursu[ing] and achiev[ing] the values that life requires," in the same sense that consciousness is. If one's self-esteem directly influences one's choice to pursue, or not to pursue values, then, like consciousness, I think Rand would say that both of these are extrinsically valuable.

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<sup>45</sup> Rand, The Virtue of Selfishness, pp. 36-37.

That a person's self-esteem, or lack of it, can and does influence his behavior is supported by psychotherapists and psychologists. It is a factor in the achieving or non-achieving of values. Self-esteem is a property that people have in differing degrees. If it is always the result of a mind's "being fully committed to reason," then there must be a lot of people whose minds are fully committed to reason. This does not seem to be the case; hence, Rand is mistaken. Perhaps a great deal of self-esteem results from this commitment. But the flat assertion that all of self-esteem issues from this full commitment seems to be mistaken. I agree that self-esteem is of great value to one's life in that it is sometimes a factor, or seems to be, in determining whether one acts to achieve his goals or to develop those goals.

In summary, then, I believe that Rand's values and corresponding virtues have the following status: (1) Reason/Rationality and Purpose/Productive action do seem to be consistent with her foundational claim that one's life is the intrinsic good since each of these are instrumental in securing and promoting one's life. (2) Self-esteem seems to be a value consistent with her foundational claim in that its presence or absence does affect one's actions, and in many cases may help to secure the intrinsic good. (3) Pride, on the other hand, does not seem to be an action, nor does it seem to be instrumental in achieving the knowledge that what one does is right. It does not appear to be the least bit connected with the securing or promoting of one's life. However, I do think that pride is a "contributive" good in that the experience of pride contributes to my life greatly as a whole.



The conclusion of the consideration of these values and virtues brings me to Chapter III in my analysis of Rand's ethical position. Chapter III deals with two primary things: first, her theory of obligation, and, second, happiness. I shall discuss them in that order.

## CHAPTER III

### THEORY OF OBLIGATION AND HAPPINESS

Rand's theory of obligation is set forth very clearly in the following statement.

The basic social principle of the Objectivist ethics is that just as life is an end in itself, so every living being is an end in himself, not the means to the ends or the welfare of others--and, therefore, that man must live for his own sake, neither sacrificing himself to others, nor sacrificing others to himself. To live for his own sake means that the achievement of his own happiness is man's highest moral purpose.<sup>46</sup>

Rand has already argued that each organism's life is the intrinsic good for that organism. On her view, then, whether a man regards his life as the ultimate value or not, does not negate the fact that his life is the ultimate value for him. What this statement reveals, then, is that Rand commends each person to recognize that his life is the intrinsic value.

There are two major claims in Rand's social principles that require investigation. The first is that a man should never sacrifice himself to others, nor sacrifice others to himself. The second claim is that each man's highest moral purpose is the achievement of his own happiness. We shall investigate these claims respectively.

The principle of non-sacrifice is absolutely crucial to Rand's ethics. However, the main question involved is not whether her position

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

is right or wrong standing by itself, but whether, given her view that the intrinsic good is one's life, the principle of non-sacrifice fits consistently with this foundational claim. An examination of what Rand means by sacrifice may help to clarify some of the questions that may arise regarding her social principle. She defines "sacrifice" as "the surrender of a higher value in favor of a lower value or of a non-value."<sup>47</sup>

Two points should be noted concerning this definition. Firstly, the fact that one believes that a sacrifice is made does not entail that one is: a definite surrender of a greater value to a lesser one must take place before one has sacrificed. The criterion used to discover whether or not one has sacrificed the criterion of all value is one's own life. In other words, for Rand, if a value is that which promotes or helps to secure my life, then a sacrifice consists in surrendering that which helps to promote or secure my life in favor of either that which will not promote my life at all, or that which will not promote it to the same extent as that which I am surrendering. The second point is that it is thought by some ethical philosophers that one must make genuine, voluntary self-sacrifices if one is to be moral. These sacrifices usually mean the disregarding of one's own interests. It is enlightening to find that rules in society such as "Thou shall not kill" are not to my interest. We shall discuss this shortly.

One major problem of Rand's social principle is the reconciliation of two principles or rules. The first is that I shall not sacrifice

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

my life, nor the means I have to insure my life (for example, reason, productive action, and self-esteem) to others. This seems to be consistent with her theory since my life is the ultimate value to me. The second rule is that I shall not sacrifice others to myself. This means that I shall not sacrifice their lives, nor the means they have to insure their lives, to my life.

As her theory is formulated, however, I do not think that the latter rule follows consistently from her basic claim that one's own life is the intrinsic good. I may kill another and eat his flesh. He clearly would have been sacrificed to the betterment of my life since he would have nourished me. But since my life is the intrinsic good and the only one for me, how can this action be counted as wrong? Rand does not offer any reason why this would be wrong. She just asserts that it is. From studying her fiction, as well as her essays, one becomes aware that Rand is far more concerned with the issue of sacrificing oneself to others than she is with the issue of sacrificing others to oneself.

What I shall do here is to try to construct and defend an argument showing that sacrifices of others to oneself is wrong, and indicating why it is, in hopes of rendering Rand's social principle consistent with her other ethical premisses. I will be using many of Rand's own ideas and tenets which she sets forth in her political philosophy. It is the ethical implications, however, rather than political applications that will concern me.

