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Ayn Rand's Ethics

From *The Fountainhead* to *Atlas Shrugged*

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Ayn Rand first envisioned *Atlas Shrugged*—originally entitled *The Strike*—as something of a postscript to *The Fountainhead.* The novel would dramatize the world's need for and injustice toward its prime movers—its Howard Roarks. But its philosophic frame of reference would be the philosophy of egoism and individualism set forth by its predecessor. In time, however, *The Fountainhead* became—as Rand later put it—the overture to *Atlas Shrugged*.[1]

The postscript view—the view of *Atlas* as the subordinate work—is evident in Rand's very first notes for the novel, dated January 1, 1945. "The theme," she says, "requires showing who are the prime movers and why, how they function; who their enemies are and why, what are the motives behind the hatred for and the enslavement of the prime movers; the nature of the obstacles placed in their way, and the reasons for it."[2] That sounds familiar enough; it sounds like *Atlas*. But she immediately adds: "This last paragraph is contained entirely in *The Fountainhead.* Roark and Toohey are the complete statement of it. Therefore, it is not the direct theme of *The Strike*—but it is part of the theme and must be kept in mind, briefly re-stated in order to have the theme clear and complete."[3] The point is evident: *Atlas* will inherit its main philosophic content from *The Fountainhead.* By the late '40s, however, Rand realizes that *Atlas* will be "bigger in scope and scale than *The Fountainhead*," as she puts it in a 1949 letter to Archibald Ogden (her former editor at Bobbs-Merrill).[4]

In part, *Atlas* is bigger in "scope and scale" because it has a metaphysical theme (the role of the mind in human survival), not just an ethical one (egoism and individualism). But *Atlas* also presents a more detailed, more complex, more systematic, more fully validated—and, in some ways, different—view of ethics from

The Fountainhead. And this is my focus here: how Ayn Rand's ethical thought develops and why.

I start by exploring Rand's changing conception of the relationship between *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas.* This will point up three issues on which the moral philosophy of *Atlas* diverges from or moves beyond that of *The Fountainhead*, and I then explore each of these issues more fully. Although these issues do not exhaust the important differences between *Atlas* and *The Fountainhead* (even in ethics), they are among the most important of those differences. The three issues are: (1) rationality rather than independence as the primary moral virtue; (2) altruism as a means of exploitation; and (3) the proper validation of a moral standard and the role of choice in morality. Finally, I draw some general conclusions concerning the progression of Rand's ethical thought in the period between her two major novels. I refer frequently to Rand's notes and draft material for *The Moral Basis of Individualism*, a book she never completed but that was to have been a nonfiction presentation of the moral philosophy of *The Fountainhead.* She worked on this project from 1943 to 1945.

ATLAS SHRUGGED IN RELATION TO *THE FOUNTAINHEAD*

Let us return to Ayn Rand's early notes for *Atlas*, specifically, to her further analysis of the thematic relationship of *Atlas* to *The Fountainhead. The Fountainhead*, she writes, "showed that Roark moves the world—that the Keatings feed upon him and hate him for it, while the Tooheys are consciously out to destroy him. But the theme was Roark—not Roark's relation to the world. Now [in *Atlas*] it will be the relation."[5] *The Fountainhead* "was Roark's story."[6] But *Atlas* "must be the world's story—in relation to its prime movers. . . . I do not show directly what the prime movers do—that's shown only by implication. *I show what happens when they don't do it.*"[7] This last statement is striking. The completed novel does, of course, "show directly what the prime movers do"; it shows a great deal of how they approach life and how they use their minds, which is just what makes it inspiring. Similarly astonishing is the statement in Rand's early notes that the novel "do[es] not set out to glorify the prime mover (that was *The Fountainhead*)."[8]

Six months into her work, Rand is having doubts about her original conception of the novel:

> I must consider very carefully the statements I made . . . to the effect that *the world* is featured in the story, and *the relation* of society to its prime

> movers. . . . [T]he second-handers *must not* be allowed to steal the show . . . . Even though I do not here treat of the *nature* of prime movers but of *their relation* to society—it is still *the prime movers* who are to be the stars: it is still *their* story.[9]

Although she still does not expect *Atlas* to add to *The Fountainhead*'s depiction of "the nature of [the] prime movers," she perceives that the novel's social emphasis threatens to give the second-handers[10] center stage. The danger is that "[t]he predominant emotion left by the book would be contempt, hatred, ridicule, gloating over the second-handers and their plight—but no uplift to the spirit of the strikers. The strikers would become only a kind of plot means to expose the parasites."[11] Thus, in rethinking her initial conception of the novel, Rand makes a decisive change. Whereas originally *Atlas* was to have been the world's story, not the strikers' story, now, referring to the strikers, Rand writes: "it is still *their* story."

But this change presents an awkward problem. How can *Atlas* be the prime movers' story without "treat[ing] of the *nature* of [the] prime movers"? Focusing on the strikers seems repetitive and unnecessary in light of *The Fountainhead*, but without such a focus the novel will lack an uplifting meaning. The solution, Rand concludes, is for the events of the novel to dramatize "[t]he nature of the *prime movers' martyrdom*," which is the "spirit" and "justification" of the strike and "*the very thing that made me want to write this novel.*"[12] Now the strike, once complete, *ends* their martyrdom. Thus, to *dramatize* their martyrdom requires showing the prime movers when they are *not* on strike. Rand discusses the advantages of this approach in subsequent notes: "There is the danger of having mere action, without emotional content, if I start with the strikers already on strike. Their decision [to strike] is then undramatized, behind the scenes—and the story can become passive, like their action of just doing nothing."[13] She adds, "*The actual plot must contain emotional conflict.*"[14] What is needed, then, is to show the strikers being victimized by society, and going on strike as a result, in a way that centers the emotional content of the story on their decision to do so. Rand then indicates the nature of the emotional conflict they face: "Here—show that it is not easy for them to break the ties."[15] It is not easy for any of the strikers. The emotional content of *Atlas*, however, centers on Dagny and Rearden—on their resistance to the strike and eventual realization that it is they themselves, as well as the other prime movers, who have empowered the evil destroying them and the world. In the remainder of this section, I take an overview of the steps involved in that realization, highlighting the importance of the three issues mentioned in the introduction. As we will see, the novel presents

Dagny's and Rearden's decisions to join the strike as the direct result of a growth of moral understanding centered on these issues.