Although men have their own individual lives which they must sustain, it is a historical fact that they live in a social context,

i.e., with other men. This does not diminish the fact that it is individual men who make up these groups. The attempt to reconcile my life's being the intrinsic good to me with the principle that I may not sacrifice others to my life can be effected through the principle of individual rights. The principle of individual rights within a group serves as a rule which precludes certain actions on the part of individuals and gains for those individuals' protection from those same actions on the part of others. Remarks dealing with the concept of individual rights are scattered throughout Rand's political philosophy. She writes of the concept:

'Rights' are a moral concept--the concept that provides a logical transition from the principles guiding an individual's actions to the principles guiding his relationship with others--the concept that preserves and protects individual morality in a social context. . . .<sup>48</sup>

Rand implies that rights are not a gift from God, nor a gift from society, but have their source in man's nature.<sup>49</sup> She does not elaborate on this point. Therefore, I am not quite sure what she means by this statement. If she means that rights inhere in a man's nature like breathing oxygen does, then it is not rights themselves that evolved, but the recognition of these rights by men. It is beyond the scope of this paper to try to argue the question of whether rights are/are not gifts from God or society, or inhere/do not inhere in man's nature.

I can agree with Rand that "rights" is a concept. Like other concepts, it arises because of man's ability to think and to communicate

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

his ideas with others. Reason confirms that individual rights are to the interest of every single person for the instantiation of the concept provides this rule: Each man has the right to his own life and to that which he can achieve and produce in his life for the betterment of his life, so long as he does not infringe on the lives of others to do so.

With the instantiation of individual rights, I can know that I am protected from others' would-be aggressions, just as they are protected from mine. Adherence to the rules implicit in individual rights will salvage Rand's principle of non-sacrifice of others to oneself without contradicting her basic premiss.

Three questions concerning individual rights are: (1) Does the instantiation of individual rights involve a sacrifice by each man? (2) What is the justification of individual rights? (3) How does the instantiation of individual rights affect emergency situations?

(1) Regarding the first question, I do not think that the instantiation of individual rights involve a sacrifice on the part of any man. My being protected from another's would-be aggressions, and his being protected from mine is a case of fair exchange. On both parts assurances are given and received. To be sure, my giving my assurance to my neighbor that I will not kill, conquer, or rob him is to his self-interest. Were this the end of the matter, there could arise situations of definite sacrifice on my part. However, his assurance to me that he will not rob, conquer, or kill me is to my self-interest. The reciprocity of the agreement to adhere to individual rights is what makes the agreement to my self-interest.

Even if I am unusually strong and charismatic, my adherence to individual rights is equivalent to my neighbor's. My strength and charisma are not altered by the agreement; nor is, say, the dead-aim my neighbor may have with a rifle. In adhering to individual rights neither of us lose the capacity to be killed, robbed, or conquered. These capacities remain whether individual rights are instantiated or not.

(2) There are two main points to be considered regarding the justification of individual rights. In some cases, if individual rights are not instantiated, we have the alternative of no rules whatever. On the other hand (and by far the most exemplified situation) if individual rights are not instantiated uniformly, then we may have what I shall call "select rights." This means that the rights of one group are different from another in the same social group. I think I can show that it is to my best interest that, rather than either of the alternatives above, uniform individual rights be instantiated. First, then, concerning the alternative where neither individual rights nor select rights are instantiated, we have a situation where "kill or be killed" is an apt description. It seems obvious to me that this kind of situation would have a devastating effect on my ability to live. Fear would be a viable motive for action and would remain so since from moment to moment, there would exist possible threats from another to my person/life. To be constantly fearful or to be constantly threatened would not be to my self-interest in that both could hamper the effectiveness of my actions which could result in my being unable to live. Second, if the rules adhered to are such that the lives of some are protected, while the lives

of others are not, or are not protected to the same degree, then my life will be adversely affected, whether I am in the privileged group or the other. If I am a member of the group which is not protected by the rights and rules that protect the other group, then in the areas in which I am not protected, my life, or efforts and achievements of my life, might be sacrificed. It still remains true that the buildings I build for them, or the food I grow for them are not a fair exchange for the food and clothes they provide me with. For I might be able to feed and clothe myself without having to build the buildings, or grow the food that they take. The fact that I am not allowed an option in such situations to reason as to how I will live, or the conditions under which I will work is enough by itself to make this a sacrifice. If, on the other hand, I am a member of the group that these select rights protect, then I may have dissention, revolution, and death to look forward to from those who have been given fewer rights, and thus, no assurance of maintaining de facto the protection that I have been given de jure.

It is important to note that history is full of examples of this second kind of social order. Many of these orders last for generations. However, upon realizing that the disparity of rights exists, and that the basis or reasons for the disparity are both questionable, and, given certain assumptions, illogical, the group which is less protected will seek to alleviate the situation. Most cases in history show that the actions to alleviate the situation took the form of violent assault and counter-assault by the privileged members of the social order. Further,



it does not matter who "wins." If my life, as a member of the protected group, is lost in such a struggle, and this could have been avoided by the instantiation of individual rights, then it was not worth it to me to have the existing order continue. Even if my life is not lost, I will have lost in other ways as a result of the struggle. History goes on to show that when the existing inequality of rights is not alleviated, then the society usually has the same process to look forward to again. There may be other reasons for such uprisings; however, in most revolutionary accounts, from the Hebrew Exodux from Egypt to the American Revolution, inequality of rights is at the bottom of many grievances. Many times it seems that the reasons for the inequality are the focus of the revolt, for example, reasons such as the Will of Pharoah, or The Divine Rights of Kings, skin color, bad blood, or tradition, were, and in some cases still are, the seeds of discontent of the less protected segment of a society.

Even as a member of the protected class, I should realize that the social stability of such an arrangement is precarious. Since social disharmony can and does affect the productivity of my life adversely, I should want to have rules that protect all individuals alike. Therefore, in both kinds of social structure, the justification of individual rights remains the same: my life.

(3) The third question regarding individual rights is whether or not the instantiation of the concept affects particular emergency situations and, if it does, how it does. Discussion of emergency situations is sometimes called "lifeboat ethics." Rand does a good deal of

complaining about this kind of thinking, but she never quite admits or resolves either that there may arise cases of which the proposition, "It is your life or mine," is the only apt description, or what to do about them. The principle of individual rights cannot help a person here; since individual rights extends to persons impartially, the situation itself excludes the possibility of deciding who lives and who dies on the grounds of "rights."

Suppose, then, that I am in a life boat with another person and the life boat can only hold one long enough to reach safety. After running through various possibilities such as, the younger person lives, and the older person drowns, or the one with a family lives, and the one without a family drowns, or the woman lives and the man drowns, I have reached the conclusion, perhaps unjustifiably, that in such a situation, there is no way to reasonably determine in all cases who will live and who will die. For in the case of each of the above standards which attempts to determine the issue, everything could be equal in a given situation. Both may be aged twenty. Both may have a family of four. Both may be women.

The only way to resolve the issue, when all things are equal, is perhaps an agreement to let a flip of the coin decide. This solution is offered in all seriousness, for the above "reasons" amount to almost the same thing. For example, if both parties decided to use age as the criteria, then each would be hoping himself to be the youngest. Whoever turned out to be the youngest, by a year or a day, was allowed to live by the chance of the standard decided upon. The same can be said of

strength if the two people engage in physical battle each trying to toss the other one out of the boat. A coin-flip amounts to about the same thing.

I do not know how Rand would resolve this situation. There is certainly no indication that she would resolve it the way in which I have resolved it. It seems to me, however, that any advice such as, "Jump out if you love the other person," or "Try to toss the other guy out," will either contradict the spirit of her work, or come down to a coin-flip. Individual rights, then, cannot help you in an emergency of this kind.

There are great benefits to be derived from a social existence. However, these benefits do not proceed from either a sacrifice of one's own values, or the sacrifice of others. They proceed from a principle of trade and from knowledge. "Man is the only species that can transmit and expand his store of knowledge from generation to generation . . . every man gains an incalculable benefit from the knowledge discovered by others."<sup>50</sup> For example, benefits I have gained from the contributions of scientists are the assurances that I will not get polio or typhoid fever because of the serums they discovered. A second great benefit stems from "the division of labor: it enables a man to devote his effort to a particular field of work and to trade with others who specialize in other fields. This form of cooperation allows all men who take part in it to achieve a greater knowledge, skill, and productive return on their effort than they could achieve if each had to produce

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

everything he needs,"<sup>51</sup> by himself. Trade, as opposed to sacrifice, is the principle which Rand sets out as being the proper "rational ethical principle for all human relationships. . . . It is the principle of justice."<sup>52</sup> Knowledge and trade are, then, tools for the betterment of the quality and the length of life. The principle of justice is one principle among others, that are "chosen and validated by a process of thought."<sup>53</sup> This principle, and the virtue of trade exemplifying it, means, "one must never seek or grant the unearned and undeserved, neither in matter nor in spirit. . . ." <sup>54</sup> Further:

Justice is the recognition of the fact that you cannot fake the character of men as you cannot fake the character of nature, [without the subsequent negation of one's perception of and reasonings concerning reality] that you must judge all men as conscientiously as you judge inanimate objects . . . that every man must be judged for what he is and treated accordingly . . . that your moral appraisal is the coin paying men for their virtues or vices, and this payment demands of you as scrupulous an honor as you bring to financial transactions--that to withhold your contempt from men's vices is an act of moral counterfeiting; and to withhold your admiration from their virtues is an act of moral embezzlement. . . .<sup>55</sup>

For example, if two men are working on a project which will cure cancer, and one man's efforts are conscientiously directed to the goal, and he succeeds in unlocking the last door to the cure, for another man, who has worked with him, to withhold his admiration from the success of the first

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>55</sup>Rand, Atlas Shrugged, pp. 1019-1020.

is an attempt to keep from acknowledging the fact that he was successful. The embezzlement has two parts: the first is the fact that a cure was effected by the first man. The second is the second man's attempt to ignore or forget that fact. In a like manner, if they are working together and the first man's efforts are haphazard, or if he is contributing little or nothing to the advancement of the project, another man's attempt to cover up for, or ignore, the first man's ineptness is an attempt to wipe out the fact that there is a project, and that the first man is not doing his part. What is counterfeited is that this first man is doing his share of the work effectively. The reason these actions are wrong is that they are paramount to the declarations: "Who am I to judge?" which means, "Who am I to think?" which means, "Who am I to live?" These entail the rejection of the ultimate value.

The relation between these declarations is this: In order to live, a person must think in normal cases. This process, though not the same as judging, includes judging. For example, one can think about the differences in snakes, mushrooms, and men; but one judges, on the basis of evidence, whether what one sees is a poisonous snake or not, a poisonous mushroom or not, or whether the man one works with is working or not. Judging is a part of what thinking includes. Further, according to Rand, it is a most important part in that one's judgements can affect the maintenance of one's life. For Rand, to voluntarily suspend one's judgement of a situation is like knowing the difference between a good doctor and a bad doctor, but refusing to be guided by that knowledge

in choosing one's surgeon. It is in this way that these declarations are related.

There are cases in which the declaration, "Who am I to judge?" does not mean these things. Suppose I am asked which of two cars has the better engine. Given that I know nothing about car engines, honestly demands that I admit that I do not know the better engine and in this case am not one to be judging. If I do know about car engines, however, then I should be able to pick out the better engine (if there is one) and state my reasons for its being so. Again it is the use of man's rational faculty and his commitment to learning the facts that provides a person with the knowledge of the facts; and this determines the validity of this principle. A person who does not apply this principle, when he can, is not acting in the best interests of his own life since it is his own apprehension of the facts that he refuses to acknowledge.