Why do Dagny and Rearden oppose the strike? In effect, they make the opposite error from Dominique Francon in *The Fountainhead.* Dominique believes that evil—second-handedness—is powerful, and that the good can succeed in the world only by making terms with evil, thereby destroying itself as good. By contrast, Dagny and Rearden consider evil impotent, not powerful; they regard the policies of the second-handers (the "looters" in the vernacular of *Atlas*) as a self-defeating aberration. Galt sees the full truth that the novel seeks to convey: that evil *is* impotent in itself but gains its destructive power through the forbearance of the good. In this respect, *Atlas* places the theme of *The Fountainhead* into a wider and richer context, in which that theme is both confirmed and refined. If *The Fountainhead* said that evil cannot touch the good, then *Atlas* adds: unless the good empowers it.

Rearden (rather than Dagny) is first to see this and go on strike. A long development lies behind his decision to do so. But the last straw is the looters' total imperviousness to reason, as displayed in the expectation that the prime movers will always save them from the consequences of their actions, will always find a way to make reality suit the looters' wishes *somehow.* Rearden had long recognized that the looters were cowardly, dishonest, and completely dependent on the judgment and actions of better men; that they were what Roark would have called "second-handers." He assumed, though, that even they would eventually have to alter their disastrous course. It is the Steel Unification plan that finally convinces him otherwise. Objecting to the plan, which would force profitable steel manufacturers to subsidize unprofitable ones, he tells James Taggart, Floyd Ferris, and the others, "There is no way to make the irrational work"—to which Taggart replies, "Oh, you'll do something!" (986). The assumption that the looters would eventually concede their errors and relent presupposed some basic rationality on their part—some basic respect for reality. Taggart's reply crystallizes for Rearden that this basic rationality is what the looters have rejected; he sees that they are not just second-handers but irrationalists. If second-handedness, for Rand, represents a contemptible and self-defeating way of dealing with the world, then the looters' irrationalism represents a profound evil—a rejection of the precondition of any form of successful, life-sustaining action. By working under the looters' directives, Rearden realizes, he has helped them to prolong their hold on the country and sustain the illusion that the irrational *can* be made to work. He has thus unwittingly collaborated in his own exploitation

(and that of the other prime movers). At the beginning of the next chapter, he goes on strike.

But nothing Rearden learned about the looters could have had its full effect before he had grasped an important truth about himself, namely, that the sense of moral guilt he carries for much of the novel is undeserved. He condemns himself for his affair with Dagny, which he considers both a salacious betrayal of his respect for her and an unpardonable violation of his marriage vows. This verdict on his actions has two disastrous results: first, it damages his estimation of himself and, so, his capacity to enjoy his life and achievements; second, it opens him up to "white blackmail" by the looters when he is asked to sign the Gift Certificate making Rearden Metal public property. The blackmail is white because, in Rand's view, Rearden has no actual guilt. In the circumstances, the affair is morally justifiable (his wife neither loves nor respects him, and she actively works to deprive him of happiness); indeed, it is admirable (what draws him to Dagny are her moral virtues and way of facing life). Dagny, who speaks for Rand on this issue, recognizes this and subsequently chooses to reveal the affair herself. But Rearden—not questioning the necessity of unconditional marital fidelity or the assumption that sexual passion is a morally anomalous animal response—signs the Gift Certificate in order to prevent the affair's being exposed. He allows guilt over the affair and pity for Lillian's unhappiness to tie him to her, treating his marriage vows as though they gave her unlimited license to maltreat him. In these respects, his actions are shaped by the ethics of altruism, of self-sacrifice, that the novel as a whole condemns.[16] Although his acceptance of altruism is merely passive and implicit, and contradicted by all he does that is motivated purely by love of his work, it damages him as well as signalizes a deeper problem. As conscientious as he is in other respects, Rearden has given little explicit attention to the importance of moral values and ideals in human life. The irrationality of the looters could not have driven him to strike had he not first come to grips with this issue and revised the moral standards by which he judged his own actions.

Dagny has a richer explicit understanding of morality and is more morally consistent than Rearden. But she, too, crucially misunderstands the looters' motivating aims. She can see that their policies have the *effect* of preventing the prime movers from functioning, and that those policies will be harmful not only to the prime movers but ultimately even to the looters themselves, since they will inevitably bring down the entire national economy. But she does not see that the destruction of the prime movers is the unadmitted intent of those policies. She does not see that the looters have a psychological stake in the destruction of the prime

movers, and in branding them as evil, for if the prime movers represent virtue and success, then the looters can only represent evil and impotence. The looters sense something that Galt expands on in his speech:

> By a feeling he has not learned to identify, but has derived from his first awareness of existence, from his discovery that he has to make choices, man knows that his desperate need of self-esteem is a matter of life or death. As a being of volitional consciousness, he knows that he must know his own value in order to maintain his own life. He knows that he has to be *right*; to be wrong in action means danger to his life; to be wrong in person, to be evil, means to be unfit for existence. (1056–57)

Precariously, the looters have staked their self-esteem on being the moral opposites of prime movers. What is inconceivable to Dagny is that they will not right themselves come what may but will persist in seeking vindication from an uncooperative reality. They struggle not to make themselves fit for existence but—impossibly—to make existence fit for them (and unfit for the prime movers). This is what explains their insistence on political and economic policies that are a disaster by any sane standard.

Dagny's own love of life runs so deep, and her commitment to the fulfillment of her life's potential is so fundamental, that it simply eludes her that others do not share it or that there is even an issue on which a choice must be made, a stand taken. When she discovers late in the novel that the looters would rather kill Galt than change course and save themselves, the truth becomes clear to her: she sees that the looters have no real desire to live and that what motivates them ultimately is a nihilistic hatred for all human success and ability. That is when it becomes clear to her that she must quit. Until then, she assumed that the looters would eventually have to recognize the futility of their own policies and give up. On that assumption, her struggle to keep Taggart Transcontinental alive was a struggle *against* the looters—a struggle to hold out until they were forced to concede and relent. But if their motive is destruction, then there is no bringing them around, and holding out merely amounts to accepting victimization for herself and others.

The realizations that Rearden and Dagny come to, and that are decisive in their decision to strike, become central themes in the moral philosophy presented in Galt's Speech. In regard to each of them, the moral philosophy of *Atlas* takes important steps beyond the moral philosophy of *The Fountainhead.* Rearden's discovery of the looters' rejection of reason emerges as the view

that rationality rather than independence is the basic moral virtue; in *The Fountainhead* the basic virtue was said to be independence. His awakening to the costs of his own moral passivity emerges as the issue of the "sanction of the victim" and the exploitative character of altruism. Dagny's recognition of the looters' nihilistic motives emerges as the view that the choice to live or not is the basic choice a human being must confront, and the requirements of living, the proper standard of morality. I turn now to the development of Rand's views in each of these areas.

FROM INDEPENDENCE TO RATIONALITY AS THE PRIMARY MORAL REQUIREMENT

The unreason of the looters' society is all over *Atlas Shrugged.* It is best embodied in the character of James Taggart. We repeatedly see Taggart refusing to think, evading what he knows, and placing feelings over facts. By contrast, Dagny, Rearden, and the other prime movers use their minds fully, straining every nerve to understand, to know the truth, even in periods of anxiety, discouragement, and exhaustion. Reflecting this basic contrast, in *Atlas* Ayn Rand casts rationality as the basic requirement of morality—an important shift from *The Fountainhead.*

The case for independence as the basic moral requirement is made in Roark's courtroom speech. Here are two key passages:

> Man cannot survive except through his mind. He comes on earth unarmed. His brain is his only weapon. Animals obtain food by force. Man has no claws, no fangs, no horns, no great strength of muscle. He must plant his food or hunt it. To plant, he needs a process of thought. To hunt, he needs weapons, and to make weapons—a process of thought. From this simplest necessity to the highest religious abstraction, from the wheel to the skyscraper, everything we are and everything we have comes from a single attribute of man—the function of his reasoning mind. . . . But the mind is an attribute of the individual. There is no such thing as a collective brain.[17]
>
> The choice is not self-sacrifice or domination. The choice is independence or dependence. The code of the creator or the code of the second-hander. This is the basic issue. It rests upon the alternative of life or death. The code of the creator is built on the needs of the reasoning mind which allows man to survive. The code of the

> second-hander is built on the needs of a mind incapable of survival. All that which proceeds from man's independent ego is good. All that which proceeds from man's dependence upon men is evil.[18]

Roark's argument is as follows: (1) we face the alternative of life or death; (2) the requirements of life are the proper standard for moral evaluation; (3) the mind is our means of survival; (4) but the mind is an attribute of the individual and independence is its basic requirement; (5) therefore, independence—forming one's own judgments and living by the work of our own mind—is one's primary moral obligation. The conclusion is really only implied, but it is explicit in Rand's early notes for *The Moral Basis of Individualism*, where she makes essentially the same argument and concludes: "To preserve the independence of his mind is man's first and highest moral duty. It stands above any other precept."[19]

Notice how much that is familiar from *Atlas* (and from *The Virtue of Selfishness*) is already clear to Rand by 1943: (a) the connection between morality and the alternative of life or death; (b) the requirements of man's life as the proper standard of moral value; (c) the mind as man's basic means of survival; and, therefore, (d) its needs as the source of moral requirements. Still, she identifies independence, not rationality, as the basic requirement to be derived from the moral standard of "man's life" and from man's nature as a rational being. Why is this? Her views at this time about the nature of human volition are the decisive factor. She says in *The Moral Basis of Individualism* that the choice of independence or dependence "is the crucial choice; primary in its nature, based on the manner of his survival, on the issue of life or death, this choice will determine all his subsequent behavior, his actions, his motives, his character, the style of his soul."[20] If independence or dependence is our basic choice, and one leads to life and the other to death, and life is the standard of morality, it makes sense to take independence as the basic moral requirement.

Why does Rand think the choice of independence or dependence is psychologically basic? She writes:

> There is nothing in nature to hinder the function of man's rational faculty. That function follows a simple pattern: to observe through his own senses, to make the proper deductions through his own reasoning power. Nothing must stand between the material and man's mind. No intermediary is possible. What can assume the role of such an intermediary? Only other men. The conclusions, the

> thoughts, the opinions, the wishes or the orders of other men. . . . The only threat to man's rational faculty lies in the person of others.[21]

This seems to imply that if no one else were around, a person would use his mind fully. Interestingly, in the same set of notes she recognizes that "[l]eft alone, man has a single alternative: think or perish."[22] Further, in some earlier notes, she recognizes that thinking involves choice: "It is not only that man survives through the rational faculty which functions through constant choice. It is that he also has the choice of exercising his rational faculty or not. He can make an error in judgment. He can act against his own judgment. He can suspend all judgment."[23] But she does not appear to consider the choice to suspend one's judgment a psychologically realistic one in desert-island cases. In society, she thinks, suspending one's judgment is a realistic possibility, since one has the apparent (but actually only temporary) alternative of "think or be supported by the thinking of others."[24] The presence of others, she seems to assume, supplies a potential motive for nonthinking that would be absent on a desert island. Why is this? She seems to be making two assumptions about those who choose to be dependent on the thinking of others: first, that they have nothing against thinking *per se*; second, that they do want to live. In that case, if such a person found himself on a desert island, he might wish that there were someone else to do his thinking for him, but he would choose to think rather than allow himself to perish. But, as we will see, these are two assumptions about dependent people that Rand will modify later.

On Rand's early view, the choice to suspend one's judgment just *is* the choice to be a second-hander. If independence or second-handedness is the primary choice, then morality has a primarily social function, a function essentially concerned with guiding our relations to others. And this seems to be how Rand first views morality in working on *The Moral Basis of Individualism.* If moral principles are to be delineated by reference to the requirements of human survival, she says, then "the first moral principle deduced from [this standard], the first commandment to guide man in his relations with other men, is the principle of independence. Independence of man from men is the Life Principle. Dependence of man upon men is the Death Principle."[25]

In *The Moral Basis of Individualism*, Rand does not call independence a *virtue* but rather a *moral duty*, by which she means not a duty in the technical, Kantian sense of a categorical imperative, but rather a moral obligation teleologically grounded in the goal of sustaining one's life. She uses the term "virtue" more narrowly than she later does in *Atlas*: "Man's virtues are the

qualities required for the preservation of his independence."[26] The virtues, in this presentation, have roughly the same relation to independence as the virtues of independence, honesty, justice, and integrity have to rationality in Rand's later thought (indeed honesty, justice, and integrity are among the virtues Rand discusses as subordinate to independence, along with courage, confidence, honor, wisdom, strength [of mind], and self-respect). Presumably she later concluded that it was not necessary to have a separate category for the master moral requirement of which these virtues are applications; the master requirement (e.g., rationality in Galt's Speech) could also be considered a virtue (and no doubt she later would have wanted to avoid the Kantian overtones of the term "duty"[27]). Terminology aside, her attempts to depict the subsidiary virtues as aspects of *independence* are rather strained. For instance, she writes, "The incentive to dishonesty comes when one deals with other men," which turns it into an issue of independence or dependence (in the sense that the dishonest person is dependent on those he exploits).[28] But that seems incorrect: isn't there such a thing as self-deception—and isn't it precisely the point of Rand's characterization of men like James Taggart that they deceive and manipulate others in order to fake, to themselves, a self-esteem they do not have? Similarly, can't one be unjust in one's assessment of *oneself*, as Francisco argues that Rearden has been when they speak at Rearden's mills? (455).