Rand calls the person who acts on the principle of justice a trader. She describes a trader as one who

does not treat men as masters or slaves, but as independent equals. . . . [He] does not expect to be paid for his defaults, only for his achievements. He does not switch to others the burden of his failures, and he does not mortgage his life in bondage to the failures of others. . . . In spiritual issues. . . . The currency is different . . . [i.e., not material], but the principle is the same. Love, friendship, respect, admiration are the emotional response of one man to the virtues of another, the spiritual payment given in exchange for the personal, selfish pleasure [i.e., happiness] which one man derives from the virtues of another man's character. . . . A trader is a man who does not seek to be loved for his weaknesses or flaws, only for his virtues, and who does not grant his love in response to the weaknesses or the flaws of others, only to their virtues. To love is to value. . . . The man who does not value himself cannot value anything to anyone.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>Rand, The Virtue of Selfishness, pp. 31-32.

Although this statement seems to idealize actual personalities, I do not find it inoperative from the standpoint of her explication of justice as a principle of action guiding a man's relationship with others. Rand is commending this principle and consequent action to her readers. She would not be commending it if it were already the way most relationships really were.

The value of others is an instrumental value to me in the following ways: The knowledge, skills, and productive action of people in a society lead to a betterment of both my life, through my working and/or trading with others, and that of society as a whole, as in the case of special research and work-saving techniques. I, also, will be of instrumental value to others through trade. Further, others are of instrumental value to my achievement of happiness through what Rand refers to as "spiritual" trade. The emotions of love, respect, admiration, and friendship are governed (or should be on Rand's view) by this principle. The trade is of this nature: Respect, admiration, and friendship are emotional responses on the part of one man directed to another in payment for the happiness one derives from the virtues and the character of the other. The emotions themselves, and the relationship which elicits them, are valuable in that they are instrumental to my achievement of happiness, which is a great contributive good.

There is a point of clarification needed concerning this spiritual trade. In one sense my emotional response of, say, admiration can be an actual payment. This occurs when the person whom I admire knows of my admiration for him and/or his virtues. But there are instances where

the person knows nothing of this because (1) he is dead, or (2) we have never met, or (3) both of these. For example, if my sister were to die, in all likelihood, my admiration for her would continue. Her death prevents her from ever knowing this, and thus, in a real sense ever collecting the payment that I would be giving to her. In a like manner, my admiration for Plato may continue until I die, but he will never know it. Although the collection of the "payment" of my admiration is barred to these two people, the principle of trade is not altered by this. It is still true that my admiration for both my dead sister and Plato arose from what each of them did. The action of writing his thoughts and insights, and the fact that I derive great pleasure and other benefits from reading these thoughts evokes in me an admiration for Plato himself though he cannot collect this payment. Were he here, and were I to meet him, he would collect this part of the trade.

Before moving to the discussion of happiness, I would like to reiterate the points that I made concerning Rand's theory of obligation. The only way I can see that her theory of non-scarifical living can be made consistent with her other claims is by the introduction of the concept of individual rights. Through the use of this concept one can move from the "rules of thumb" and "I can get away with it" position that inheres in traditional egoism, to a principle that is explicit and to the interests of every individual. It does not seem to me to involve a sacrifice on the part of individual men to subscribe to such a rule, but rather to serve each man's interest. The fact that I cannot kill my neighbor for money does not mean that I cannot make money, nor does his



not killing me for my money entail that he cannot make money. It means that neither of us can procure money in that way. In a social community, men's lives are in want of protection from the whims of others. "Rights" are not new to the history of man. Indeed, there have been the rights of the kings over their subjects, the rights of the Russian lords over their serfs, the rights of the Pharoah over the slaves, and the rights of the state over the individual. Individual rights differ from these in that they do not select one group over another in a society to have more or less protection than the other. They do not guarantee that each individual will achieve those values that he sets out to pursue; only that he can try. In this attempt he must depend on his own effort and the efforts of those who voluntarily consent to help him. The justification of this principle is the fact that it is my life that is intrinsically valuable to me. This is not to maintain that the principle of individual rights will always be in service to my life. For in some instances, such as those that obtain in the life-boat example, the principle cannot designate that I will live and the other person will drown. Further, it is not the case that the principle is unable to be legitimately violated. Particular situations of the type "kill or be killed" may arise where not to kill someone might be a sacrifice of my own life. In this latter situation, if it is obvious that Jones is about to kill me, then the principle is not binding on me for that instance. The violation of the principle, however, like the implementation of it, should be a result of wanting to protect one's life since this is the ultimate value and obligation.

From the theory of obligation we turn to Rand's statement that

the achievement of one's own happiness is the highest moral purpose that one has (Cf. p. 59). What is the meaning of this claim? We have seen that the principle of trade and/or justice is compatible with a person's intrinsic value, i.e., it is to the best interest of a person's life as to avoid sacrificing others or himself, or his judgements of others, in normal situations. Happiness, on the other hand is not an action, nor a material good like food, clothing, or dishwashers. Rand says quite a lot about happiness, and the first statement we will investigate concerns the nature of happiness. Rand says that happiness

is the successful state of life [while] suffering is the warning signal of failure of death. . . . Emotions are the automatic results of man's value judgements integrated by his subconscious; emotions are estimates of that which furthers man's values or threatens them. . . . Since man has no automatic knowledge, he can have no automatic [knowledge of] values; since he has no innate ideas, he can have no innate value judgements. . . . Happiness is that state of consciousness that proceeds from the achievement of one's values.<sup>57</sup>

Rand makes three distinguishable claims in this statement. The first is that happiness is an emotional state. While this has been disputed, I agree with Rand that happiness is, indeed, an emotion. The second claim is that emotions are the automatic results of value judgements integrated by a man's subconscious. Since this claim is unqualified, I am not sure if she means that all emotions are the results of value judgements, or that only some are. If she means the latter, then I am in agreement with her. Experientially it does seem to be true that one will experience emotions such as happiness as a consequence of achieving one's value. If she means the former, however, I am not in

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid., pp. 27-28.

agreement with her. The assertion that all emotions result from value judgements seems to have this very obvious counter-example, viz., children and infants certainly seem to exhibit emotions. I do not think that Rand would want to accredit them with having made value judgements. She might, however, say that they had made a sort of proto-judgement, which could perhaps be defended. On the other hand, she might want to maintain that what infants and children experience is merely pleasure or pain. This would be in conflict with recent psychological studies that reveal that children do suffer emotionally from, say, lack of affection.