A great deal of the characterization in *Atlas Shrugged*, both of the prime movers and of the looters, involves aspects of rationality or irrationality that are not primarily matters of independence or dependence. To take one more (negative) example, what drives the looters' material exploitation of the prime movers—their expropriations, regulations, and so forth—is not primarily a desire for wealth but a desire to take over the stature held by the prime movers as beneficent, efficacious men crucial to the well-being of the nation. But it is part of the theme of *Atlas* that wealth has its source in the moral stature of the individuals who produce it, and that it is impossible apart from moral virtue. The novel thus presents the looters' attempt to gain moral stature through material expropriation as a futile and irrational attempt to reverse the actual direction of causal influence.

Shortly before stopping work on *The Moral Basis of Individualism*, Rand makes some notes assessing what she has written. A two-year gap separates these notes from the earlier ones:

> Before you come to any "principle as a guide in his relations to other men," cover the point of how the morality of reason applies to man alone—even to a man on a desert island. The first commandment is to exercise his reason. *Morality is not social* (and

> don't forget the evils that come from thinking that it is). Only after you have established this, can you come to morality in relation to other men.[29]

In his editorial comments in the *Journals of Ayn Rand*, David Harriman notes that this passage marks the beginning of Rand's transition from taking independence as the primary moral requirement to taking rationality as the primary requirement.[30] Independence is a virtue that can only be exercised in a social context;[31] if morality is not primarily social, then independence cannot be its primary requirement. What accounts for this transition? The notes in which Rand revises her thinking on this point, deciding that morality must be defined nonsocially, come at the end of June 1945, six months after she has started working on *Atlas Shrugged.* It may be that the thinking she had now done concerning the respective psychologies (as she projected them) of the prime movers and the looters had convinced her that there is a genuine, nonsocial choice that a person faces between using his mind fully and failing to do so (e.g., sometimes evading facts or giving in to the promptings of unconsidered emotions). From this, she may have concluded that there is a need for nonsocial moral guidance identifying and characterizing this choice, and evaluating the full and consistent use of one's mind as morally good. This, in essence, is what Rand's concept of "rationality" (as a moral virtue) serves to do.[32] Her views concerning the fundamentally nonsocial nature of ethics and the primacy of the virtue of rationality, in other words, may have grown out of her having reached a clearer view of the nature of human volition, as a result of her having started to work out the psychologies of the positive and negative characters of *Atlas Shrugged.* And *Atlas* not only presents rationality as the basic virtue but presents the choice to think (or not) as the basic choice (1017).

ALTRUISM AS A MEANS OF EXPLOITATION

In her first notes for *Atlas Shrugged*, Ayn Rand writes that the novel must show "exactly *how* the second-handers live on the creators, both in *spiritual* matters *and* (most particularly) in concrete physical events."[33] Some fifteen months later, she reverses this emphasis: "John Galt is the Roark in the story, but the others are not, and it is against the exploitation by the world, particularly . . . spiritual exploitation, that Galt teaches them to strike."[34] Here, as elsewhere in Rand's writings, "spiritual" has a purely naturalistic sense and means "pertaining to consciousness"—to man's moral-intellectual and emotional life.[35] Broadly speaking, spiritual exploitation is Rand's term for the

looters' attempt to deprive the prime movers of recognition, admiration, and self-esteem.

Why does Rand decide that the prime movers' spiritual exploitation should have primacy? This reversal of emphasis corresponds to changes in her thinking about the nature and causes of the spiritual exploitation that the prime movers are subjected to. Early on, she envisions the looters exploiting the prime movers by taking credit for their achievements.[36] This form of exploitation is similar to what occurs in *The Fountainhead* (e.g., when Keating accepts credit for architectural plans actually drawn by Roark). Although this kind of exploitation also occurs in *Atlas* (e.g., when James Taggart claims credit for Dagny's decision to build the John Galt Line out of Rearden Metal or when Rearden Metal is made public property and renamed Miracle Metal), it is not of primary importance *per se.* Rather, it is an indication and consequence of a much larger issue, an issue not seen in *The Fountainhead* that Rand seems not to have formulated previously.

The looters in *Atlas* have a sense of the psychological power of morality that the prime movers largely lack (the leaders of the strike, and to some extent Dagny, are the exceptions). According to Rand, man needs morality not only to be able to sustain himself physically but because "to live requires a sense of self-value, but man, who has no automatic values, has no automatic sense of self-esteem and must earn it by shaping his soul in the image of his moral ideal" (1020–21). Thus, "he must acquire the values of character that make his life worth sustaining" (1020). To sustain himself psychologically, Rand holds, a person must acquire the self-esteem that proceeds from a dedication to moral rectitude, which Rand calls the virtue of pride.[37] The prime movers all have the virtue of pride; what they lack (the strike leaders again being exceptions) is a full and explicit grasp of the moral standards—the moral ideal—that should inform this virtue, and a grasp of their own heroic stature when judged by those standards. Their lack of complete and well-articulated moral standards enables the looters to use the prime movers' moral conscientiousness against them. Attuned to the psychological necessity of morality, the looters have attached themselves to a moral code that allows them seemingly to reverse their own sense of moral inferiority to the prime movers while continuing to reject the virtues required by a code geared toward human survival.

The moral code embraced by the looters is *altruism*, not in the confused popular sense of an indiscriminate combination of self-sacrifice and mere generosity, but in the precise philosophic sense deriving from Auguste Comte's use of the term to mean a morality of self-denying service to others.[38] In the novel, altruism enables the looters to cast their antipathy toward the prime movers

as a moral crusade against selfishness and for the general good. Altruism thus serves as a vehicle for the exploitation of the prime movers. But *Atlas Shrugged* is not Rand's first attack on altruism; her first explicit attack is in *The Fountainhead.* Nor is *Atlas* the first time she shows the prime movers (as opposed to others) being victimized by altruism. Roark is certainly harmed by the pervasive demand that he sacrifice his own architectural standards in order to serve the standards of the public; it makes his struggle harder. He is harmed by the unauthorized alteration of his design for Cortlandt Homes, which is justified by reference to the public interest. *The Fountainhead* presents "second-handedness" as the unavoidable psychological result of altruism, in the sense that altruism drives people to set aside their own values and seek self-esteem in catering to the wishes of others.[39] And the second-handedness of others devastates Henry Cameron and nearly destroys Steven Mallory, neither of whom is able to sustain the same degree of inward self-sufficiency as Roark. Indeed, Roark points out in his statement at his trial that "the second-hander [uses] altruism as a weapon of exploitation," suggesting that not only does altruism foster second-handedness but that second-handedness, once it takes root, depends on altruism for its moral justification.[40] But *The Fountainhead* does not show Roark and the other prime movers being victimized by *their own* acceptance of altruism. In *Atlas*, however, the focus is on the damage done to the prime movers by their own acquiescence (to varying degrees) in the altruistic code of the looters' society. This was never an issue in *The Fountainhead.* In *Atlas Shrugged*, it is an issue and it has a name: "the sanction of the victim," the prime movers' own toleration of and deference to a moral code on which their rationality, their productiveness, their dedication to their own happiness, and all their other virtues are denigrated as forms of immoral self-indulgence, inimical to the good of society.

Dagny is one case in point here. Misled by an overly charitable reading of the looters' motives, she struggles to run Taggart Transcontinental in conditions demanding a growing effort to stem crises, while offering shrinking room for the pursuit of positive goals. Not surprisingly, her energy wanes and her ability to find joy in life shrivels. But Dagny's acquiescence is not inward acceptance, not even in a latent or implicit form, and this saves her from the worse consequences endured by Rearden, on whom I will focus for the remainder of this section. Rearden's suffering in the novel runs deeper than Dagny's, because Dagny has an explicit awareness of morality that he lacks. In his conscious convictions, Rearden is largely oblivious to morality, and that, the novel shows, makes him specially vulnerable, for morality has a power rooted in our need for moral guidance and justification, a power it exerts on

us whether we realize it or not. Francisco warns him of this in the moments before the furnace breakout at Rearden's mills: "You who won't allow one percent of impurity into an alloy of metal—what have you allowed into your moral code? . . . You knew that man needs the strictest code of values to deal with nature, but you thought that you needed no such code to deal with men" (454).

The distinction that Francisco makes in this passage parallels the distinction that led Rand to view rationality rather than independence as the basic virtue. Whereas Rand had, in effect, neglected the purely individual, "desert island" aspect of morality in making the basic virtue independence, Rearden, according to Francisco, makes the reverse error: he neglects interpersonal moral issues. But that is really only the tip of the iceberg. For Rearden's knowledge of the code of values needed for dealing with nature is at best implicit; he does not explicitly see himself as operating by a moral code in his work. His lack of moral self-awareness comes out most clearly in the scene between him and Dagny after her radio appearance: "I took pride in my ability to think, to act, to work for the satisfaction of my desires. But I did not know that this was virtue, I never identified it as a moral value, as the highest of moral values" (858). Rearden does not just neglect interpersonal morality; he neglects morality as such as an explicit intellectual concern:

> While I was busy conquering matter, I had surrendered to them the realm of the mind, of thought, of principle, of law, of values, of morality. I had accepted, unwittingly and by default, the tenet that ideas were of no consequence to one's existence, to one's work, to reality, to this earth. (858)

In short, he "had accepted the one tenet by which they destroy a man before he's started . . . : the breach between his mind and body" (857–58). And he had accepted it "like most of their victims . . . not knowing even that the issue existed" (858).

As long as Rearden has not identified the sources of his pride as *moral values*, he cannot regard his pride as morally justified, and therefore he cannot regard his self-esteem as morally deserved. Rearden *has* earned the self-esteem that he feels. But it is not enough that his fundamental emotional estimate of himself is positive, for his lack of insight into the moral basis of this emotional estimate leaves him tragically vulnerable. We see his vulnerability in the inner conflict he faces in regard to his affair with Dagny. He regards his sexual desire for Dagny as an animal lust degrading to both of them; meanwhile, he is wracked by guilt over his violation of his marriage vows, even though Lillian offers

him neither love nor respect. He cannot feel guilty for wanting Dagny, and he cannot hate himself in any fundamental sense. Yet having absorbed societal moral standards he barely knows exist, he condemns himself. The condemnation does not shake his core self-esteem; what it shakes is his conviction that he has any moral *right* to that self-esteem, or, consequently, to any happiness his life has to offer him.

The prime movers' spiritual exploitation is the cause of their material exploitation. And that is surely one reason why Rand reverses the novel's emphasis, giving primacy to the issue of spiritual exploitation. But it is not the most important reason. As Rearden says to Dagny, "wealth is a means to an end" (858). The deepest damage Rearden suffers is not the loss of his wealth. As he comes to recognize,

> I . . . created the means [the wealth] and let them [the society's intellectual trendsetters] prescribe the ends. I, who took pride in my ability to achieve the satisfaction of my desires, let them prescribe the code of values by which I judged my desires. I, who shaped matter to serve my purpose, was left with a pile of steel and gold, but with my every purpose defeated, my every desire betrayed, my every attempt at happiness frustrated. (858)

Besides its connection to their material exploitation, the spiritual exploitation of the prime movers is important in its own right, for the same reason that happiness is important in its own right. Happiness, in Rand's view, is a moral person's deepest purpose in living. But happiness, she holds, proceeds from success in attaining one's values, including, above all, the moral values one aspires to embody in one's character. Thus, happiness, for Rand, depends on moral virtue and thus on pride, understood as "moral ambitiousness," dedication to upholding high moral standards.[41] Pride, in this sense, requires not just living up to one's standards but taking *explicit* charge of the moral standards by which one judges oneself. For all his rightful pride in his abilities, it is pride in this moral sense that Rearden lacks and that makes his exploitation by the looters (both spiritual and material) possible.

THE CHOICE TO LIVE AND THE VALIDATION OF A MORAL STANDARD

Rearden lacks an understanding of his own virtue and of the importance of morality in human life. He comes to see that his lack of explicit moral values has harmed him. But why is this?

Paraphrasing Francisco, what *is* it that a code of moral values does to a man's life, and why *can't* he exist without one? Further, what standard should govern the formulation of such a code, and why, and what would qualify as moral virtue by that standard? The world learns the strikers' (and Rand's) answers to these questions in Galt's Speech, and the individual strikers hear them privately at the time of their recruitment. Clearly, answers to these questions are necessary; the recognition that one has suffered by allowing others to set one's moral values is at best a first step toward solving this problem.

It is not surprising, then, that the validation of a standard of morality is a matter of intense concern for Ayn Rand in the period between *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas.* I will trace some of the evolution of her thinking on this issue. We will also see her reach a conclusion that is vital not for Rearden's self-liberation but for Dagny's: the idea that one's need for, and thus one's potential receptiveness to, morality depends on a basic choice to live. Dagny, recall, shares none of Rearden's moral errors; she does, however, assume that she and the looters share some common moral ground as fellow human beings with the same fundamental aims. What Rand's exploration of the foundations of morality brings out is not just the need for morality in human existence but that there is a choice involved in valuing one's life, a choice that is the precondition of one's being reachable by moral appeals.