When Rand uses the word "pleasure" or "pain" she means it to refer to a physical sensation. When she uses the word "emotion" she means it to refer to psychological state that may or may not have to do with the physical sensations of one's body. For example, if my dog were killed, there would be no physical trauma occurring in my body, but I would be suffering nonetheless.

The third claim in the statement is an implication of the second: It is that happiness proceeds from the achievement of one's values. If this means that the only source of happiness is the achievement of one's values, then I think that Rand is mistaken. Surely one can experience happiness during the endeavor to achieve one's values. At least I have not been able to distinguish phenomenologically between what I feel emotionally at times when I am endeavoring to achieve my values, and what I feel upon the success of the endeavor. Further, we experience happiness when those close to us achieve success or are happy.

A fourth claim that Rand makes concerning happiness is that it should be the moral purpose of each person's life. I cannot agree with this claim. Since happiness is, at least in many cases, the result or reward of the achievements of one's values, then it seems to me that the achievement of one's values, rather than happiness, ought to be the moral purpose of one's life. A fifth claim she makes concerning happiness is this: "The maintenance of [one's] life and the pursuit of happiness are not two separate issues."<sup>58</sup> Here, again, I think that she is making a mistake. Happiness is not the same thing as life, conceptually speaking, and to maintain the former may not be to maintain the latter. To treat happiness as either the purpose of ethics, or as "the goal and the reward of life,"<sup>59</sup> (a sixth claim) is totally inconsistent with her previously stated position. If there is anything that is the goal or reward of life, then life becomes a means to that end--which is to say that it no longer bears the status of the intrinsic good. It is acknowledged that life is a necessary condition of happiness, and, thus the happy person will also be alive; however, for Rand to make the goal happiness, rather than life, is to contradict her previous claims.

I believe that she can hold the following claims concerning happiness consistently: (1) Happiness results from the achievements of one's values, though not exclusively from this, and (2) happiness is a great contributive value in that it contributes to my life as a whole, and (3) happiness is a "state of non-contradictory joy."<sup>60</sup> The meaning

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>59</sup> Rand, Atlas Shrugged, p. 1021.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 1022.

of this last claim is that one cannot really be happy if one is feeling guilty, or sorry, or sad about that which has made one happy. This seems obviously true to me.

Rand offers two other explications of happiness that I think need to be looked at since neither of them seem to stem from the aforementioned claims. The first draws an analogy between happiness and a barometer. She writes:

Your emotions are estimates of that which furthers your life or threatens it, lightning calculators giving you a sum of your profit or loss. You have no choice about your capacity to feel that something is good for you or evil, but . . . what will give you joy or pain, what you will love or or hate, desire or fear, depends on your standard of value.<sup>61</sup>

This seems to be a very awkward view of the emotional mechanism in man. It does seem true in some instances that one's emotions are lightning calculators giving you a sum of your profit or loss. It seems that the grief we feel at the death of a loved one, or the fear that we have of being run over by a car, say, do issue from situations in which one has gained or lost, or could gain or lose, that which contributes to one's life, or one's life itself. However, what of the genuine emotions that many people feel in response to situations in which they are not even involved? This kind of emotion is usually called "empathy." For example, I may go to a movie and cry watching the experiences of a fictitious family. The sadness or fear or joy I experience during the movie cannot be said to issue estimates of that which furthers or

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 1021.

endangers my life, for I am in a dark movie house, and whatever emotions I am experiencing are issued in response to the happenings on the screen. Therefore, I do not think that the sweeping statement that emotions calculate my own profit or loss is valid. They also seem to gauge the profit or loss of others on some occasions.

A second problem concerning Rand's view of emotion is her claim that I "have no choice about [my] capacity to feel that something is good for [me] or evil, but what [I] will consider good or evil . . . depends on my standard of value."<sup>62</sup> What is the meaning of this statement? It is true that men have no choice as to whether they can experience emotions. This capacity seems to be inborn in all men. What Rand means is that I do not have a choice as to whether or not I will possess this capacity. I simply have the capacity to experience emotions; these emotions include feeling that things are good for me or bad for me, and also, extend beyond my own personal victories and trials, as was shown in the example of the movie. When she says that what I consider good or bad for me depends on my standard of value, she means, firstly, that the events that give rise to joy or unhappiness in person A are a consequence of his consciously or unconsciously held values, and, secondly, that these same events may not give rise to joy or unhappiness in person B, because his values may differ considerably from A's. There does not seem to be a contradiction in asserting that I have no choice as to whether I shall have the capacity to experience emotions, but that what I actually do

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 1021.

experience emotionally is tied to my standard of value, which I do have control over. It is similar to saying that one does not have a choice about the capacity to experience pleasure and pain, but what pleasures and pains one does experience depend on one's environment, one's parents, or whatever.

Although the statement is not self-contradictory, the problem of ascertaining its truth or falsity remains. I am just not sure whether one can answer this. Rand's claim seems to account for the difference between people's emotions. For if there are different values for different people, then there will be as many different responses emotionally to one thing as there are degrees of value, dis-value, or disinterest.

This is not yet a full account of Rand's position concerning happiness. In several places she seems to hold not only that happiness is the result of achieving one's values, but that it is the result of "achieving values that are real."<sup>63</sup> A corollary of this statement is that with the achievement of false or irrational values, one experiences pseudo-happiness. At this point I shall try to analyze this position.

The earmark of pseudo-happiness is that it involves a contradiction. Real happiness, recall, is a state of non-contradictory joy (Cf. p. 79). Rand describes this pseudo-happiness in Atlas Shrugged. In the novel Hank Rearden is a man who holds it his duty to do certain things for his family. . . ." He told himself that he had to attend the party--that he had to learn to like their pleasure for their sake--not his own."<sup>64</sup> Unlike the other phases of

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 1022.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. pp. 130-131.

his life, however, Rearden learns that the actions proceeding from a value such as: the duty to do x because his family had the right to demand it of him does not engender the desire to do those actions: "Throughout his life, whenever he became convinced that a course of action was right, the desire to follow it had come automatically. . . . [In his private life came] the impossible conflict of feeling reluctant to do that which was right. . . ." <sup>65</sup> The duty Rearden thought was right was in direct conflict with his desire to perform it.

Now this state of affairs, i.e., the thinking that something is right to do, but feeling reluctance to do it, is supposed to be a clue to the fact that the value from which the contemplated action proceeds (in this case, duty to his family) is an irrational value. This entire line of reasoning seems, however, to conflict with her statement that emotions are programmed by one's standard of value. It seems that if Rearden really thought it was right to go to the party, then, if emotions are determined by one's values, he would have wanted to go to the party. If "doing what is right" is a value to Rearden, and "going to the party" is an instance of "doing what is right" in Rearden's mind, and if he desires to do that which is right, then he should be desiring to go to that party. In truth, however, he dreads going. There is not one intimation that he wants to go. Further, the only emotion that he feels when it is over is relief. I do not think that in normal circumstances one is apt to confuse relief with happiness. One might feel

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 131.



them both arise in certain circumstances, such as being rescued from a mine after its tunnel had collapsed. However, the two emotions seem to me to be distinguishable.

The contradiction then is not one that arises during the experience of happiness, but between thinking that something is right to do and the conflicting rational desire to keep from doing it. For Rand the nature of emotions and the nature of desires are the same. Both proceed from one's standard of value (Cf. p. 79).

Further, if this conflict between desiring not to do x and thinking that it is right to do x can be unravelled to disclose the holding of an irrational value, then it seems that the emotions I experience become a guide to my intellect. Rand would certainly not want to hold this position. I admit that they would only be guides in the weak sense that they would tell me something was wrong, but not what to do about it. But it does seem that the experience of such a conflict does alert my intellect. Perhaps this is what Rand means by this kind of clue. I do not know how Rand would respond to these two points.

To draw the conclusion that one's values and one's emotions have nothing to do with each other seems as false as the claim that one's emotions are totally grounded on and issue from one's values. The relationship between one's emotions and one's values seem to be more subtle than the description offered by Rand. Like many other philosophers, she seems to be saying, "Accept my values and my philosophy, and be happy; otherwise be unhappy." Though she would disagree, I am doubtful that the whole of one's rational thinking is

enough to guarantee one's happiness. Scientific research is pointing more and more to biological and hormonal factors as ways of understanding why people are happy or miserable. The statement that a man will necessarily be happy if he holds rational values, and the man who does not hold rational values will not be, does not seem to me to be the whole truth concerning happiness.

At this point I should like to discuss Rand's position on "values" from what might aptly be described as a "bird's eye view." Hopefully this will help to clarify the meaning of real values or rational values as opposed to false or irrational values.

In Chapter I of this paper we saw that Rand argues for and commends to her readers their own lives as their standard of value. After she finishes trying to establish life as the standard, she goes in search of values that promote this standard. The first value she examines is consciousness, and therein, for man, reason. She concludes that reason can indeed promote one's life. She then argues that each value one holds should be examined thoroughly to see if it will or will not promote one's life. The basic assumption here is that one's reason can perform this feat in most cases. We see from this that reason is both a value and a determiner of values.

When Rand calls values "real," she is referring to three things: first, that they are life-promoting, second, that they are justified by reason according to the standard of one's life, and, third, that they are hierarchical. Hierarchical means two things for Rand: that one's values are arranged in an order that reflects the ultimate value of one's

life, and that thus arranged they do not conflict. This, too, is due, more often than not, to one's reason. The holder of real values, then, is one that "values things in proportion to their importance in serving his life and well-being."<sup>66</sup>

When Rand uses the terms "irrational" or "false" values, she means that they are either not life-promoting, not justified according to the intrinsic value of one's own life by reason, and/or that they are not hierarchical. Unlike real values for which all three conditions must obtain, any one or more of the three conditions above can be realized in an irrational value. In other words, I may value, say, happiness; but if I value it intrinsically, and use it as the standard for my actions, then it is an irrational value.

Rand is intensely concerned with values for the reasons that Paul Taylor indicates here:

If we know what normative standards and rules have been accepted by a person, we can tell what value judgements he will make. For no matter whether he has consciously chosen a set of such norms as the result of his own thinking, or has unconsciously absorbed them from his social environment, he will implicitly refer to them whenever he judges the goodness or badness of anything and the rightness or wrongness of his own and others' actions. . . . Thus a person's values shape his whole way of life, guiding his choices and giving direction to his conduct.<sup>67</sup>

As Rand puts it, "Moral values are the motive power of a man's actions."<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>Rand, The Virtue of Selfishness, p. 40.

<sup>67</sup>Paul Taylor, Ed., Problems of Moral Philosophy (Belmont, Calif.: Dickenson Publishing Company, 1967), p. 3.

<sup>68</sup>Op. Cit., p. 73.