Recall Roark's statement that the morality of independence was based on "the needs of the reasoning mind" and, beneath that, the requirements of man's life in the face of the alternative of life or death. This approach to justifying moral requirements takes life as the end to which morality will be the means, and thus makes the requirements of man's life—of man's long-range survival—the standard of what is moral or immoral. So, for example, if we learn that human survival requires rationality, rationality will qualify as a moral virtue. Without a clearly formulated moral standard, any claim one makes about what is moral or immoral is arbitrary. In *The Fountainhead*, Rand sets forth her moral standard but does not present its validation. She first tackles the question of how to validate the standard in *The Moral Basis of Individualism.* This is a crucial issue, since not only do particular moral principles need to be validated by reference to a moral standard, but the standard itself has to be validated in some way; it cannot just be arbitrarily picked out of the air or else the principles based on it will themselves be arbitrary and unjustified.

In *The Moral Basis of Individualism*, Rand says that the basis of morality is a *moral axiom*, which she formulates as "Man exists and must survive as man."[42] Given this axiom, she holds, man's life is the proper moral standard, the proper criterion for

determining what is right and wrong. By the time she writes Galt's Speech, however, she has rejected the view that morality is based on a moral axiom. Let us explore why she held her earlier view, what problems there were with it, and how her later view deals with those problems.

Consider again the proposed moral axiom, "Man exists and must survive as man." As she uses the term, an axiom is a self-evident, primary truth lying at the base of a discipline, a truth that must be accepted in any attempt to deny it.[43] Before judging whether the statement just mentioned qualifies as an axiom, we must get clear on what the statement means. The first part—that man exists—is easy enough. But what about the second part, *Man must survive as man*? What does "must" mean, in this context? We are talking about human beings with the faculty of volition, so the "must" cannot refer to deterministic causal necessity—it cannot mean that man necessarily acts in a certain way, just as a pen necessarily falls to the floor when you drop it. This is supposed to be a *moral* axiom, and so the "must" has to be the kind of "must" we encounter in morality—that is, a "should" or an "ought." Rand says that if you wanted to deny this part of the axiom, you "would have to claim either that [man] exists, but his survival is not desirable, or . . . [that] he can survive as a sub-human creature."[44] This part of the axiom thus makes two claims: that man's survival is desirable—that is, that man *should* seek to survive; and that man cannot survive by subhuman means—that is, that *if* man seeks to survive, he *should* act in accordance with his nature.[45] Thus we have three points built into the axiom: (1) Man exists; (2) man should seek to survive; (3) if man seeks to survive, he should act in accordance with his nature. Now it is easy to see why Rand might have thought that (1) has the status of an axiom within ethics. Since ethics prescribes guidance for human conduct, and so presupposes that there are such things as human beings, ethics must take the existence of human beings as a given.[46] It is also easy to see why she might have considered (3) to be axiomatic for ethics: it can be seen as an inference from, or application of, the law of identity, which for Rand is a metaphysical axiom. The law of identity, as she formulates it, says that everything that exists has some definite nature; (3) says that human nature is a given that must be yielded to if one is to be able to survive.[47] But what about (2), the claim that man's survival is desirable or that he should seek to survive? There are two problems with taking this claim to be axiomatic. First, why accept that we should seek to survive? Where does this "should" come from? Second, why accept that survival should be the ultimate end toward which all moral requirements are calibrated? Some moral systems claim that a

person should subordinate his life to a higher end. What proves that these systems are wrong?

As she works on *The Moral Basis of Individualism*, Rand seems to recognize that this middle component of her axiom is contestable. She takes two important steps, which, in effect, respond to the objections just mentioned and suggest that her views are evolving—or at least that she is articulating them more fully and precisely. First, she raises the issue of what to say to someone who challenges the claim that man's survival is desirable: "If anyone now asks: But why do I have to hold my survival as desirable?—The answer is: You don't have to. It is an axiom, to be accepted as self-evident. If it is not self-evident to you, you have an alternative: admit that your survival is not desirable and get out of the way."[48] This is a pretty relaxed attitude to have about an axiom (or any true proposition), and it suggests that she is *not* really thinking of "survival is desirable" as a self-evident *truth* that we apprehend, which is how she thinks of metaphysical axioms like the law of identity. For she does not suggest that the person envisioned here would be mistaken or deluded; she is willing to grant him the premise that his own survival is not desirable. One could imagine Rand telling a person who denied metaphysical axioms, "Suit yourself." But it seems unlikely that she would tell him he should admit that a thing can be nothing in particular, or admit that things can act in conflict with their natures.[49]

It seems, then, that the middle part of the axiom—"man's survival is desirable"—is something other than an axiomatic truth that one can grasp and would be mistaken to deny. Confirming this impression, in the same stretch of her notes Rand explains this part of the axiom as follows: "Man needs a rational decision, an axiom understood and consciously accepted: I wish to survive—my survival is desirable. In accepting this, he has accepted the standard and the first axiom of morality."[50] Here, the "axiom" sounds less like an axiomatic *truth*—a truth whose identification lies at the base of a field of study—and more like what we might call an "axiomatic decision"—a decision lying at the base of one's concern to discover correct moral guidance. On this approach, the answer to the question about the source of the "should" in "man should seek to survive" is that there really *is* no "should"; rather there is a decision to embrace one's survival as a goal and, in this sense, take it as "desirable." Although Rand's view seems to be developing in this direction, it still remains somewhat ambiguous.

What about the second objection I mentioned—the issue of why we should take survival (even if it is desirable) as our ultimate end and as the standard for morality? Here the key beginning step comes as Rand is rewriting some earlier draft material for *The Moral Basis of Individualism.* She has the idea that instead of

starting her argument by setting forth her axiom she should "begin by asking whether a moral code is necessary? Prove that it is—for a rational being."[51] Later, in *The Virtue of Selfishness*, she begins the presentation of her ethics with just this question, emphasizing that it is the question from which any ethical theory must properly begin. Starting with the question of why moral values are needed provides a way of validating a moral standard without recourse to a moral axiom. If we can explain why—for what purpose—man by his very nature needs a code of moral values, then that purpose will have a clear claim to be the standard of moral value.[52]

Interestingly, it is not until quite some time after Rand thinks of this procedure that she believes she has a satisfactory answer to the question of why man needs moral values. She mentions this question a couple of times more in her notes for *The Moral Basis of Individualism* and in her working notes for *Atlas*, but she mentions it as a question still to be answered, rather than as one to which she already has the answer. This may seem puzzling since she has already stated explicitly that all living things need values in order to live and that man needs morality because he has no preprogrammed values. One might think that she could just put these two points together and obtain the answer she's looking for. But that's not what happens.