Rand agrees with Taylor that a person's values are either the product of his thinking or they are not. Since values do influence a person's actions, Rand, of course, urges that they be the product of one's thinking. Actually, Rand does not conclude that thinking will necessarily lead to the right action, for man is neither infallible nor omniscient; in fact, "if, in a complex moral issue, a man struggles to determine what is right, and fails or makes an honest error, he cannot be regarded as 'grey'; morally, he is 'white.' Errors of knowledge are not breaches of morality; no proper moral code can demand infallibility or omniscience."<sup>69</sup> The effort to understand, to justify, one's course of action and the values giving rise to a course of action with reference to the ultimate value of one's life will, on Rand's view, help to eliminate the holding of irrational values. On the other hand, if a person's values are not the product of his thinking, but are accepted "by subconscious associations, on faith, on someone's authority, by some form of social osmosis or blind imitation,"<sup>70</sup> without a standard which justifies certain values being accepted and adhered to and others being rejected, then a person is apt to confuse real values with irrational values. Such a person is apt to do actions which would be sanctioned by the irrational value, but which would be wrong if subjected to scrutiny by one's reason.

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

For example, let us consider a person who blindly accepts the values of his culture. If, in this acceptance, two conflicting tenets are accepted as valuable, then the actions issuing from one will be condemned by the second tenet, thus bringing a person to the point of being unable to decide which of the two conflicting tenets and respective actions is right and which is wrong. As Paul Taylor indicates, if a person who blindly accepts a set of moral beliefs

is confronted by others who have moral beliefs contradicting his own and who hold them with as much certainty as he holds his own, he will feel lost and bewildered. His state of confusion might then turn into a deep disillusionment about morality. Unable to give an objective, reasoned, justification for his own convictions, he may turn from dogmatic certainty to total scepticism, and from total scepticism it is but a short step to an 'amoral' life--a life without any moral principles at all.<sup>71</sup>

Rand would agree with Taylor's statement. She would describe the "short step" as one in which the person decides that there is no way to give a rational justification of his values, and that, therefore, one value is as good as any other.

On Rand's view, holding internally contradictory values for which no justification is possible, or even holding values which one has not justified, though they be consistent, is to be avoided for the reason that the result is often the scepticism mentioned above, which, Rand would argue, is not conducive to the promotion of a person's life. Man has to act in certain ways and not in others in order to survive; in order to act effectively he must have principles to guide his actions,

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<sup>71</sup>Taylor, Problems of Moral Philosophy, p. 11.

and one action or principle is not as good as another. In order to know what actions and principles will promote his life, a person must think as clearly and rationally as possible. The fact that the adoption of different principles may result in consequences that he does not want makes it very important that he try to discover which principles are justifiable and which are not.

For example, suppose a person accepts the tenets "Honesty is the best policy" and "One must never do harm to others." Merely accepting these two tenets without defining the rationale behind them, and, thus, coming to understand what they mean both metaphysically and existentially, one might find himself in this position: John comes to Jane to inquire about the math test Jane just took. John tells Jane that if she does not give him the answers, he will flunk the test, flunk the course, flunk out of school, and have to go into the army, disappointing his ill father to whom he has attended rather than class, Jane, holder of the two tenets, thinks that to be honest in this instance entails harming John, but not to harm entails cheating. She is reasonably unable to forsake either principle, but, finally breaches one by, say, giving John the answers.

Her problem, as Rand would see it, is that she has not conceptually and rationally internalized either the meaning of "harming others" or the meaning of "honesty." As Jane sees it, the value conflict must ultimately be resolved in a way which will violate one or the other of her values. Rand would resolve the situation by saying that Jane should be honest. Her honesty is not what harms John. John's own

actions of not learning the material and of not preparing for the test harmed John. Jane had nothing to do with John's inability to pass the test, so she cannot be thought to have harmed John by not giving him the answer. The course of action which led ultimately to John's inability to pass the test is not Jane's but John's own actions.

Panaceas offered in hopes of absolving the conflict this sort of situation produces include, "Well, everybody does it," which is fallacious thinking and/or false, and, "If I hadn't, he would have flunked the course," suggesting that I would have been doing something against him, which is false on Rand's analysis of action.

Conflicting values are passed on by means of education "from one generation to the next," as are beliefs, knowledge, and skills.<sup>72</sup> Beliefs and values vary from time to time, place to place, and from person to person at a given time and a given place, which creates further possibility for conflict.

If opposing values are widely accepted as valid, people find it difficult to accept one and reject the other. Instead, without openly rejecting either value, the individual frequently offers some socially acceptable reason for ignoring one of them . . . a continuing clash of values, however, may progressively weaken attachment to both alternatives, thus increasing the possibility that neither can serve as an effective guide to action.<sup>73</sup> (my emphasis)

The statement above made by Eli Chinoy has many examples. The "socially acceptable" statements, such as, "Business is business," "That's just politics," "Men will be men," are panacea statements offered as excuses

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<sup>72</sup>Eli Chinoy, Society (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 389.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., pp. 469-470.

and in justification for momentarily dropping one value, and following its contrary. That they are offered and accepted as reasons show that people are both cognizant at some level of the conflict, and are either unwilling or unable to perform the necessary reasoning to resolve the conflicts. This is not to say that the conflicts can always be neatly and quickly disposed of. Rand's position would maintain that of two conflicting values, one will almost always be more beneficial to my life than another; and that this is the best criterion for deciding between the conflicting values.

The great value that Rand places on man's ability to reason is derived from her belief that without the use of this capacity a man's life is left to the blind chance of the moment. Since each man's life is intrinsically valuable to him, Rand argues, in company with the tradition of "Enlightened" Egoism, that one ought to give that life greater assurance than the mere chance of the moment.