What holds her back? What does she think is missing? There is something present in the *Atlas Shrugged* and *Virtue of Selfishness* arguments for the standard of moral value that is only hinted at previously: her analysis of our grounds for forming the concept of "value." Why is such an analysis necessary? The claim that man needs values to live (and more broadly that all living things need values to live) reflects a certain view of the concept of value, a view of what the concept refers to. Since the classifications we make here will impact our conclusions about why we need values, any answer to this question is liable to be accused of changing the subject by someone who sees those classifications differently. Either there is some way of escaping that kind of impasse, or an objective resolution of fundamental ethical disputes is impossible. In her epistemological writings, Rand argues that, along with epistemic standards for justifying beliefs, there are epistemic standards for justifying conceptual classifications.[53] As far as these standards are concerned, Rand contends that our ordinary evaluative vocabulary is a mixed bag. There are parts of it that have no rational grounds and should be jettisoned, such as the concept of "duty" in its Kantian sense (and the artifacts of that sense found in ordinary moral discourse) and the concept of the "common good" as opposed to the good of an individual human being (or other individual living thing).[54] Other parts are in better shape, though, and Rand's analysis of the basis

of the concept "value" is an attempt to recover those aspects of this familiar concept that are epistemically legitimate. If she has done this correctly, then she cannot be accused of changing the subject.

To answer the question of why we need values, then, we have to first know what values are—what, if anything, we are talking about when we talk about "values." Knowing this, on Rand's account of the way our concepts work, involves knowing what facts of reality enable and require us to form the concept "value."[55] By the time of *The Moral Basis of Individualism*, Rand has already concluded that values are integral to the functioning of all living things. But this conclusion depends on extending the concept "value" very broadly, to cover not only things pursued by humans but by animals and plants. Is this classification of the objects of animal and plant action as "values" warranted? Rand has some grounds for it in observable similarities between humans and other species.[56] But before Galt's Speech, she does not have a full, systematic account of the basis of the concept "value."

She does have some leads. She writes at one point, "The concept of 'value' presupposes an entity to whom an object or action is valuable."[57] She also has the idea that what is of value to an entity is of value to it for the sake of some goal or end. What does not appear until *Atlas* are these two crucial points from Galt's Speech:

(1) "'Value' presupposes a standard, a purpose and the necessity of action in the face of an alternative. Where there are no alternatives, no values are possible" (1012).

(2) "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. The existence of inanimate matter is unconditional, the existence of life is not; it depends on a specific course of action. Matter is indestructible, it changes its forms, but it cannot cease to exist. It is only a living organism that faces a constant alternative: the issue of life or death" (1012).

The concept of "value," Galt says here, can only be formed with reference to an entity facing "the necessity of action in the face of an alternative"; omit the issue of such an alternative and it would be impossible to form the concept.[58] But if living organisms and only living organisms confront an action-necessitating alternative, then a "value" is properly defined as an object of a living thing's goal-directed action. And in that case, according to Rand, it is possible to give an objective, nonarbitrary answer to the question

of why living organisms need values and, more specifically, why man needs a code of *moral* values. The answer is that we and they need values in order to live—and that means that life *is* the proper standard by which to delineate a code of morality.

Once Rand has this analysis of the roots of the concept "value" in place, she is also able to reframe her account of the basis of morality, to eliminate the problems and ambiguities we noted earlier. In particular, she drops the idea that morality is based on the axiom that man's survival is desirable. To say that survival is desirable or that one should survive, she now holds, is to use the evaluative concepts "desirable" and "should" outside of the only context in which they acquire meaning—the context of a living organism acting to sustain its life.[59] We can evaluate things as desirable, and actions as ones that we should take, in relation to the goal of sustaining our lives; but strictly speaking that goal itself qualifies neither as desirable nor undesirable, in Rand's view (though, of course, it can be desired or undesired). Nor is there any "should" attaching to it, for it is precisely this goal that gives the concepts of "should" and "desirable" meaning. Thus Galt says, "My morality, the morality of reason, is contained in a single axiom: existence exists—and in a single choice: to live. The rest proceeds from these" (1018). This formulation replaces the problematic axiom that "survival is desirable" with the basic choice to live. What about the "existence exists" part? "Existence exists" is a metaphysical not a moral axiom, for Rand, the axiom that there is a reality (1016).[60] But it has moral implications. It implies that if one chooses to live, one must take specific steps to implement that choice—the steps required by the nature of the reality in which one acts, by the "nature of things," including one's own human nature. In effect, Rand is retaining point (3) of her original axiom here, but making its deepest metaphysical foundation explicit.

CONCLUSION

What can we say overall about the development of Ayn Rand the moral philosopher in the period spanning the publication of her two greatest novels? The theme that runs through each of the topics we have considered is our profound *need* for morality. It is her conclusion that we would need morality even on a desert island that prompts her shift from taking independence to taking rationality as the primary virtue. It is her recognition of the indispensability of moral ideals that motivates her concern with spiritual exploitation and her critique of altruism. And it is her quest for the deepest philosophical justification of the thesis that we need morality to live that drives her to one of her most

important insights—that the very idea of "value" is inconceivable apart from the concept and phenomenon of life.

These are striking philosophical contributions. But it is worth remarking that they are also more than that. They are part of the abstract background that makes all the concrete magnificence of *Atlas Shrugged* possible. For all of this extraordinary philosophical thinking was born of the aim not of writing a philosophical treatise but of creating something geared toward yet another crucial human need: the need for moral inspiration through art.

NOTES

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1. See "About the Author," which follows the text of *Atlas Shrugged.*
2. David Harriman, ed., *Journals of Ayn Rand* (New York: Dutton, 1997), 390.
3. Harriman, *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 390.
4. Michael S. Berliner, ed., *Letters of Ayn Rand* (New York: Dutton, 1995), 437. The letter is dated April 23, 1949.
5. Harriman, *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 390–92.
6. Harriman, *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 392.
7. Harriman, *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 392–93, emphasis in original.
8. Harriman, *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 392.
9. Harriman, *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 397, emphasis in original.
10. "Second-handers" is Rand's term for those who live lives of intellectual, psychological, and existential dependency, drawing their ideas, values, goals, self-esteem, and (in some cases) material support from the "creators" or "prime movers" who think and produce for themselves. See Ayn Rand, *The Fountainhead* (New York: Signet, 1993), 679–85.
11. Harriman, *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 397.
12. Harriman, *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 396 and 397, emphasis in original.
13. Harriman, *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 399.
14. Harriman, *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 399, emphasis in original.
15. Harriman, *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 399.
16. For discussion of the meaning Rand attaches to the term "altruism," see section 3, below.
17. Rand, *Fountainhead*, 680.
18. Rand, *Fountainhead*, 682.
19. Harriman, *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 258.
20. Harriman, *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 259.
21. Harriman, *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 257.
22. Harriman, *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 258.
23. Harriman, *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 253.