## CHAPTER IV

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Before concluding, I should like to deal with a flagrant inconsistency in Rand's theory. It concerns her position on suicide. Since I believe that Rand's position concerning sacrifice of oneself to others, and the sacrifice of others to oneself, is consistent with her basic claim, I think it is devastating to her theory for her to offer examples of virtue consisting of suicide. In her essays, Atlas Shrugged, and in her play "Night of January 16," she does this. How can it be consistent to hold one's life as the standard, and the achievement of one's values as the moral purpose of one's life, and to hold that sometimes it is acceptable to do away with that value? Her claim that such an act is justifiable takes place in Atlas Shrugged between John Galt and Dagny Taggart.<sup>74</sup> In justification of this Rand offers the following statement: "If a man loves a woman so much that he does not care to survive her death, if life can have nothing more to offer him at that price, then his dying to save her is not a sacrifice."<sup>75</sup> What if a man loves his business so much that he does not care to survive its going into bankruptcy? What if he loves his horse so much that he does not care to survive its going lame? What if a man loves his Cocoa-Puffs so much that he does not care to survive their being sold out at the store?

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<sup>74</sup>Rand, Atlas Shrugged, P. 1091.

<sup>75</sup>Rand, The Virtue of Selfishness, pp. 58-59.

There is no rational way to draw the line on this, and the very attempt to do so shakes the foundation of Rand's ethics. In the particular scene between Galt and Dagny, he admits that she has "a week, maybe less"<sup>76</sup> before she is put on "the [physical] torture rack."<sup>77</sup> But Galt concludes that "at the first mention of a threat"<sup>78</sup> to her, he will take the life which might be able to save her. His dependence on the fact that his suicide would assure her life is grossly unwarranted. Further, what does it mean for Galt to say that upon Dagny's death that "there will be no values left for me to seek . . ."?<sup>79</sup> Are there values to seek after his own death? Weren't there values to seek before he ever met Dagny? Didn't he seek them?

I think that Rand confuses fighting for something, which on her fundamental claims should be one's life, and giving up that which one should be fighting to maintain. To say that a man is killed fighting for his freedom, and to say a man kills himself because he does not think there are any values to be sought given certain conditions, is to say two entirely different things. On Rand's theory one should not be "willing to die" at all. "Integrity is loyalty to one's convictions and values; it is the policy of acting in accordance with one's values, of expressing, upholding and translating them into practical reality."<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup>Rand, Atlas Shrugged, p. 1091.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., p. 1091.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., p. 1091.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., p. 1091.

<sup>80</sup>Rand, The Virtue of Selfishness, p. 46.

The first act of integrity on the part of a person is to stand firm on his conviction that his life is intrinsically valuable, and that his death is intrinsically dis-valuable. In many instances Rand reaffirms this stand: "Science is a value only because it expands, enriches, and protects man's life. It is not a value outside that context. Nothing is a value outside that context. And "Man's life" means the single, specific, irreplaceable lives of individual men."<sup>81</sup> Is the act of suicide to be considered one that "expands, enriches and protects man's life"? Rather than trying to justify suicide, Rand should be condemning those conditions which help to bring it about, and trying to offer solutions to the problem.

In summary, I have undertaken the examination of Rand's ethical theory with a view geared more to the consistency of her claims than to their truth or falsity. When I encountered claims I believed to be false, I tried to offer my own solutions consistent with her basic position, and justification of my solution.

In this thesis we have dealt thoroughly with the arguments that one's life is intrinsically valuable, that Rationality Productiveness, Pride and Self-esteem are values/virtues, the issue and meaning of non-sacrifice in her theory of moral obligation, and her view of happiness. None of these areas were free of problems. I found that the pluralist position is a viable option to Rand's monistic one and that her arguments did not fully treat the problems of intrinsic value. In

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<sup>81</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

Chapter II when I discussed extrinsic values/virtues, I found that "Pride" did not exemplify Rand's definition of virtue, and her arguments concerning Pride were very abstruse and confusing. The theory of moral obligation in Objectivism is, I think, a consistent and a defensible one given Rand's fundamental premisses. The problem as how it can be maintained that I should not sacrifice another to myself cannot be solved until the concept of rights is brought in. Thus, even her theory of moral obligation presents unique problems of its own. Finally, Rand's position regarding happiness was the most problematical part of the paper. Her definitions, concepts, and framework surrounding these, were unclear and imprecise. I could not sanction many of her statements regarding happiness for the reasons that (a) they seemed inconsistent with her basic premiss, or (b) they seemed false.

Many of the problems in Rand result from the fact that Rand is almost exclusively concerned with ethics. Her metaphysical position is often stated, but is weakly supported, if at all. She has no clear, consistent epistemology, and though I believe that she is presently engaged in the development of one, the fact that she has not completed this project hampers almost any attempt to understand how she can warrant the truth of all she claims to know. I did not attempt to question her assumption that reason gives us the true picture of things simply because that would have been another thesis in itself.

I tried to present her ethical position as it is, to explain that position, and where needed, to render it consistent internally with her other claims. I know from my exposure to her writings that she is more

concerned that people not sacrifice themselves, than she is that they not sacrifice others. This stems from her belief that the former is much more prevalent than the latter. Further, I think that she may believe that if those who are sacrificing themselves to others stopped, that those who are sacrificing others to themselves would eventually run out of victims. If the dominant trend were the sacrificing of others to oneself, I think that she would be emphasizing that side of her theory of obligation.

The conclusions I have drawn from this thesis are that (1) often Rand's terms and positions seem to slip and to slide into each other for lack of clear and precise definitions; (2) Rand often makes unqualified claims, and therefore, unacceptable assertions that tend to hamper the believability of her main points; and (3) that Rand's position, if ever relieved of these slippery terms, e.g., real and rational, and if ever stripped of the flat universalisms that she is given to, can be made a coherent, consistent rule-egoism.

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