24. Harriman, *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 253–54.

25. Harriman, *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 258. Brackets are Harriman's.

26. Harriman, *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 260.

27. See Ayn Rand, "Causality Versus Duty," in *Philosophy: Who Needs It* (New York: Signet, 1984), 95–101.

28. Harriman, *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 261.

29. Harriman, *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 275.

30. Harriman, *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 275.

31. This is not to say, however, that independence can only be exercised *in the company of others.* A person on a desert island (or alone in his house) lacks independence if, say, he adjusts his thinking or action out of fear of "what others might think" if he said or did such-and-such. Conceivably, a person might have become so habituated to this sort of dependence on others that he might persist in it even under circumstances in which the actual likelihood of encountering other people's disapproval was nil—for example, if he had become stranded someplace where there was no hope of being rescued. The point, however, is that dependence on others can only originate where there are others to be concerned with. (If there were no others to be concerned with, a person would face the alternative of being rational or irrational, but the alternative of independence or dependence would not apply; he could have neither the virtue of independence nor the vice of dependence.)

32. For her fullest summary statement of what this virtue involves, see Ayn Rand, *The Virtue of Selfishness* (New York: Signet, 1964), 28. Her most comprehensive elaboration of what rationality entails comes in the form of the characterizations of the prime movers in *Atlas* and thus must be gleaned from the novel as a whole. For Rand's account of the function of literature, in this regard, see *The Romantic Manifesto*, revised edition (New York: Signet, 1975), chapter 1, esp. 21–22.

33. Harriman, *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 393, emphasis in original.

34. Harriman, *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 404.

35. See Ayn Rand, *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, Expanded Second Edition, Harry Binswanger and Leonard Peikoff, eds. (New York: Meridian, 1990), 33–34.

36. Harriman, *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 394.

37. Rand, *Virtue of Selfishness*, 29. For Rand's use of the phrase "psychological survival," see Rand, *Romantic Manifesto*, 169; see also 16–17.

38. See *Oxford English Dictionary*, Second Edition (1989), s.v. "Altruism" (dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50006618?single=1&query_type=word&queryword=altruism&first=1&max_to_show=10) (accessed October 17, 2008). Also see Auguste Comte, *System of Positive Polity, or Treatise on Sociology*, Volume IV, translated by Richard Congreve (Paris: Carilian-Goeury and Vor Dalmont,1854), *passim.* and esp. 43–45, 145–47, 247–48, and 228.

39. Rand, *Fountainhead*, 607.

40. See Rand, *Fountainhead*, 681.

41. Rand, *Virtue of Selfishness*, 29–30.

42. Harriman, *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 255.

43. See Rand, *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, 55; see also Leonard Peikoff, *Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand* (New York: Dutton, 1991), chapter 1.

44. Harriman, *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 255.

45. It is clear, in context, that "man" refers to any and every individual human being and not to mankind as a whole, and that what Rand's axiom prescribes is that each human being make his own survival his end (and seek that end in a manner consistent with his human nature).

46. This would actually be a more contentious claim in some quarters than I have made it out to be. A Kantian in ethics might argue, as Kant did, that ethics prescribes guidance for the conduct of *rational* beings and thus does not presuppose that there are *human* beings. That is clearly not how Rand views the subject matter of ethics, but the existence of the Kantian view points up that what one could consider axiomatic within a given field will depend on some potentially controversial prior conception of that field's subject matter. The reasons why Rand would reject the Kantian view are complex and largely beyond the scope of this essay. In essence, however, Rand's view is that a *rational* being is a certain kind of *living* being, and that our need for ethical guidance derives *both* from our rational nature (in virtue of which we must act by choice and by the guidance of principles) and from our nature as living things (in virtue of which we confront a basic alternative of life or death and the consequent necessity of taking action to sustain our lives). Some aspects of this perspective are discussed further in the text, in the remainder of the present section. (For Rand's elaboration of this perspective, see *Virtue of Selfishness,* chapter 1.)

Finally, even Kantians are normally interested in ethics for the sake of settling questions about *human* conduct, and see their discussions of ethics as being addressed to their fellow human beings. The existence of human beings, then, though it may not be a theoretical presupposition of Kantian ethics, certainly appears to be a practical presupposition of the enterprise of Kantian ethical theorizing.

47. Rand takes the law of identity to be a substantive truth of metaphysics, but one that is arrived at by conceptualizing a self-evident fact known in sense perception, and not through any sort of a priori insight. See *Atlas Shrugged*, 1016. See also Peikoff, *Objectivism*, chapter 1. The connection between a later variant of (3) and the law of identity is made in *Atlas Shrugged*; see 1016.

48. Harriman, *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 303.

49. She might tell him to go ahead and try to act successfully on the basis of these premises. But that would be toward the end of exhibiting the premises as false. She could not use a parallel strategy to exhibit as false someone's denial that his survival was desirable.

50. Harriman, *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 303.

51. Harriman, *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 272.

52. See Rand, *Virtue of Selfishness*, chapter 1; and Peikoff, *Objectivism*, chapter 7. There is obviously more to be said in order to make this argument fully, but my intention here is only to indicate the direction in which Rand's thinking develops. I discuss Rand's argument

from the need for ethics to the standard of morality further in my "Evaluative Concepts and Objective Values: Rand on Moral Objectivity," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 25.1 (2008): 149–81.

53. See, for elaboration, Rand, *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, esp. chapter 7.

54. For her criticisms of these two concepts, see, respectively, Rand, "Causality Versus Duty," and Ayn Rand, "What Is Capitalism?" *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal* (New York: Signet, 1967), 11–34, esp. 20–25.

55. See Rand, *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, 51.

56. See, for example, Harriman, *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 298–99.

57. Harriman, *Journals of Ayn Rand*, 299.

58. In *Virtue of Selfishness*, Rand uses the example of an "immortal, indestructible robot," which, she claims, could not form any value-concepts, to clarify and support the claim that the presence of (and one's awareness of) an alternative is necessary for the formation of these concepts. See Rand, *Virtue of Selfishness*, 16.

59. See Rand, "Causality Versus Duty," and Rand, *Virtue of Selfishness*, 97.

60. See, for discussion, Peikoff, *Objectivism*, chapter 1.